Lula’s Win: A Blow to the Far Right Throughout the World

Lula’s extraordinary victory overnight in Brazil is the most important defeat for the far right we have seen anywhere in the world in recent times, and its impact will be felt worldwide.

Seeing those millions and millions of people pour onto the streets across this vast country to celebrate was enough to make you weep.

The seemingly impossible turnaround in the second round is not a simple electoral victory. It was won in the streets and on socials. Immediately after the far-right candidate, Flavio Bolsonaro, won in the first round, thousands of mainly very young people took to streets in Niteroi, across the bay from Rio de Janeiro, to demonstrate against the likelihood of a neo-fascist government in Brazil. The same thing happened in cities in the Northeast, the most impoverished region. This was repeated throughout the country in the three weeks between the rounds.

In parallel, younger members of congress from a smaller party supporting Lula’s Workers Party, completely revamped the campaign’s lacklustre social media presence. ‘Lula’s Army’, a WhatsApp channel launched by Janones of the Rede party, went from 50,000 followers to a million in two days. Now it has 10 million.

The next stage will be difficult, and possibly violent. As I write, Flavio Bolsonaro is refusing to recognise the results and calling on his supporters not to either. He’s promising a legal challenge, but last time, when his father, Jair Bolsonaro lost, they invaded the congress and presidential palace. President Trump looks ready to back him.

Even if the immediate threat recedes, Lula's presidency will confront big far-right and traditional right majorities in both houses of congress. If he is not to capitulate completely, he will have to govern with the streets, and with his new found digital army. This in turn is likely to lead to confrontation. The far right is deeply embedded in large sections of society. And it could draw on the sympathies of at least parts of the armed forces.

What the Brazilian people have achieved can be a huge inspiration for all of us facing resurgent varieties of neo-fascism and the far right in different parts of the world. But they will also need support. We should be thinking now about how to organise that solidarity. The Scottish working class has a proud tradition in this area. 'Nae pasaran.'

But developing our own struggles is also part of building solidarity. There is little doubt that the kids on the streets in Brazil have been encouraged by what they see in France and the Spanish state. No doubt the Serbian students who just defeated Vucic have been too. A new form of internationalism appears to be taking shape and we need to be part of that.

We live in interesting, if dangerous, times.

Iain Bruce 26th October 2026

Move the bits, not the electrons – Duncan Chapel

On the first Thursday in September, several hundred people gathered outside Holyrood carrying banners against AI data centres. They had come from around fifteen local campaigns,

Larbert to the Borders, Fife to Inverclyde, and their message to John Swinney was blunt: stop approving these things until there is a strategy, and until then, listen to the communities already saying no. Larbert alone has drawn 7,000 objections. Auchtertool's proposed Cato development, at 600 megawatts reportedly the second-largest data centre on earth, would sit inside a Fife village smaller than the campus itself. In the Borders, the Duke of Roxburghe has been offered a private briefing with every Scottish Borders councillor to make the case for his own £2 billion scheme on the Roxburghe Estate, a meeting leaked emails describe the council's own chief executive arranging and encouraging planning committee members to attend, against a petition that has by now passed 22,000 signatures. Edinburgh's council has already thrown one scheme out, at the former RBS headquarters, for failing to show its green credentials. The Scottish Greens tried to force a moratorium at First Minister's Questions before summer recess. The SNP's own National Council backed one too. The government has said no to all of it so far.

Every one of those campaigns is right to fight the site in front of it. Police Scotland has already warned it may need what it calls "robust security" if the Larbert scheme goes ahead over local objection, which is itself a measure of how far this has travelled from an ordinary planning dispute. The Larbert site would put 200 diesel backup generators within 50 metres of a 56-bed hospice for the terminally ill and within 400 metres of Forth Valley Royal, an 860-bed hospital. Action to Protect Rural Scotland, the charity that has done most to knit these fifteen-odd local groups into something resembling a national campaign, now publishes an interactive map of every hyperscale proposal in the country, precisely so that a resident in Cockenzie or Dunbar or Bishopbriggs can see they are not fighting alone. What none of them can do alone is answer the question underneath all twenty-four proposals now in the planning system, which together would draw over 150 per cent of Scotland's peak demand: why is this landing in the

Central Belt and the Borders at all, when Scotland spends hundreds of millions of pounds a year paying wind farms further north to switch off?

The Duke’s own developers, to their credit, say the quiet part out loud. Their pitch for the Roxburghe scheme argues the site can help prevent some fifty million pounds a year of wasted wind energy, because it sits near turbines the grid regularly switches off. That is the correct diagnosis wearing the wrong politics. The waste is real. The fifty million pounds it could capture should not become one aristocrat’s private return on a family estate that already runs to fifty thousand acres, a castle, a golf course and a hotel.

Start with the waste, because the waste is the argument. Generators in Scotland’s congested transmission zones, principally the B4 and B6 boundaries in NESO’s own terminology, are routinely told to reduce output, and the system pays for both sides of that decision: for the generation turned down, and for the gas fired up elsewhere to replace it. NESO recorded £1.7 billion in thermal constraint costs for 2024/25, up 64 per cent on the year before. Widen it to every category of constraint and the total climbs to £1.9 billion, 71 per cent of Great Britain’s whole balancing bill. Gas dominates the replacement side: £959 million in gas offer costs in winter 2024/25 alone, much of it covering exactly the shortfall Scottish constraints create. This is not a technical footnote. It is public money spent unmaking electricity that has already been produced, on a scale NESO expects to keep climbing toward £8 billion a year by 2030.

The obvious answer is more pylons, and National Grid is building them, slowly, at a pace that would make a Bolshevik weep. But that’s not quite right either. Electricity is expensive and contested to move over long distances. Data is not. So don’t move the electrons south to the compute. Move the compute north to the electrons.

Britain has done something like this before, once, in Manchester. The National Computing Centre opened on Oxford Road in 1966, one of the visible products of Wilson's 'white heat' of scientific revolution, built to put scarce computing time within reach of industry when computers themselves were the bottleneck. By the 1980s that scarcity had gone, so the state let the Centre wither into a membership body and then sold its commercial arm into what is now NCC Group, a cybersecurity firm on the FTSE 250. The lesson is not the technology. It is that the state built serious public computing infrastructure once, and handed it to the market the moment the scarcity that justified it moved somewhere else.

Scarcity has moved on again, from silicon to electricity, and the shape of the answer is a national compute utility: not a single site but a grid of publicly owned compute campuses, sited where curtailed renewable power already sits. That is not official policy. It is an idea some policy people are starting to float, quietly, in the places where the mismatch between generation and demand is worst, and it is worth noticing that the people floating it are not, on the whole, socialists.

Which is where the moratorium campaign meets its harder question. Every one of the twenty-four sites now working through Scottish planning, Cato in Fife, Rufus in East Ayrshire, Aurelius in North Lanarkshire's new AI Growth Zone, the schemes at Larbert, Hermiston and the Gyle, sits in or near the Central Belt because that is where the fibre, the grid connections and the skills base already are. None of it is sited to relieve a single constraint. A properly sited national grid of compute campuses would look nothing like this map. It would sit north of the Central Belt, on the curtailed capacity these very same communities' wind farms are already producing and being paid to switch off, and it would be owned publicly, not by ILI Group or whoever comes after them.

That is a harder demand than a moratorium, because a

moratorium only has to say no. A compute utility has to say what compute is for, who owns it, and where the profit that a hyperscaler or a duke currently extracts from a stranded grid connection would go instead. Public ownership of the racks means nothing if the models running on them are still licensed from the same handful of firms that own the training data and the chips. Nationalising the plug socket while leaving the extraction in place is exactly what happened to Oxford Road once its own scarcity ran out, and it is not obvious that a government which would not take Thames Water into public ownership when the case was overwhelming will treat compute any differently, or that a council chief executive arranging private briefings for a duke will treat the next landowner's scheme with any more scrutiny than the last.

There is a version of this that ends with a call for the moratorium campaign to become a nationalisation campaign, computing sited for the grid and not the shareholder, and that ending would not be wrong. The harder truth is that fifteen local groups fighting fifteen separate planning applications are not yet the same thing as a movement with a positive answer to what should replace the map they are rightly rejecting, and turning one into the other is the work still to be done.

Duncan Chapel is a member of Anti-Capitalist Resistance and the editor of RedMole.org

Map of Proposed Data Centres reproduced from the Action for the Protection of Rural Scotland website is available here

Data centres are toxic capitalism – Cymru'n Codi

The following is a briefing note prepared by the Cymreig/Welsh ecosocialist organisation Cymru'n Codi (Cymru Rising) on the environmental and social impact of hyperscale data centres. It was originally published on their Substack and is reproduced here with their kind permission. For more information about the situation in Scotland, Action For the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) have a comprehensive guide and list of useful resources on this dedicated webpage

Background

Data centres are physical buildings that house computational equipment for storing, processing and sharing data, a server is a typical example. Services they provide fall into two main categories: AI computation and cloud computing, data storage and processing.

The resources used for these services are measured in terms of the maximum electrical power load required by the equipment using megawatts expressed as say as 1MW which would typically power 600 – 800 homes simultaneously.

In 2024 Cymru had the highest British data centre capacity outside London at 154MW and London at 1048MW. This is set to change rapidly. The UK Government has designated North and South Cymru as Artificial Intelligence Growth Zones (AIGZs) to accelerate the development of AI infrastructure, with the support of the Secretary of State for Wales and Adam Price AM the current Minister for Enterprise, Connectivity, and Energy. Planned growth is huge with two developments in Cardiff

proposing **148 MW** and **150 MW**, one in Newport **200 MW**, one in Bridgend **around 600 MW** and another on Anglesey **349 MW**. Maps and other basic information on current and future data centres is included in this Senedd Research paper and a longer version here.

Control over this expansion is being driven very hard by Westminster. Planning is a devolved responsibility to the Welsh Government so support for the AIGZs was required from the Welsh Government. Approvals would have to fall within environmental and other Senedd laws. However, national security is a reserved UK level power, and as many data centres will be involved with civil and defence issues, who would have the last say could become a challenge. The UK Cyber Security and Resilience Bill currently in the Lords is likely to strengthen this UK position.

Claimed economic opportunities and security interests are making the most of the investment, jobs, skills, and research opportunities projecting £10bn on investment in the South Wales AIGZ alone. Although the US experience indicates outcomes much less than originally claimed.

The toxic 'land and expand' process

These high powered signals of support for data centres is creating a legitimacy juggernaut for developers and opportunists to override any planning objections. The company applying for planning for the data centre in Pontylcun for example has never built one. They appear just interested in gaining approval and selling it on. Democracy for Sale has put their finger on the issue in relation to their work on Palintir with identifying a process they describe as 'land and expand', first you get your initial plans through then once started it is very difficult to stop future growth. Political legitimacy for data centres has lit this blue touch paper: we are faced with challenging this toxic 'land and expand' process, and for the following five reasons.

1. Soaring energy demand.

The AIGZs policy is on target for Cymru to hit 1000MW or 1GB by 2030 the equivalent of 13% of Cymru's electricity capacity in 2024. The Cardiff East data centre alone will consume 150GW equivalent of all Cymru's solar capacity in the same year. Currently 315 UK data centres are waiting connection to the grid and in Ireland in 2021-25 a moratorium had to be imposed on building new data centres around Dublin as power demands soared.

Expansion of this size will put the Welsh Government 'ambition' to achieve net zero by 2040 and legal requirement by 2050 under great pressure. It will be almost a question of running faster to stand still with nearly all new renewable capacity being used to enable data centre power. To counter the grid issues and fluctuating provision of renewable energy, data centre developers are installing their own generation or a private provider, usually gas fired, but also diesel, which if allowed would make hitting net zero increasingly difficult.

One issue that is largely ignored in UK discussions is who pays? Expansion of the grid costs and like nuclear power, is covered in current electricity bills. So not only are we as consumers potentially faced with paying for the generating investment but high levels of demand whilst power generation is in private hands will potentially mean higher consumer prices.

2. Local water supplies

Water is required as coolant in data centres. It appears most in Cymru will argue that they use water and air to cool equipment, but with rising are temperatures, water will be in demand. A mid-sized data centre could use up to 5m gallons (US) daily, as much as a small town. Development plans in Cymru have indicated that local supplies will need 'reinforcing' but that at this time it appears agencies and

the Welsh Government have yet to address the issues. There are possible alternatives to public supplies and reusable systems but it is not at all clear if any the current or proposed developments in Cymru are considering these, and without a political lead and regulation, unlikely to happen.

Again who pays is rarely considered. And we know in Cymru our water bills are already some of the highest in the UK so if new investment is needed Dwr Cymru as a private provider only source of investment is again us as consumers.

3. Air pollution and climate

If electricity is not sourced renewably and onsite gas or diesel generation is used, net zero targets would be rendered harder to achieve. Such forms of generation in the US has led to intensifying local pollution with court cases being brought under clean air acts. Foxglove reported that just two new data centres will pump out more planet heating carbon emissions than Exxon Mobile. Alternatives exist, such as battery storage, combined with renewable public provision, but will require stronger proactive political regulation. After around six years it is expected that all the data centre equipment will have to be replaced. This has to raise important issues of recycling materials to avoid disposal.

4. Noise

Noise pollution has been cited as a main concern in the opposition to the data centre in Pontyclun. Local experience in the US has cited cooling fans and back up generation systems as a source of high decibel local pollution. The same in Australia. Alternatives exist but require strong regulation and effective local enforcement – the sort of provision that has almost been lost due to local government austerity cuts.

5. Land competition

So far in Cymru data centres have been sited around places that have access to good internet connectivity such near Cardiff and Newport, a process that reduces ‘latency’ in electronic communication, something which is apparently less important to AI focused data centres. Data centres occupy large areas of land, with the average data centre covering 100,000 square feet. AIGZ application sites must demonstrate access to at least 500MW of power capacity by 2030 and have a minimum of 100 acres of land available for construction of AI infrastructure by 2028.

Building such large buildings near local communities with constant strong lighting, security and noise is causing concern around the world and increasingly in Cymru such as the opposition in Cardiff and Pontyclun that has already been mentioned. There is also concern about the impact on local biodiversity as in the Senedd Environment Act. Data processing infrastructure and the inevitable involvement of security and defence possibly centered on a particular data centre but also involved in all, with modern warfare, increases the possibility of a community being a target.

What can be done?

Due to political support for accelerating planning through the AIGZs, coupled with security concerns, it is giving virtual legitimate free rein to the ‘land and expand’ profit driven processes that lay behind the expansion of data centres. As this excellent article from Friends of Earth suggests it is difficult if not impossible to row back from the use of the internet that has now become embedded in our society and culture but some very specific policies can be put into place to control the adverse consequences outlined in this newsletter and indeed in the linked article. Clearly there is a case for the construction, maintenance, and additional employment and development that will be derived from the data centre infrastructure. However, there is also the possibility that developments in software could start to render such large

structures unnecessary and if we recognise the push to monetise and make a profit out of the internet as opposed to serving the needs of people, planet and peace, questions need to be raised about the direction and purpose of this investment.

What we clearly face is a state sponsored profit driven bonanza. With controls only on the initial planning approval stage, investors can tick all the boxes and once up and running the ‘land and expand’ process will increasingly put the power of decision making over the expansion of data centres in the hands of those who develop now and over all the five social and environmental issues listed above.

There is a weakness in the Friends of the Earth proposals in that they have an expectation that private companies will give serious consideration to their proposals. We don’t think they will and will drive forward a ‘land and expand’ profit driven strategy unless checked by collective opposition and government action. Consultation with energy generators and water suppliers not enough they need to pay for extra energy,water and recycling investment needed. state and consumers must not be forced to face increased prices to subsidise data centres. Real control only if data centres are seen as a basic utility and are developed under public ownership and control

Cymru’n Codi proposed demands and action

Stop the political open door.

- Support all opposition to data centres locally and propose supporting the following demands both for local council planning meetings and the Welsh Government.
- Demand a Welsh Government moratorium until all proposals accepted as follows:
    - Energy is renewable, infrastructure paid for by investors, electricity cost neutral, positive

effect on Cymru net zero targets.

- Additional water use is restricted as far as technically possible, where required infrastructure and charges paid by investors.
- No additional air or noise pollution.
- Brownfield land use only, special attention to avoiding any adverse bio diversity impacts.
- Recycling of materials used as part of planning and investment requirements.
- Annual reporting and Welsh Government statutory inspection established to ensure planning approval adhered to.
- Local community views and assemblies to have enhanced standing in all planning considerations and have open access to inspectors and have the right to accompany them.

Solidarity with the anti-corruption and anti-extractivist movements in Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Bulgaria

Since November 2024 the Balkans have seen the largest sustained street mobilisations in more than 30 years. In Serbia, the collapse of the Novi Sad railway canopy put students and workers on the streets in numbers not seen in a generation, and they have stayed there for eighteen months. In

Bulgaria, protests against the 2026 austerity budget – the largest in decades – brought down the Zhelyazkov government in December 2025. In Albania, opposition to the Kushner-backed resort at Zvernec grew from a village blockade in May 2026 into the "Flamingo Revolution", with 1 in 10 of the national population on the streets on 20 June and daily demonstrations in a dozen cities. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, communities are resisting mining concessions granted over their heads by law. These are not separate national crises. They are responses to the same thing: governments across the region selling land, minerals, coastline and labour to whichever foreign power will pay, and policing the population that objects.

Serbia may be heading toward elections. But President Aleksandar Vučić intends to move to the office of prime minister rather than leave power. Neither the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) nor the liberal parliamentary opposition has offered a credible answer to the demands that have sustained the youth-led protest movement since November 2024: accountability for the disaster, an end to the Jadar lithium project, and an end to impunity for the violence used against protesters. If elections are held, the students and the other campaigns that have carried this movement should nominate their own candidates – people who represent these demands directly – rather than leave the ballot to politicians who have failed to answer them.

Vučić has spent years hedging between Moscow, Beijing, Dubai and Brussels, selling access to Serbian resources to each in turn in exchange for their toleration of his rule. Albania and Montenegro have taken the opposite course, competing to be EU accession "frontrunners" through unconditional compliance – and have seen the same pattern of foreign-backed dispossession of public land regardless.

The Kushner-backed resort project at Zvernec and Sazan Island in Albania is the clearest case. Our solidarity is with the communities defending protected wetland and public land from dispossession, and the left-oriented Lëvizja Bashkë (Together

Movement), which has organised against Prime Minister Edi Rama's accommodation with Kushner's capital on that ground.

Neither strategy, Vučić's hedging nor Rama's compliance, is a road out of peripheral dependency

Three decades after the Dayton agreement, Bosnia-Herzegovina remains a western protectorate, under a foreign (so far, always EU) High Representative empowered to override its own institutions, controlling the state's sovereignty from foreign capitals regardless of the population's will. Governments in both of Bosnia-Herzegovina are obsessed with the same resource politics seen in Serbia: a 2024 law in Bosnia-Hercegovina's Serbian Republic stripped local communities of the right to consent to mining on their own land. Serbian Republic leader Milorad Dodik, defying the Bosnian state court, has offered Donald Trump access to raw materials in exchange for US backing of a secession of Bosnia-Herzegovina's Serb majority entity –most likely followed by union with Serbia itself. In 2026 Bosnia's Croat-Muslim Bosnian Federation government – traditionally pro-EU and pro-NATO – awarded a major gas pipeline project without competitive tender to a US company with no prior infrastructure experience but reported links to Trump, prompting the EU's own ambassador to warn that Bosnia-Herzegovina's accession prospects and access to EU aid were now at risk.

Across the region, leaders are now betting that Trump's Washington, unlike Brussels, will trade some meaningful recognition or support for a cut of the resources underneath their feet.

The EU controls Kosovo by a different mechanism: Five EU member states – Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain – still refuse to recognise its independence, for reasons rooted entirely in their own domestic nationalities politics rather

than anything Kosovo has done. Because EU accession requires unanimous consent, this blocks Kosovo's membership indefinitely.

Bulgaria's current crisis shows that even full membership does not resolve the problems of the EU's peripheral states. Already inside the EU since 2007 and the eurozone since January 2026, its government collapsed in December 2025 under the weight of protests against an austerity budget.

The Fourth International supports the demand for every European citizen, whether their country belongs to the EU or not, to have free access to European goods, to be able to travel and have access to the labour markets – access that offers real material benefits to working people, including the right to work and move freely. The Fourth International stands against fortress Europe and its liberal policies and for freedom of movement.

But this must not be bought at the price of surrendering these countries' ability to protect domestic industry, agriculture, land and labour standards. Inside or outside the EU, this requires a rupture with current policies. A trade relationship that runs one way, and a 'European citizenship' that comes with duties but no vote, is not integration; it is only another form of the periphery these countries already occupy.

The Fourth International salutes the courage of the movements resisting this multifaceted exploitation on the ground and calls for the cross-border solidarity between them that a struggle against transnational capital requires.

– Serbia's elections are not a substitute for accountability – nominate candidates who represent the movements, not the parties that have failed them!
– No to the Jadar lithium project and all foreign-backed dispossession of Balkan land and resources!
– No land, coastline or public resources for Kushner or any

oligarch – Balkan or foreign, East or West!
– End the High Representative's protectorate over Bosnia – for genuine popular sovereignty.
– No to EU accession with duties but no vote!
– Yes to EU market and labour-market access on terms that protect Balkan countries' domestic industry, agriculture and workers – no to access that demands their sacrifice!
– Neither hedging between great powers nor unconditional integration – sovereignty for the peoples of the Balkans!

Statement by the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International 19/08/2026

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Internationalist solidarity with the Venezuelan people

Venezuela was struck by two earthquakes measuring 7.2 and 7.5 on the Richter scale on 24 June. The damage is immense and the death toll continues to rise (more than 1,500 people have died and 50,000 are missing).

Hundreds of aftershocks have continued to occur in recent days, and the survivors find themselves in an extremely precarious situation: sleeping in tents rather than returning to cracked buildings, whilst basic services in the affected regions (water, electricity, transport, telephone connections, etc.) have ground to a halt and hospitals are overwhelmed.

In the face of this terrible situation, the Fourth International expresses its internationalist solidarity with the Venezuelan people. We stand with all the victims, the

injured and the missing, as well as their families, friends and comrades, in their grief and their hopes for a speedy recovery.

We also wish to express our support for all those who are mobilising to help their communities, to search for survivors, to collect and distribute aid (water, food, medicines…) and to assess the damage in the affected areas.

Popular mobilisation is crucial in a country that has endured repeated crises, a blockade and the deterioration of public services in recent years, and it gives full meaning to the saying ‘Only the people can save the people’.

US imperialism is exploiting the situation to strengthen its control over Venezuela, following the abduction of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores on 3 January. The US Army’s Southern Command has taken control of the distribution of international aid, thereby increasing its presence in the country.

We call for support for all initiatives providing direct aid to the Venezuelan people

That is why, in the face of this situation, we call for support for all initiatives providing direct aid to the Venezuelan people. In particular, the Fourth International is mobilising to raise funds for the joint initiative by the political current Comunes and the NGO No One Out.[1]

This initiative is helping to ensure the survival of at least 150 families living as refugees in the open in Caribe, Macuto and Playa Verde. They have lost everything. They have no electricity, food, medical supplies or shelter. The initiative is supporting three refugee centres in the worst-affected areas. They collect, purchase, organise and deliver supplies.

From outside Venezuela, donations can be made to this account:

Bank: BCC di Brescia
Account name: NO ONE OUT – ETS
IBAN: IT82T0869211202017000171010
Reference: Venezuela Emergency.

In Venezuela, donations can be made to this account:

Banco Venezolano de Crédito
Account name: Asociación de Empleados Administrativos UCV
No: 01040008210080301278
Tax ID: J-302406943

The situation calls for the broadest possible international aid to tackle a tragedy of this magnitude. This means that all funds must be channelled towards overcoming the current crisis and, as far as possible, towards future reconstruction.

We therefore endorse the call made by the Comunes current, considering that *“a step in this direction is to suspend the negotiation process regarding Venezuela’s external debt—demanded by international banks and sponsored by the US government—[to demand its cancellation] and to concentrate all efforts on addressing the tragedy and national reconstruction. All the money must be channelled towards overcoming this tragedy, the scale of which is as yet unimaginable.”*

Statement by the Secretariat of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International
1 July 2026

- [1]No One Out is an Italian NGO, formed from the merger of two organisations specialising in international cooperation and solidarity-based international volunteering. It is driven by deeply Christian values

and focused on international solidarity.

Scottish Parliament elections: a balance between continuity and change

The independence-supporting Scottish National Party (SNP) [**3**] became the largest party for the fifth consecutive time since the Parliament was re-established in 1999, though it fell short of a majority. The SNP have been the largest party for 19 years and now move into their third decade of continuous leadership of the Scottish government – a remarkable outcome given the volatility of UK politics.

Despite the SNP falling back a little, the Parliament now has the largest majority supporting independence in the devolution era. This is despite the process of devolution and the electoral system being deliberately intended by the once-dominant British Labour Party to prevent independence.

While the right wing anti-immigrant party Reform UK has emerged as a significant force in Scotland for the first time, their gains in seats were entirely at the expense of the discredited rightward-moving Conservative & Unionist party [**4**], with the combined Reform UK and Conservative seat numbers being less than those held by the Conservatives alone in the last Parliament. Reform failed to win a constituency seat and had to rely on the regional list "top up" seats in the "two votes" electoral system.

The election was a disaster for the Labour Party [**5**] which had high hopes two years ago of emerging as the largest party, but

they lost seats and fell to their lowest representation in the devolution era.

The big gainers were the left-wing Scottish Green Party [**6**], who nearly doubled their seats despite being ignominiously bundled out of a joint governmental agreement with the SNP in the last parliament. The Scottish Greens won two constituency seats from the SNP for the first time in the largest cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh and won representation from all regions of Scotland. The small centre-right anti-independence Liberal Democrat party also grew but is still the smallest party in the parliament.

The SNP will continue to take the role of First Minister and nominate Government ministers as a minority, negotiating with other parties to get their legislation through. One policy of the newly re-elected government will be to demand another independence referendum from the UK Parliament at Westminster. This is very unlikely to be granted by the Starmer UK government majority, leading to a continuing "democratic deficit". However the SNP will be strongly encouraged by the victory of Plaid Cymru [**7**] in Cymru/Wales to take control of government there and role of First Minister. The SNP are also working with Sinn Fein in the north of Ireland, once taboo due to Sinn Fein's past and unionist sentiment in Scotland, but now becoming normal.

All three First Ministers and leading parties in the devolved legislatures of the UK state now support the break up and creation of separate states. The "Celtic Alliance" of the three First Ministers and parties, as it is increasingly called, will put significant pressure on the unionist forces in England. [**8**]

Similarities and differentiation across Britain

The separate elections took place across Britain on 7 May have provoked a crisis in the UK government of Prime Minister Keir

Starmer that could see him ousted from power after only 22 months within days rather than weeks.

It is important to understand that although synchronous, the elections were to different bodies in different parts of the state in England, Scotland and Cymru/Wales, and even under totally different electoral systems and electorates. Unlike the Westminster Parliament, both Scotland and Cymru/Wales use systems for their national-devolved legislatures that are more proportional and give votes to 16/17 year olds. The electorate in Scotland includes all nationalities, the only part of the UK state where all immigrants are enfranchised.

But the common features across the UK state were a massive collapse in votes for the Labour Party compared to the UK general election in 2024, a continuing rise in support for the right wing Reform party of Nigel Farage, emerging from the Brexit Party, and a rising challenge to the Labour Party by parties setting out policies to the left of Labour or posing a radical challenge to the UK state union.

However these challenges to Labour were differentiated across different parts of the UK state – in England from the Green Party of England & Wales (GPEW) winning 5 councils and hundreds of councillors, in Scotland from the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the left wing Scottish Green Party (SGP) in Parliament, and, most dramatically, in Cymru/Wales from the left social democratic/nationalist Plaid Cymru that replaced a century of Labour domination and their 27 year uninterrupted leadership in the devolved legislature, Senedd Cymru.

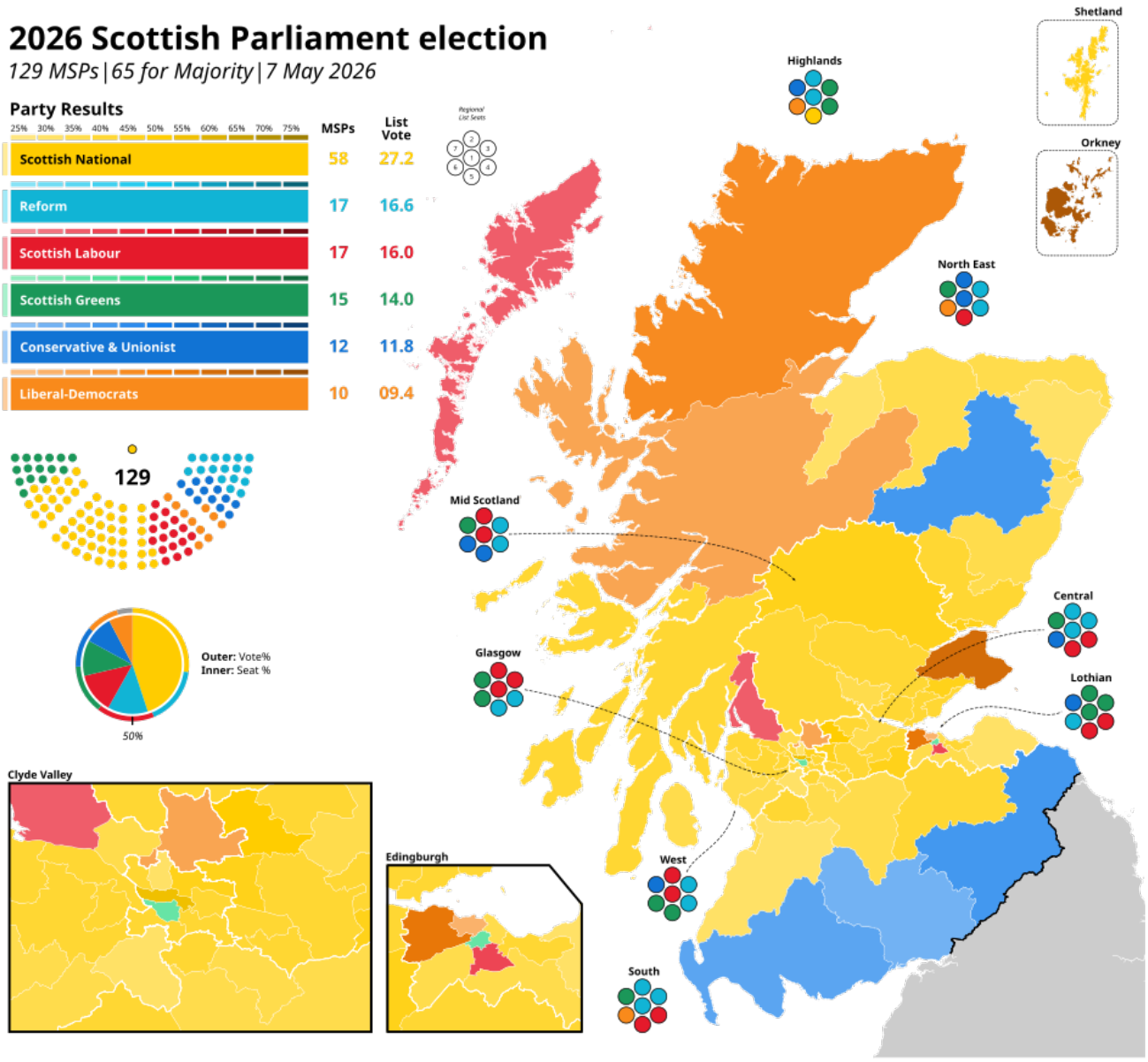
There were no elections in the part of the north of Ireland occupied by the UK state, where Sinn Fein, the former political wing of the IRA, have emerged as the largest party in elections in recent year, reinforcing the fractures within the UK state on national lines. Elections will however take place for the Northern Ireland Assembly and local councils

there under a more proportional system (Single Transferable Vote – STV) in May 2027 and for all the local councils in Scotland and Cymru/Wales, as well as for some councils in England. Scotland also uses the STV election system for council elections, while Cymru/Wales and England still use the less representative ’first past the post’ system for local councils.

A further fracturing and crisis of the political system into multi-party, multi-national politics in the 2027 elections and the multiple by-elections anticipated is likely to put pressure on the UK government, whoever is at the helm by then.

The results

Scottish Parliament Election results in seats (previous results in brackets from 2021)
Party Seats Vote Share Constituency / List (figures in brackets 2021 election)
SNP 58 seats (64), 38% (47%) / 27% (40%)
Labour 17 seats (22), 19% (22%) / 16% (18%)
Reform UK 17 seats (-), 16% (-) / 17% (-)
Scottish Greens 15 seats (8), 2% (1%) / 14% (8%)
Conservative 12 seats (31), 12% (22%) /12% (24%)
Liberal Democrat 10 seats (4), 11% (7%) / 9% (5%)



Unlike the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament is elected under an Additional Member System that resembles that used in Germany, where voters have two votes: one for a traditional 'first past the post' constituency candidate and one for a party list top-up regional election that brings a stronger element of proportionality than the winner-takes-all Westminster system.

The SNP won the lion's share of the constituencies taking 57 out of 73 seats, largely due to a significantly divided opposition. The SNP constituency vote however declined by 9.5% percentage points to 38.2% from the last election in 2021. Due to its domination of the constituencies, in the regional party list elections the SNP only took 1 list seat, with many SNP

voters switching to other parties, particularly the Scottish Greens. But the net effect was to give the SNP a clear large lead over other parties, but short of a majority. The SNP have led a minority government on 3 of the last 4 occasions since 2007, only winning a narrow and supposedly impossible majority in a somewhat ’freak’ election result in 2011 that has yet to be replicated.

While Reform UK took 17 list seats and entered the parliament for the first time as joint largest party, this was entirely at the expense of the collapsing Tory vote. The Tories were originally a more liberal party in the Scottish Parliament, even supporting SNP budgets and advocating increased spending commitments while presenting a pro-LGBTQI image, but the process of Brexit transformed the situation and the Tories in Scotland followed their party at Westminster in moving rapidly rightwards and embracing anti-immigrant sentiment. However the Tories lost much support to the more media-savvy, more right wing populism of Nigel Farage’s Reform UK, particularly given the relentless promotion of Farage and scare-mongering against immigrants in the London-based media that Scottish unionism looks to.

The entry of the 17 members of Reform UK of a populist far right anti-migrant party into the national parliament will have a significant effect on Scottish politics. Reform UK have promoted far-right street protests against asylum seekers. Reform UK are opposed to efforts to stop climate change through development of sustainable energy. They will aim to move politics to the right. Yet, most Scots realise migration is needed to tackle an aging population and populate jobs in the economy and public services. North Sea oil and gas is nearly exhausted and due to its large land mass, Scotland is well placed to expand wind, wave and hydro sources of cleaner energy. The SNP have declared they will attempt to isolate Reform UK MSPs. Overall the combined right wing anti-immigrant parties have less seats than the previous parliament and there

is a big 10 percentage points difference in electoral performance of Reform UK in Scotland than England.

The Scottish Greens were criticised from their left for standing in only six constituencies and concentrating on the list vote. The Scottish Greens are a decentralised party however, and decisions about where to stand were made in local branches. Against all the odds, the Scottish Greens took two constituencies/direct mandates, defeating two SNP ministers, and topped the list poll in five constituency areas in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Across the Glasgow region as a whole the Greens exceeded 20%, beating Labour and coming a narrow second to the SNP in what was previously regarded as Labour heartland (Labour ran Glasgow council for over 40 years from the 1970s and won all 7 Westminster seats in 2024).

The left of the left

Outside of the Greens, Labour and SNP, the left challenge completely floundered. The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) contested the list vote in all eight regions in its own name for the first time since 2011, but its vote was minuscule (only 0.37%). The SSP was a significant force in the early days of the parliament, winning 6 seats in 2003 election and over 10% in Glasgow region. The SSP included most of the left groups to the left of Labour/SNP, but split badly over the leadership of its maverick biggest personality Tommy Sheridan, and has diminished to a small group of highly committed activists with a lost direction. Sheridan tried to reinvent his career by standing for a motley cobbled-together ’independence’ coalition arising from the ruins of the former Alba Party formed by former SNP leader Alex Salmond. Alba had turned to transphobia and the right, and has since collapsed. The Sheridan coalition also won less than 1% of the vote wherever it stood, as did the few candidacies by the George Galloway’s Workers Party and the remnants of the Militant Tendency/CWI and the Communist Party.

Despite an enthusiastic response and big conferences, the new party launched by former Labour MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana has totally collapsed in Scotland and did not stand or support any candidates. Named ’Your Party Scotland’, the 300 strong conference in Dundee in February decided to form a separate but linked Scottish Party, to support Scottish independence and to contest the elections. A sizeable contingent including three councillors from the Scottish Green Party in Glasgow had joined Your Party Scotland, alongside a wide range of other left wingers who reflected the consensus by the vast majority of the radical left to support independence. But these moves to a new Scottish party were blocked by the England based clique around Corbyn supporters, despite claims to respect ’autonomy of nations’. This finally collapsed in April when it became clear candidates would not be permitted to stand and that a unitary party with the Scottish members constituting a ’branch office’, reflecting UK Labour practice, was inevitable. All the leading members of Your Party Scotland resigned, declaring it a failure, and are now engaged in a process around developing a new initiative.

The challenge ahead

In many respects the election campaign was dull. Despite their claims of being progressive, the SNP promised an element of continuity with little in the way of new thinking around tired and struggling public services. Their one radical policy – price controls over basic goods – was treated as undeliverable by the media. UK Labour threw massive spending on advertising, focussed on a presidential style campaign for their leader, Anas Sarwar, much of it funded by commercial interests and Labour supporters in England. Yet Labour failed due to the massive disillusionment among those who had voted Labour in 2024 to rid the UK government of the 14 year reign of Tories. While independence is a major cleavage in Scottish population, it’s mainly the Tories who raise it , unsuccessfully for them, as an electoral issue. Similarly with Brexit. The climate and

ecological crisis was not a major feature – the main issue was the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the failure of the UK government to tackle it.

The general feeling of voters was summed up in the old Scots language word “scunnered”, meaning discontented and bored. Turnout was down ten points on the previous election to 53% – it had previously been higher than UK Westminster elections, though the electorate for Scottish Parliament elections is significantly larger due to the more inclusive electorate. The Greens tried to develop alternatives, for example by promoting an immediate policy of free bus fares to tackle both climate and poverty and having previously championed (and won) free bus travel for those under 22. But both the SNP and Greens present cautious social democratic incrementalism rather than radical change. It is Reform who are presented as the disruptors and their support mainly comes from a minority of disillusioned working class former Tory and Labour voters looking for scapegoats in the crisis.

Despite winning its largest ever Scottish Parliament majority, the movement for independence remains stalled. The Westminster UK parliament veto over a second independence referendum, established by the UK Supreme Court in 2023, remains in place. The focus on the day-to-day cost of living pressures makes it unlikely a successful mass movement for rupture will re-emerge in the short term, though the constitutional divide remains a significant cleavage, demonstrations regularly occur and polls put support for independence at 50-55%, rising to 60% if Reform UK came to power at the next Westminster election. The broader coalition against the union state is given a boost by the victory of Plaid Cymru and the liaison with Sinn Fein, though all three parties adopt constitutional gradualism and compromise with capital, relying on changing generations rather than mass mobilisation and rupture.

The SNP did put forward a radical policy in their manifesto – price controls over basic goods by the end of the year in the

face of rapidly rising inflation due to war and trade. The Scottish Greens may pressure the SNP to make that policy more meaningful for a working class bearing the brunt of an economic crisis. The trade unions, increasingly disentangled from their Labour Party heritage, may support mobilisations and increase defensive actions including strikes. However, the powers of the Scottish Parliament to impose widespread price controls may be limited by the UK government using a post-Brexit Tory law over the UK internal market and their powers over fuel pricing and taxes. A confrontation over the right of the Scottish Parliament to take such measures is possible.

Whatever happens in the crisis of Labour at Westminster and the threat of a Reform victory in the UK government, there are some positives in Scotland in building a fightback.

Mike Picken, 14 May 2026

[1] Graphic: Par Talleyrand6 – File:2026 Scottish Parliament Election Map.svg, CC BY 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=191646626

[2] The Scottish Parliament covers a population of over 5 million and has very significant legal and constitutional role and a large annual budget of around £60 billion sterling and including some taxation measure, control over many public services like health, education, transport, aspects of social security benefits, local government, police, courts and prisons.

Importantly the UK government retains control over oil and gas industries in the North Sea and the energy infrastructure, though the Scottish government are able to use devolved planning powers to oppose fracking and the construction of new nuclear power stations, and to promote renewable options particularly wind farms. The Scottish government has deviated significantly from some UK state policies, for example

abolishing university tuition fee and health prescription charges, adopting more progressive income tax measures, not breaking hospitals and schools into semi-independent “trusts”, and expanding social security benefits targeted at the poorest.

[3] The Scottish National Party, normally abbreviated to SNP, was formed in the 1930s combining a conservative layer with radical middle class support for Scottish identity. In the late 1960s and early 1970s it emerged as a significant electoral force and declared it was in the “mainstream of European social democracy” though without the formal links to the trade union bureaucracy enjoyed by Labour and most social democratic parties. It first became the largest party in the Scottish Parliament in 2007 and in 2011 won a “freak” majority of seats that resulted in the independence referendum of 2014. While losing the referendum, the SNP emerged as the strongest electoral force with a mass membership five times that of Labour, but it fell back in the UK general election of 2024 and was widely presumed to being on its way to being replaced by Labour as largest party.

[4] The Conservative party in Scotland organises under the formal title of “Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party” but is also widely known as “Tory” or “the Tories”. It was originally a separate party but merged with the Conservatives in England & Wales in the 1960s. The “Unionist” label in its title originally referred to opposition to Home Rule in Ireland and many of the party’s supporters had strong links with the unionist/loyalist block in the north of Ireland, including the sectarian protestant-supremacist Orange Order dedicated to preserving Protestantism within the UK state. The party has not won an election in Scotland since 1955, but became the second party in the Scottish Parliament in 2016. In recent years it has collapsed and many of its activists and voters have defected to the newly established and more rightwing Reform UK of Nigel Farage. However, both parties

support Brexit, the UK leaving the EU, which is very unpopular in Scotland where support for EU membership runs at over 75%.

[5] The Scottish Labour Party was established by Keir Hardie in the 1880s, predating the Britain-wide Labour Party and supported “Home Rule” within the UK state – most domestic policies being controlled by national parliaments with only defence and foreign policy being coordinated at UK level. However it has now become a fully fledged unionist party and its opposition to independence and alignment with Tories in a “Better Together” campaign in 2014, led to a mass exodus of voters and members to the SNP. Its central strategy to head off independence moves from the UK state in the 1990s was to create significant “devolution” though keeping many powers at the level of the UK state. While it has some elements of a notional “autonomy” within the British Labour Party, under its current leadership of Anas Sarwar it had aligned itself with the leadership of Keir Starmer in London winning 37 out of 57 Westminster seats in the UK general election in 2024 mostly from the SNP. Following its electoral collapse in 2026 and plummeting support for Starmer across the UK, there are some marginal voices calling for it to become an independent party.

[6] The Scottish Green Party [SGP] was formed in 1990 and is entirely independent from the Green Party of England & Wales/Plaid Werydd and the Irish Green Party which operate elsewhere in the UK state. It sits on the left of Green Parties internationally and long supported Scottish independence. It has formally adopted “ecosocialism” as its ideology and increasingly uses that term to describe its politics. It is opposed to membership of the NATO alliance but supports Scottish membership of the EU when it becomes independent. It has supported the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign in Scotland and endorses Ukraine’s right to defend itself against Russia’s aggression rejecting pacifist pressures. It is strongly anti-monarchy. It entered into a governmental agreement with the SNP in the Scottish Parliament in 2022,

taking two ministerial roles in the government, but its support for trans rights and opposition to an abandonment of climate targets by the SNP generated tension between the SNP and SGP and it was unceremoniously bundled out of the government by the SNP. For many Green activists the SGP was too uncritical of the SNP, and a new leadership was elected in 2025 that takes a slightly more critical tone. Other parties argue the SGP is just a satellite of the SNP. The SGP broke off relations with the Green Party in England over disputes about trans rights and recognition of devolution, but following the election of Zack Polanski as leader in England and his advocacy of Scottish and Cymru/Wales independence, there has been a convergence and closer working.

[7] Plaid Cymru "Party of Wales" was established in the 1920s and was heavily involved in the revival of Cymraeg/Welsh Language in the 1960s, though remained only a minor or fringe party confined to Cymraeg speaking areas until recently. It has long had informal relations with SNP though it does also define itself as a party of "decentralised socialism'" rather than nationalism per se.

[8] This Alliance includes the North of Ireland in which no elections were held this year. Stormont, the devolved Assembly, will be re-elected next year.

The far right as a global phenomenon: the ecosocialist alternative

In recent years, we have seen a spectacular rise in reactionary, authoritarian and/or fascist far-right movements

across the globe. They already govern half of the world's countries, including Trump (USA), Modi (India), Orbán (Hungary), Erdogan (Turkey), Meloni (Italy), Netanyahu (Israel), and, recently, Milei (Argentina). Elsewhere, they have recently governed Brazil (Bolsonaro) and are serious candidates for power with the National Rally (France), the AFD (Germany), the Republican Party's Kast (Chile), etc. And Putin's regime in Russia is not very far from this model.

In each country, the far right has its own characteristics: in many cases (Europe, the United States, India), the 'enemy'—i.e. the scapegoat—is the Muslims and/or the immigrants; in some Muslim countries, it is some religious minority (Christians, Jews, Yezidis). In some cases, xenophobic nationalism and racism predominate; in others, religious fundamentalism, or hatred of the Left, feminism, and homosexuals.

Despite this diversity, there are some common traits shared by the majority, if not all: authoritarianism, integral nationalism—'Deutschland über alles' and its local variants 'America First', 'O Brasil acima de tudo', etc; religious or ethnic (racist) intolerance; and police/military violence as the only response to social problems and crime. The characterisation as fascist or semi-fascist may apply to some, but not to all. Enzo Traverso uses the term 'post-fascism', but I believe that *neo-fascism* is the best term to describe both the continuity and the novelty of the 21st-century far right.

Neo-fascist not 'populist'

The concept of 'populism' is used by some political scientists, the media and even part of the Left. But it only serves to sow confusion. While in Latin America from the 1930s to the 1960s the term corresponded to something relatively precise—Vargasism, Peronism, etc.—its use in Europe since the 1990s has become increasingly vague and imprecise.

Populism is defined as “a political position that sides with the people against the elites”. But this applies to almost any political movement or party! This pseudo-concept, applied to far-right parties, leads—intentionally or unintentionally—to legitimising them. It makes them more acceptable, if not sympathetic—who is not for the people against the elites?—while carefully avoiding terms that cause offence: racism, xenophobia, fascism, far right. ‘Populism’ is also used in a deliberately misleading way, by neoliberal ideologues, to conflate the far right and the radical Left. They are characterised as ‘right-wing populism’ and ‘left-wing populism’, since they are opposed to liberal policies, ‘Europe’, etc.

Climate change rejected

One common element in most of these neo-fascist governments or movements is *negationism*—the refusal to acknowledge the ecological crisis and climate change. In spite of the overwhelming scientific evidence, they persist in denying, or simply ignoring, the reality of global warming. Donald Trump is only the most vociferous and vulgar proponent of this trope, which is not only an ideology but an ecocidal *praxis.*

This is illustrated again by Trump, who is totally devoted to the unlimited development of fossil fuels. These suicidal politics represent the interests of the fossil oligarchy—the capitalist sectors linked to the production of oil, coal, gas, chemicals, plastics, cars and airplanes, etc. Their short-sighted perspective is exclusively focused on immediate opportunities for profit and accumulation.

Back to the 1930s?

History does not repeat itself; we can find similarities or analogies, but current phenomena are quite different from past models. Above all, we do not—yet—have totalitarian states comparable to those of the pre-war period. The classic Marxist

analysis of fascism defined it as a reaction by big capital, with the support of the petty bourgeoisie, to the revolutionary threat posed by the labour movement. One may wonder whether this interpretation truly accounts for the rise of fascism in Italy, Germany and Spain in the 1920s and 1930s. In any case, it is not relevant in today's world, where there is no 'revolutionary threat' anywhere.

There are other significant differences with the fascism of the past: neo-fascist regimes are devoted to neoliberalism, not to corporate-national economies. And they are involved in ecocidal activities on a much larger scale than in the 1930s.

What is the explanation?

It is difficult to offer a general explanation for such diverse phenomena, which are the expression of contradictions specific to each country or region of the world.

One 'explanation' that should be rejected is that it is linked to waves of migration, particularly in the US and Europe. Migrants are a convenient pretext, a useful tool for xenophobic and racist forces, but they are by no means the 'cause' of their success. Moreover, the far right is thriving in many countries—Brazil, India, etc.—where immigration is not an issue.

The most obvious and undoubtedly relevant explanation is that capitalist globalisation—which is also a process of brutal cultural homogenisation—produces and reproduces, on a global scale, forms of 'identity panic' (a term coined by Daniel Bensaïd). This leads to nationalist and/or religious intolerance and fosters ethnic or religious conflicts. The more nations lose their economic power, the more they proclaim the immense glory of the 'Nation Above All Else'.

Some of these explanations are useful, but they are insufficient. We do not yet have a comprehensive analysis of a phenomenon that is global and is taking place at a specific

moment in history.

How can we fight back?

Unfortunately, there is no magic formula. Bernie Sanders' call for a Global Anti-Fascist Front is an excellent proposal. At the same time, we must build broad coalitions in defence of democratic freedoms in every country affected. This is also an ecological imperative: prevent the rise of negationist and ecocidal governments, or when they are in power, resist their destructive politics.

But we must also take into account that the capitalist system, especially in times of crisis, constantly produces and reproduces phenomena such as fascism, coups d'état and authoritarian regimes. The root of these tendencies is systemic, and the alternative must be radical; it must be anti-systemic. In 1938, Max Horkheimer, one of the leading thinkers of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, wrote, "If you don't want to talk about capitalism, you have nothing to say about fascism." In other words, a consistent anti-fascist is an anti-capitalist.

This is more relevant than ever today, when the active destruction of the environment and global warming are the inevitable consequences of the expansive logic of the capitalist system. If we want to avoid ecological catastrophe, the only way is to look for anti-systemic proposals, such as ecosocialism.

Ecosocialism the way forward

Ecosocialism is an attempt to provide a radical, civilisational alternative, based on the basic arguments of the ecological movement and of the Marxist critique of political economy. It counters capitalism's destructive idea of 'progress' with an economic approach guided not by money or economics, but by social needs and ecological balance. This dialectical synthesis is attempted by a broad spectrum of

authors (including Joel Kovel and John Bellamy Foster). It is at the same time a critique of ‘market ecology’, which does not challenge the capitalist system, and of ‘productivist socialism’, which ignores the issue of natural limits.

Ecosocialism has the potential to bring together social and ecological

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An ecosocialist transformation is impossible without public control over the means of production and planning; that means

public decisions on investment and technological change. These must be taken away from the banks and capitalist enterprises to serve society's common good. Socialist planning is grounded in democratic and pluralist debate, on all levels where decisions are taken: different propositions submitted to the people, in the form of parties, platforms, or other political movements, and delegates elected accordingly. However, representative democracy must be completed—and where necessary corrected—by forms of direct democracy, in which people directly choose among options on major issues at the local, national, and, later, global levels.

The passage from capitalist 'destructive progress' to socialism is a historical process, a permanent revolutionary transformation of society, culture and ways of thinking. This transition would lead not only to a new mode of production and an egalitarian and democratic society, but also to an alternative way of life—a new ecosocialist civilisation, beyond the reign of money, beyond consumption habits artificially produced by advertising, and beyond the unlimited production of commodities that are useless and/or harmful to the environment.

Such a process cannot begin without a revolutionary transformation of social and political structures, and the active support of the vast majority of the population for an ecosocialist programme. The development of socialist consciousness and ecological awareness is a process in which the decisive factor is people's own collective experience of struggle, from local and partial confrontations to the radical change of society.

Michael Löwy *is a Franco-Brazilian sociologist. Emeritus Research Director at the CNRS (National Centre of Scientific Research), Paris, and author of, amongst others, Ecosocialism: A radical alternative to capitalist catastrophe.*

First published in *Amandla*, 16 March 2026

US/Israel hands off Iran! No liberation through US bombs!

Statement adopted by the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International on 28 February 2026.

1. After several years and different US governments threatening Iran with military attack, the USA, in alliance with Israel, has launched missile strikes and bombs against the country. Trump has called on the Iranian military to surrender or 'face certain death'. Iran has retaliated with strikes on US military bases across the Gulf and now there is a threat of a wider regional war.

2. The pretext for this war is the 'inconclusive' negotiations around Iran's nuclear programme and Trump's claim that Iran is building long range missiles to strike at Europe or even the USA, the same refrain as when George W Bush and Tony Blair claimed that Iraq could strike at western targets with only "45-minute warning" in 2003. The hypocrisy of the strongest military powers – equipped with global striking power and nuclear weapons – claiming that Iran is a meaningful threat to people as far away as New York is obvious. Iran had offered some concessions in its Uranian enrichment programme and also to open up its gas and oil to US contracts – this was not enough for a bully and a war monger like Trump who demands complete subservience and obedience to himself personally and the US geo-politically.

3. Military actions must be viewed in the context of the openly aggressive and colonialist turn of the US under a

neofascist government, with growing competition between imperialisms for direct access to resources as the neoliberal and globalizing order disintegrates. The kidnapping of Nicolas Maduro and Cilia Flores in Venezuela, and the consequent control over the country government, Trump's threats against Greenland, ongoing genocide against the Palestinians and the planned "reconstruction" of Gaza, the annexation of the West Bank and now the bombs falling on Tehran, are all part of this new world order. The first missiles were initially launched by Israel before being followed up with US military ordinance launched from its warships and aircraft carriers in the region. This once again demonstrates the close military and political connection between the two countries.

4. While this latest aggression continues the Trump governments' pattern of contempt for international law, the sovereignty of nations, and the use of threats and actual violence to advance what it regards as US interests, Trumps attack on Iran is the just the latest chapter in a long history of US aggression against Iran and its peoples. The US has never forgiven Iran for overthrowing the US backed repressive comprador regime of the Shah in the popular 1979 revolution that overthrew the Pahlavi monarchy. All US presidents since then have used economic boycotts and occasional military action against the country. They have all cynically claimed to support the Iranian people against the dictatorship of the mullahs as thin cover for their desire to control the region and its oil supplies.

5. The recent popular uprising against the Iranian government and the brutal way in which the Iranian theocratic regime has crushed it might cause some people to be sympathetic to the US/Israeli attack in the hopes of creating regime change. Sensing an opportunity to return to power the military strikes have been praised by supporters of the exiled Iranian royalist leader, Reza Pahlavi son of the Shah, whose family was overthrown in the revolution in 1979. Pahlavi visited Israel

in April 2023 to discuss regime change in Iran and has made no secret of his hopes that Netanyahu can be helpful his plans for restoration.

6. As the bombs started to fall Trump announced to the people of Iran that “The hour of your freedom is at hand”. This attack is not about liberation, and no one should believe that the USA or Israel, hands soaked in blood from Gaza and elsewhere has any interest in human freedom or happiness. This a geopolitical strategic consideration by the forces of US imperialism to assert greater control of the region. As we said in our statement from 5 January “We reject the plans for ‘*regime change*’ by Trump and Netanyahu, who are attempting to impose a solution from above by financing the monarchist movement and threatening further military intervention against Iran. Behind Trump’s plans lies the explicit objective of gaining control of fossil fuel reserves, as he clearly stated with regard to Venezuela.”[1]

7. The masses of Iran have been struggling for years to overthrow the Iranian theocratic government. Iranian women in particular have been in the forefront of these movements, most notably in the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in 2022. Iran has a large working class and trade unions that fight, particularly in the oil sector. Students most recently came out in mass protests after the regime slaughtered thousands in January. The Iranian government is weak, held together only by violence and fear.

8. The task of overthrowing the Iranian regime is the task of the people of Iran, and the Fourth International supports the anti-imperialist and class struggle democratic forces there in their struggle.

For mobilisations against the war across the world!
No US and Israeli war on Iran

Solidarity with the people of Iran

End U.S. imperialism and Israeli colonialism

1 Against the theocratic and authoritarian regime in Iran and imperialist interference: solidarity with the struggle of the Iranian people

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British trade unions call for solidarity with Ukraine

Statement issued by UK trade unions, in association with USC, on 23 February 2026, for the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February. All the signatories are General Secretaries signing on behalf of their unions, all of which have policy in support of Ukraine made by their members through their democratic structures. In addition to support from the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the ten unions supporting the statement represent a clear majority of organised workers in the UK.

For more information, interviews, etc, email info@ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org. If your union has not yet signed but wants to do so, please also get in touch.

Joint Statement by UK Trade Unions in Solidarity with Ukraine

On the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, UK trade unions reaffirm our solidarity with Ukraine, its workers and their unions. Ukraine's workers are not only defending their country but are standing up for democratic rights, freedoms and labour standards that underpin our movement. We send our greetings to our sister organisations,

the FPU and KVPU, and commit our continuing support for them.

As Putin's war of aggression enters its fifth year, Ukraine's workers continue to face unrelenting violence. Systematic attacks on the energy system have plunged towns and cities into darkness, shutting schools and hospitals and placing entire communities at risk. Energy workers are restoring power under fire, often at immense personal danger, to keep people safe through severe winter conditions.

Russia's deliberate targeting of civilians and infrastructure is a grave breach of international law and is deepening Ukraine's humanitarian crisis as temperatures fall well below freezing.

Working people always bear the heaviest cost of war. On 1 February, fifteen miners were killed when a Russian drone struck their bus in the Pavlohrad district. In territories under Russia's illegal occupation, reports expose forced labour, the suppression of trade union freedoms and the violent mistreatment of workers, alongside the wider killing and torture of civilians.

Tens of thousands of children have been abducted by Russia and subjected to abuse on an industrial scale. As always, women, oppressed minorities and children also bear the brunt of war.

We stand with Ukrainian unions in their call for the restoration of labour rights and for a socially just reconstruction that embeds collective bargaining and rejects deregulation and privatisation.

We also stand with Ukrainian and other refugees in the UK and insist that their rights and safety are upheld.

The UK trade union movement has a proud history of standing in solidarity with victims of fascism and imperialist aggression.

A victory for Putin's regime would embolden authoritarian and

far-right forces globally.

We therefore reaffirm our support for the Ukrainian people's right to determine their own future, call for the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from all occupied territories, and support Ukrainian trade unions' appeals for the UK to provide the aid necessary to help secure a just and lasting peace.

Paul Nowak, General Secretary, Trades Union Congress

Andrea Egan, General Secretary, UNISON

Sharon Graham, General Secretary, Unite

Gary Smith, General Secretary, GMB

Daniel Kebede, General Secretary, NEU

Joanne Thomas, General Secretary, USDAW

Fran Heathcote, General Secretary, PCS

Jo Grady, General Secretary, UCU

Naomi Pohl, General Secretary, Musicians' Union

Dave Calfe, General Secretary, ASLEF

Chris Kitchen, General Secretary, NUM

Reposted from Anticapitalist Resistance

For information on solidarity with Ukraine in Scotland see Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland

Defend Greenland Against USA's Plunder – Without Illusions About the Kingdom of Denmark or the EU

Statement of the SAP Executive Committee, January 26, 2026

The Trump regime is still engaged in a fierce offensive for an imperialist American takeover of Greenland. All means have been used: political, economic and even military threats. In this situation, the Greenlandic self-government, a united *Inatsisartut*, has quite understandably chosen to seek refuge in a tactical alliance with the former colonial power (Denmark), the EU and the European NATO countries. At best, this alliance can stop Trump's plans to formally take over power in Greenland here and now. However, neither the powers that be in Denmark nor the EU are reliable champions of the Greenlandic people's right to self-determination – quite the contrary!

The massive popular support for, among other things, the demonstrations against Trump's plans for conquest has very clearly focused on the Greenlanders' right to self-determination. Hurrah for that! And even the Prime Minister has, in recent months – side by side with the leaders of the Self-Government – chosen this focus. But there is absolutely no reason to trust the Danish government and the other alliance partners or to embellish their motives.

As we described in a commentary about a year ago, Denmark's relationship with Greenland continues to be characterized and driven by imperialist interests – first and foremost, perhaps,

the interest in maintaining Denmark's geopolitical significance. This is despite the limited self-government that the Greenlanders have managed to fight for.

The helpful EU partners have also occasionally revealed the EU's undoubtedly deep interest in the resources in the Greenlandic subsoil – as well as the country's strategically important location in relation to the defence of Europe.

Stand away from the hypocrisy

For true friends of Greenlandic independence – and not least for the Greenlanders themselves – it has been challenging to listen to the entire political public in Denmark praising the Greenlanders' right to determine their own country, the rights of indigenous peoples, etc. in recent weeks. As if this were and always had been the basis for the "Kingdom", as it is so beautifully described. The hypocrisy seems glaring when this fairy tale is compared with the Danish-Greenlandic colonial history. And with the continued Danish imperialist dominance, even after the self-government arrangement.

It is also outrageous when Denmark, England, France, the Netherlands and others now stand guard over respect for "an international legal order". And claim that "we in the West" have safeguarded this since World War II. For example, a number of the same countries – not least Denmark – have been eager participants in the "coalition of the willing" which (led by the USA), without scruples under international law, violated the very territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Afghanistan – and, for many, later also Iraq!

Should the left wing – out of respect for the tactical alliance against the US – completely ignore this hypocrisy? Should we pretend that we completely share this view of the 'Kingdom' – and, for that matter, of our 'EU friends'? This is overwhelmingly what the Red-Green Alliance has chosen to do.

And that is a mistake!

Firstly, because we suddenly come across as Eurocentric hypocrites who turn a blind eye to Western (including European and Danish) colonialism and imperialism, both historically and in the present day. This will obviously and with good reason complicate our solidarity-based, internationalist cooperation across borders. It will also strain our relationship with Greenlanders and other ethnic minorities in Denmark and Greenland, who are typically already painfully aware of this hypocrisy.

No rose-tinted view of Denmark and the EU

Secondly, to lay the groundwork for the continued struggle for the Greenlanders' real right to self-determination. A struggle that – regardless of whether Trump and the US abandon a formal takeover, and even regardless of Trump and the US altogether – will be necessary.

Unless Trump succeeds fully in his conquest and, at the same time, completely breaks the economic and military imperialist alliance across the Atlantic, the Danish government and the EU will play a decisive role in shaping the future of Greenlandic self-determination – both in terms of military armament and the exploitation of Greenland's subsoil resources.

For that reason alone, it would be reprehensible to contribute to the illusion that the Greenlanders can trust the powers that be in Denmark and the EU. For there is little doubt that the goal of these parties will be to find a solution that primarily serves their own imperialist interests in the Greenlandic subsoil and military control of the Arctic. Not the self-government of the Greenlanders, who have been very reluctant to accept both the arms race in the Arctic and environmentally hazardous mining.

No to the arms race in the Arctic

The arms race in the Arctic is a threat to both the security of the Greenlanders and world peace and must be stopped!

It may have sounded very reasonable to send some (more) Danish soldiers to “stand symbolic guard over Greenland against a US military takeover” – if the Greenlandic self-government, and even the left-wing party IA, wanted it.

They clearly did – and apparently everyone is also enthusiastic about the fact that, instead, a large contingent of European NATO troops will be coming to Greenland and the surrounding waters. The Red-Green Alliance’s enthusiasm was due to the massive “European solidarity on Greenland’s sovereignty”. This angle was also strongly emphasized by many journalists.

BUT: Officially, the large troop deployment is being presented as something completely different from protecting Greenland against the US, namely as protecting Greenland, NATO and, to a large extent, the US against Russia and China. In other words, as an attempt to demonstrate what Denmark and others have already said, namely that the Danish Realm willingly fulfils all of Trump’s dreams of insane armament – so he does not need to take over Greenland at all!

It is clear that the action serves both purposes – and that it is therefore a smart move if one wants to convince the US that a military takeover would be very difficult and costly – and that the US’s wildest dreams of arming Greenland and the Arctic will be fulfilled with joy and enthusiasm by Denmark with the support of the other European NATO countries.

However, this is where the chain breaks for a party like the Red-Green Alliance. Or rather: it should have broken.

We are staunchly opposed to the imperialist blocs arming

themselves for war against each other. That is why we are also fighting for a demilitarized Arctic, for mutual disarmament – and thus against the obvious boost to the arms race that the recently launched NATO escalation around Greenland also represents.

Not a defence of either the Greenlanders or world peace

Denmark's, NATO's and the US's joint armament plans around Greenland have very little to do with defending Greenland – and absolutely nothing to do with protecting the Greenlandic population.

For example, monitoring and combating Russian submarines in the waters around Greenland, which can prevent Russian submarines from coming close to threatening the US, and the construction of a missile shield over Greenland ("Golden Dome") to protect the US from Russian missiles, are in no way "defensive defence" of the Kingdom. This armament in the Arctic will rather make Greenland and the Greenlanders a sure-fire first target in a war.

What does it mean for world peace if a "Golden Dome" actually succeeds in protecting the currently most aggressive imperialist power, the United States, from getting anything back in return if they start World War III? This increases the risk that a president like Trump, in an armed conflict with Russia/China, might take the chance and plunge the world into a nuclear war. And just last week, Trump highlighted the "Golden Dome" as a US "national security interest" that necessitates the conquest of Greenland.

Respect the Greenlanders' respect

for nature

Despite economic pressure, the Greenlandic self-government has on several occasions dug its heels in when greedy companies of various nationalities have had plans for environmentally damaging extraction of raw materials from the Greenlandic subsoil. And there is little doubt that one of the more rational arguments for Trump's desire to gain overall formal authority over Greenland is precisely to remove all obstacles – such as environmental legislation – to American companies' exploitation of Greenland's raw materials in the long term. Therefore, there is also reason to fear that part of a negotiated solution may include unpleasant concessions to wishes in this direction. Regardless of whether Trump has already discussed this with the NATO Secretary General or not… And there is reason to fear that Denmark/the EU will be more interested in getting a piece of the pie themselves than in securing the Greenlanders' veto.

In this context, it is not enough that the Greenlanders' right to decide on environmental legislation, etc. is preserved. Greenland must also be guaranteed an economy that does not force them to sell out their nature conservation efforts due to economic pressure.

Real Greenlandic self-government requires economic independence. At present, the economy is a major barrier to the Self-Government taking on new tasks. A first requirement must be that the block grant be increased – and made unconditional, so that it also goes to an independent Greenland. An obvious additional requirement is Danish "colonial era compensation" to enable the Self-Government to invest heavily in sustainable, publicly owned and controlled business development that can create a stable economic foundation for a self-financing, independent Greenland.

The fight is not over

It is clear that right now it is a matter of creating as strong a front as possible against Trump's threats, for the respect of Greenland's borders and the Greenlandic people's right to self-determination.

And, of course, it is entirely up to the Greenlanders to decide what they are ultimately willing to accept here and now in order to achieve a negotiated solution, in a situation where they face overwhelming threats from the US – and false promises from all sides.

But that does not mean that we, including the Red-Green Alliance, should cheer for a "solution" that essentially cements imperialist interests – neither those of the US nor those of Denmark and the EU.

The Red-Green Alliance should be clear from the outset about the problems of a "successful negotiated solution", a "deal" with Trump that does not affect the sovereignty of the Realm, but entails a catastrophic Arctic arms race, increased opportunities for imperialist exploitation of Greenland's natural resources and de facto shackling of Greenland in the so-called Realm.

The struggle for real Greenlandic independence and against environmental disasters and insane armament continues – under slightly different conditions, but regardless of the outcome of the ongoing arm wrestling. It will be necessary to maintain the impressive popular support behind the Greenlanders' demands for self-determination – and for the further demands that can make self-determination a reality. Our most important task is to build popular, anti-imperialist solidarity and gather support for these demands in Denmark – and in the other imperialist countries.

- Stop USA's imperialist plunder – Defend Greenland's

right to independence
- Terminate the base agreement with the USA
- Stop Denmark's – and Europe's – weapons purchases from the USA
- EU economic sanctions against the USA
- Denmark must secure Greenland's economic possibilities for independence
- Increased and unconditional continued block grant, and colonial compensation that the country can use for sustainable investments in an independent economy
- No to plunder and environmental destruction, no to imperialism via contracts
- The Greenlanders must be secured full democratic control over the country's subsoil
- No to rearmament in the Arctic
- The Greenlanders must have the right to limit/reject all military installations in their country and waters

Socialist Workers' Policy Executive Committee, January 26, 2026

Translated from "Forsvar Grønland mod USA's røvertogt – uden illusioner om Rigsfællesskabet og EU".

The SAP (Socialistisk Arbejderpolitik) is the Danish section of the Fourth International. It participates in the Red Green Alliance. It was founded in 1980 as a continuation of Revolutionære Socialisters Forbund (RSF) – Revolutionary Socialists' League

H/T Red Mole Substack

The Liberating Influence of the Transitional Program – George Breitman (1974). Part 2 – The Labor Party Question

[Earlier this month, we published the first of three talks by the veteran American Trotskyist George Breitman on the transitional approach to politics and on its impact during the formative years of the Socialist Workers Party in the 1930's. We are now publishing the second of these talks, which focuses on the attitude of early Trotskyist movement towards the creation of an independent labor party in the United States and on the transitional method generally. Breitman's detailed discussion of how the SWP overcame its initial sectarian and propagandist tendencies on this issue remains of relevance both to the question of the formation of broad parties on the left and to how revolutionaries should orientate towards mass movements around immediate and partial demands. The third and final of Breitman's talks will be published next month. *Ecosocialist Scotland, 26 January 2026*]

2. The Labor Party Question

I can't repeat the ground covered yesterday, but I'll give a brief chronology.

1928—Our movement begins when Cannon, Shachtman, and Abern are expelled for "Trotskyism" from the American Communist Party (CP).

1929—The Communist League of America (CLA) holds its founding convention and adopts its platform.

1931—The CLA holds its second convention.

1933—The International Left Opposition, to which the CLA is affiliated, makes the most important shift in its history, giving up its efforts to reform the Comintern and calling for a new International. In this country, the CLA ceases to consider itself a faction of the CP and set out to build a revolutionary Marxist party. This means the beginning of a turn away from almost pure propagandism directed at the CP toward intervention in the class struggle, with the aim of linking up with leftward-moving tendencies to construct the cadres of the revolutionary party.

1934—The CLA merges with the American Workers Party (AWP) headed by Muste to form the Workers Party of the United States (WPUS).

Spring of 1936—We dissolve the WPUS and join the Socialist Party (SP) and the YPSL in order to win over to the Fourth International young revolutionaries recently attracted by those organizations.

Summer of 1937—We are expelled from the SP and YPSL, with our forces considerably increased, and begin a discussion in preparation for the founding convention of a new party.

New Year's 1938—The SWP is founded at a convention in Chicago that adopts a declaration of principles and other basic documents to guide the new organization.

End of March 1938—Cannon, Shachtman, Dunne, and Karsner go to Mexico to meet with Trotsky to discuss plans for the founding conference of the Fourth International (FI) to be held later that year.

Trotsky introduces to them the idea of the Transitional Program, to be written as the basic program of the FI founding conference. They discuss this and related problems for an entire week, and then agree that they will go back to the United States to ask the SWP to approve it and act as its sponsor at the international conference, even though it will

require changing certain positions previously adopted by the SWP. One of these is the SWP's position on the Ludlow amendment to the U.S. Constitution for a referendum on war, which I discussed yesterday.

The other is the SWP's position on the labor party, which I shall discuss today. Before doing that, however, I would like to carry the narrative further as regards the disposition of the Transitional Program as a whole, aside from the labor party question.

Cannon and Shachtman got back to New York in time for a Political Committee meeting in mid-April, nine days before a plenum of the National Committee. The Political Committee adopted an agenda for recommendation to the plenum, which was to be changed a week later on the eve of the plenum; they changed the rules for attendance—previously it was to be open to all members, now it was to be closed except for NC members and a few invited guests—and they received reports from the delegates, the minutes reporting only, "Comrades Cannon and Shachtman give full reports on their journey."

There is no record of the Political Committee deciding to recommend anything regarding these reports; it only designated Cannon, Shachtman, and Dunne reporters to the plenum but did not take a position on anything, which is not how it is usually done. We can assume that the Political Committee wanted time to think over the Transitional Program and related proposals.

In referring to this plenum yesterday, I called it stormy and chaotic, and I don't think that is an exaggeration, although the minutes contain only motions and a few statements made specifically for the record. In the first place, the plenum was extended from three days to four, an unusual thing; and even so, a considerable part of the agenda was not acted on, and at the end had to be referred to the Political Committee.

The first point on the agenda was a report by Cannon on the matters discussed in Mexico, supplemented by brief remarks on factory committees by Shachtman. The second point was questions from the National Committee members, answered by Cannon, Shachtman, and Dunne. The third point was a five-hour recess to study documents (the first draft of the Transitional Program had arrived shortly before the plenum), including stenograms of the talks with Trotsky (those that dealt with the Transitional Program have just been published for the first time in the second edition of the Transitional Program book).

Then the political discussion began on transitional demands and related questions. But when the political discussion ran out, instead of a vote being taken, voting was deferred to the third day of the plenum; in fact, before the vote was taken, time was consumed with local reports on the branches, labor party sentiment, the antiwar movement, the CP, etc. The members of the plenum were plainly not in a hurry to vote on the key proposals. But the clearest sign of uncertainty or confusion was the nature of the motions presented and finally voted on.

A motion was made by Maurice Spector, supported by Cannon and Abern, that the SWP approve the Transitional Program, and a motion was made by Shachtman, supported by Burnham, that the SWP approve the Transitional Program, and the debate over these motions became one of the two focal points of the plenum, leading to roll-call votes duly recorded in the minutes and a division that was sixty to forty. Of course the motions were not exactly the same. But I had to reread them several times before I detected a possible nuance, and three of the twenty-eight who voted—Goldman, Clarke, and Cochran—voted for both motions, with a statement that they considered then essentially the same.

The possible nuance was this. Spector’s motion “endorses and adopts” the thesis written by Trotsky, whereas Shachtman’s

“endorses the general line of the thesis . . . and adopts it as a draft of an analysis.” But this thin line is made thinner yet by the fact that a second part of Spector’s motion “subscribes in principle to the conception of the program of transitional demands proposed” in the thesis. So one endorses and accepts while subscribing in principle, and the other endorses the general line and adopts it as a draft of an analysis. The vote was seventeen for Spector’s motion, eleven for Shachtman’s.

The same thing happened with the second part of these motions, directing the Political Committee to prepare a program of actions based on the Transitional Program and the conditions and needs of the American working-class struggle. To me, the two motions seem the same, but they led to a thirteen to twelve vote in favor of Spector’s. There was agreement only on the third part of the motion, that the program to be prepared by the Political Committee be submitted to the membership for discussion and referendum.

When such a thing happens, when a National Committee is divided thirteen to twelve over motions it is hard to distinguish between, then it is safe to conclude that the situation is not normal, or, to put it another way, that it contains the potential of a crisis. In my interpretation, there were two elements involved. One was what may be called personal. Cannon had been convinced by Trotsky, and he wanted the SWP leadership to endorse the Transitional Program without equivocation or pussyfooting. Others, including Shachtman, probably still had some reservations, hence wanted to affirm only “the general line.” They resented being pushed or pressured; they wanted more time to try to square the new line with what they had said in the past, and they reacted against the motions supported by Cannon as a way of expressing their dislike of him as a “hand-raiser” for Trotsky, as someone who unthinkingly went along with whatever Trotsky proposed, in contrast to themselves as independent thinkers.

This was closely connected with something that had happened the previous year, 1937, when we were still in the SP. Trotsky was the first, in a confidential letter to the leadership, to conclude that the SP experience was coming to an end and that we should prepare to be expelled and set up our own party. Cannon, agreeing, quickly sent a letter from California, endorsing Trotsky's perspective. Shachtman and Burnham, who were in the New York leadership, almost flipped out when they got this letter, because they had settled themselves in for an extended, an indefinitely extended, stay in the SP, and they were bitter about Cannon "the hand-raiser," even after they were compelled to agree with his proposal.

The difference between them was that Cannon was a more astute politician, saw things faster, and did not feel that there was anything shameful about endorsing a good idea just because Trotsky had made it; whereas they, being perhaps less self-confident, had greater psychological difficulty in reaching a decision.

But the other element, a purely political one, played the main role in producing the strange situation of a fight over two similar motions. That was the one I referred to in some detail yesterday. Namely, that the SWP leadership was being asked to sharply change positions on important questions like the labor party, which they had held for several years and which they had reaffirmed just a few months before at the founding convention of the SWP; and that the reasoning Trotsky used in the Transitional Program seemed in some ways new to them, so new that at first they were jolted by it.

Supporting this part of my interpretation are the facts about what happened after the plenum. A Political Committee subcommittee was set up to draft a national program of action based on the Transitional Program, which was to consist of two parts, one on transitional demands, the other on the labor party question. In June, Spector and Burnham brought in separate drafts on the Transitional Program, but as they

worked on them, the realization grew that really there were not any significant differences, and what emerged was a joint document. There were differences over various passages, but these were settled by majority vote (except Workers Government or Workers and Farmers Government), and in the end the comrades who had voted against each other at the plenum all accepted the final draft, which was submitted to the membership for the referendum.

So the leadership should be credited with the good sense to reach agreement, once they had a little more time to assimilate the Transitional Program. They should also be credited with avoiding a factional situation, which was unwarranted and would have done great damage, since there was no political basis for it. Their united presentation of the document did a lot to win the support of the party ranks for both Trotsky's Transitional Program draft and the American adaptation of it. A full-scale discussion took place in the ranks, and in the referendum that followed, over 90 percent of those voting endorsed the international resolution, and about 95 percent endorsed the American program of action (I'll report on the labor party vote later).

I do not mean to imply that everybody in the party, leadership or ranks, absorbed the full meaning of the transitional method all at once or quickly. Late in the fall, two members of the Political Committee were still trying to get us to replace the slogan of the sliding scale of wages with a "rising scale of wages." There were also some strange things said during the discussion.

One that I remember now with some amusement is a debate that was never settled, echoes of which I still encountered in the 1950s among certain kinds of comrades. That was over the question of whether transitional demands can be realized under capitalism, the implication often being that transitional demands were good or acceptable only if or when they could not be realized under capitalism and could not be supported if

they could be realized under capitalism, the further implication being that supporting demands that could be realized under capitalism would lead us into some kind of horrendous trap and make rank opportunists of us all. It sounds more amusing now than it did then.

Anyhow, my point is that we did not grasp the meaning or master the use of the transitional method all at once—it took time, in my own case it was a matter of years, not months. But we did grasp it in part relatively quickly, which testifies to the maturity of both the leadership and the membership, and to the fact that our past had prepared us for this leap forward, for in practice we had been learning basic elements of the transitional approach before 1938, but without ever having generalized it our concretized it or theorized it or worked out the relations between the different parts as Trotsky did for us in 1938.

Now let me get back to the labor party question. Lenin waged a fight in the early years of the Comintern against those sectarian elements who refused to work in or give critical support to the candidates of existing labor parties, and this fight was so successful that hardly any communist thereafter held such a position. The question that concerned our movement in the 1930s was not whether to work in a labor party created by other forces, but whether it was permissible for revolutionaries to advocate the formation of a labor party. In a few moments I will trace the history of our movement on this question, but I will start by referring to my own experience, which began in 1935, when I first joined.

In 1935 the CIO and the new industrial unions were just being born; soon they were to turn their attention to politics—openly capitalist politics, as in their support of Roosevelt in 1936, but also hybrid politics, as in the formation of Labor's Non-Partisan League (LNPL) nationally and the American Labor Party in New York, which had the potential of taking an independent labor party direction. Nineteen

thirty-five was also the year when the Stalinists dropped their third-period policies, including opposition to labor parties as social-fascist formations, and began to call for the formation of a national labor party. Labor party resolutions began to be discussed in various unions and other mass movements and often were adopted at union conventions, although that was about as far as it went.

What I learned as a new member was that it was impermissible for us to advocate the formation of a labor party. We could advocate independent labor political action in general, because that encompassed the idea of revolutionary workers' politics, but we could not advocate formation of an independent labor party because a labor party, necessarily reformist, would inevitably betray the workers. I remember that in 1936, when I was writing a pamphlet to be published by the unemployed movement in New Jersey, I felt it necessary, in reporting action taken by this movement, to try to distinguish between its endorsement of independent political action (which we favored) and its endorsement of a farmer-labor party (which we didn't).

In 1936 we joined the SP and YPSL, and our labor party position immediately became, and remained, the clearest point of distinction between our faction, called the Appeal Association or caucus, and the centrist faction, called the Clarity caucus. They advocated a labor party, for reasons that sometimes sounded radical and other times sounded opportunist, and we opposed advocacy. In the year and a half we spent in the SP and YPSL, there must have been thousands of individual discussions and debates around the labor party, no one ever joining our faction without coming to accept our antiadvocacy position. In fact, it was often the crucial point for the revolutionary-minded youth of the SP and YPSL, dominating their decision on whether to join the Appeal or Clarity caucus.

At our founding convention there was no debate on the labor

party question. Instead, there was agreement, you could say unanimity, with the statement in the Declaration of Principles that the revolutionary party cannot "properly take the initiative in advocating the formation of Labor or Farmer-Labor Parties," and with the statement in the main political resolution, "Faced with the prospect of the formation of a national Labor party of one kind or another, the [SWP] has no need of altering the fundamental revolutionary Marxian position on the Labor Party question. The revolutionary party cannot take the responsibility for forming or advocating the formation of a reformist, class-collaborationist party, that is, of a petty-bourgeois workers' party."

But having settled accounts with the SP and having turned our eyes to the union movement, it began to be clear to the leaders of the new party that considerable pro-labor sentiment was developing in this country and that the party had better pay attention to it. Burnham took the lead in this respect in the Political Committee, but Cannon also was starting to concern himself with it. Burnham then wrote an article called "The Labor Party: 1938," reviewing the recent developments and urging an active orientation toward them. Even he, however, felt it incumbent to tip his hat to the convention formula: "The revolutionists are not the originators or initiators of any labor or any other kind of reformist party; they not merely give no guarantees or false hopes for such a party but, on the contrary, warn against the illusion that such a party can solve any major problem of the working class. The central task of the period ahead remains the building of the revolutionary party itself."

In the Political Committee, Burnham explained the strategy behind his article: he said that "there is now a labor party movement, and that we have to find ways and means of working in it." With this approach, the question of advocating a labor party could be skipped over; a movement already existed, so we didn't have to advocate it, all we had to do was get in. He

asked the Political Committee to endorse his article and recommend its approach to the plenum coming in April. The Political Committee decided merely to refer the whole matter to the plenum, and that is how things stood at the time of the talks in Mexico.

Trotsky also wanted us to work in the labor party movement, but he didn't see any need to be devious about it. Instead, as you can tell from the Transitional Program book, he argued that we should change our position and begin to advocate the formation of a labor party, and he sought to convince the SWPers that they should do the same.

In the discussion, at the beginning, Cannon said that he thought the prevailing sentiment of the party was "to join the LNPL and become aggressive fighters for the constitution of a labor party as against the policy of endorsing capitalist candidates; if we can do that without compromising our principles, that would be best in the sense of gaining influence." Shachtman too was concerned about the possible compromising of our principles. More than once he reminded Trotsky that we cannot advocate a reformist party and yet he (Trotsky) was advocating something that seemed just that.

Trotsky replied that he was not advocating a reformist labor party. He was trying to find a pedagogical approach to the workers. "We say [to the workers], you cannot impose your [political] will through a reformist party but only through a revolutionary party. The Stalinists and liberals wish to make of this movement a reformist party, but we have our program, we make of this a revolutionary—"

Here Cannon interrupted: "How can you explain a revolutionary labor party? We say: The SWP is the only revolutionary party, has the only revolutionary program. How then can you explain to the workers that also the labor party is a revolutionary party?"

Trotsky: “I will not say that the labor party is a revolutionary party, but that we will do everything to make it possible. At every meeting I will say: I am a representative of the SWP. I consider it the only revolutionary party. But I am not a sectarian. You are trying now to build a big workers’ party. I will help you but I propose that you consider a program for this party. I make such and such propositions. I begin with this. Under these conditions it would be a big step forward. Why not say openly what is? Without any camouflage, without any diplomacy.”

Cannon: “Up till now the question has always been put abstractly. The question of the program has never been outlined as you outlined it. The Lovestoneites have always been for a labor party; but they have no program, it’s combinations from the top. It seems to me that if we have a program and always point to it. . . . ”

Shachtman was still not convinced: “Now with the imminence of the outbreak of the war, the labor party can become a trap.” He was very much on guard against traps and illusions. “And I still can’t understand how the labor party can be different from a reformist, purely parliamentarian party.”

Trotsky: “You put the question too abstractly; naturally it can crystallize into a reformist party, and one that will exclude us. But we must be part of the movement . . . we always point to our program. And we propose our program of transitional demands.”

It is obvious from reading the stenograms that the SWP leaders were hung up by some of their previous formulas on the labor party question. Trotsky tried to bring new light on the matter, and the way in which he did this, in line with the Transitional Program as a whole, appeared to them to represent something new: “The question of the program has never been outlined as you outlined it,” Cannon said. The problem seemed solved; the only thing that remained was how to explain the

change. If the new position was correct, how about the old position? Had the old position been correct in the past but become invalid as the result of new and different conditions? Or had it always been wrong? If so, what was the source of the error?

The voting on the labor party at the April plenum was very much like the voting on the Transitional Program, except that this time there was a third position, presented by Glen Trimble of California, whose motion would simply reaffirm the position taken at the founding convention, that is, would continue to oppose advocacy. Trimble's motion was defeated seventeen to four. The two major positions were expressed in motions by Cannon and Burnham.

Cannon's was very short: "That we adopt the draft statement distributed to members as the position of the Plenum; and instruct the Political Committee to take this as a basis, concretize it and elaborate it, and submit it to the Party for discussion culminating in a referendum vote." The draft statement he referred to was one written by Trotsky, which appears in the Transitional Program book under the title "The Problem of the Labor Party."

The motion by Burnham was longer and more detailed, generally along the lines of his recent magazine article, but at no point in real contradiction with the line of Cannon's motion. The vote was closer this time: twelve for Cannon's, ten for Burnham's, two abstentions (weeks later one of the abstentions was changed to a vote for Cannon).

When the time came to draw up the document authorized in the Cannon motion, almost the same thing happened as with the Transitional Program. That is, virtually everyone who had voted for either the Cannon or the Burnham motion realized that there were no real differences between them on the labor party, and they all voted for a common NC majority resolution and jointly defended it in the referendum discussion against

an NC minority resolution introduced by Hal Draper.

But the results in the discussion and the voting were not the same as with the Transitional Program. Despite the virtual unanimity of the leadership, a large part of the SWP membership (and of the youth) was and remained against the change of position. The new position received only 60 percent in the referendum, as against 90 percent for the Transitional Program and 95 percent for the American adaptation.

Here I must differ with a statement George Novack made in his introduction to the Transitional Program book. He notes that the labor party question is not included in the Transitional Program and says, “This is for good reason. This problem is peculiar to our country, which is the most politically backward of all the advanced capitalist countries,” the only one where the workers don’t have some party of their own. But obviously this was not true of all countries in 1938 and it is not true today. There are many countries in the world, especially colonial, semicolonial, and neocolonialist countries, where the workers don’t have a party of their own class, and where the general labor party approach could be appropriate. And although the Soviet Union was the only workers’ state in the world, that didn’t stop Trotsky from writing a lot in the Transitional Program about the problems that were “peculiar” to that country.

But comrade Novack was correct in saying that there was good reason for the labor party not being included in the Transitional Program. And the reason was that the leaders were aware of the opposition of many members to the new labor party position and were afraid that if the questions weren’t separated, so that they could be voted on separately, this might endanger adoption of the Transitional Program first of all in this country, and secondly, indirectly in the rest of the International. This was good and sound reasoning, in my opinion. In my own case, I could not have voted for the Transitional Program at that time if it had included a

provision in favor of labor party advocacy. At least 40 percent of the party would have been in a dilemma if they had had to vote on the two matters in a single package.

Today, when there isn't anybody in our movement who disagrees on the pro-advocacy position, it may be difficult to appreciate the heat that accompanied that discussion in 1938. The source of the difficulty was that, for several years before 1938, we, the members had been taught that it was unprincipled to advocate the formation of any party but the revolutionary party. And the difficulty was compounded because the leadership, instead of forthrightly stating that this was a mistake that now must be corrected, denied that it had been considered a principled question or tried to sweep it aside as irrelevant. This way of handling the change, which is not typical of Bolshevism or of our movement before or since, complicated the whole situation, distracting the discussion away from the essence of the problem into side issues, and made it more difficult for the members to resolve the question correctly.

"The question of the labor party has never been a question of 'principle' for revolutionary Marxists." That is the opening sentence of Trotsky's draft statement, printed in the back of the Transitional Program book, which was incorporated with a few changes into the National Committee majority resolution in the referendum. In my opinion, that sentence was wrong. It had been a question of principle, and when I say that, I am not concerned with whether it had been formally labeled a principle, but with how the party membership had been educated to view the question.

In the National Committee draft, that sentence was changed from "The question of the labor party has never been a question of 'principle' for revolutionary Marxists" to "The question of the attitude toward an existing labor party has never been a question of principle for revolutionary Marxists." In my opinion, the changed sentence was correct, as

it stands, but in the context, it was an evasion of the problem that was troubling and confusing many party members.

I have decided not to try to prove what I have said here—that before 1938 we treated labor party advocacy as a principled question, even if we didn't label it that way. I'll merely repeat what Cannon said in Mexico, that our party would become aggressive fighters for a labor party "if we can do that without compromising our principled position." I'll assume that is sufficient until somebody challenges my statement.

At that time I thought that our principled position had always been against advocating a labor party, and in the course of that discussion, both written and oral, nobody, absolutely nobody, ever said that we had previously had any other position. If they had done so, it would surely have shaken me and the other 40 percent of the membership that voted against the new position and might have persuaded us that we were wrong. But nobody ever mentioned our having had any other position, or even said when we had adopted the one we had up to 1938. You may think that odd, but in those days—before offset printing made possible relatively inexpensive production of the old bound volumes of the *Militant*, and at a time when the resources of our party did not make available the old internal bulletins and documents of our movement—the general membership was not as well informed about the history of our own movement, in the form of accessible documents, as it is today. Anyhow, in the course of that discussion, which I followed closely and anxiously because, for the first time, my confidence in the leadership was shaken, nobody ever asked or said when we had adopted our pre-1938 position or if we had had a different position before that.

And so it wasn't until a few weeks ago, in preparing this talk, that I learned that our pre-1938 position had first been adopted in 1931, and that we had indeed had a different position before then—a contradictory one, in fact.

A few months after our expulsion from the CP in 1928, the *Militant* printed a long document by Cannon, Shachtman, and Abern, “The Platform of the Opposition,” filling most of the paper’s eight tabloid pages. One section was called “The Perspective of a Labor Party.” I will read a few passages from it:

The perspective of coming mass struggles involves the question of developing these struggles in a political direction and unifying them in a centralized form. The movement for a Labor Party is today at low ebb as a result primarily of the passivity of the workers and the decline in movements of struggle in the past period. The coming period of developing economic struggles will very probably be reflected in tendencies toward the revival of the Labor Party movement.

It is not reasonable to expect that the masses of the American workers, who are still tied ideologically and politically to the bourgeois parties, will come over to the Communist Party politically in one step in a period not immediately revolutionary. All past experience, and particularly the recent experiences in the mining, textile and needle trades industries, where the workers who supported Communist leadership in strikes did not vote for the Communist ticket, do not sustain such expectations. The perspective of a Labor Party, as a primary step in the political development of the American workers, adopted by the Party in 1922 after a sharp struggle in the Party and at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, holds good today, although the forms and methods of its realization will be somewhat different than those indicated at that time.

It is therefore necessary to keep the perspective of a Labor Party before the eyes of the Party and the working class. We speak here not for the immediate formation of such a Party and surely not for the adventurism and opportunism that has characterized this work in the past, particularly in the organization of fake Labor Parties that had no genuine mass

basis. The Labor Party must have a mass basis and must arise out of struggle and be formed in the process of struggle. To this end, the propaganda slogan must be really revived, and as soon as it has found roots in the masses and their experience in the struggle, it must become an agitational, and finally an action, slogan.

The rest of this part of the 1929 platform discusses what a labor party of the kind we would propagandize for cannot be—it cannot be a two-class party, or an enlarged shadow of the CP, and so on, so I won't read those parts.

That was February 1929. We then decided to hold the founding convention of the CLA in May, and the platform containing this position on the labor party was introduced as the leadership's main document for the convention, serving as the basis for discussion first in the branches and then at the convention. There, according to a report on the convention by Cannon in the *Militant*, the labor party question was one of the two sharply debated on the convention floor. After describing minority viewpoints, including some who wanted nothing to do with any labor party even after it was formed, and some who were against advocacy but would work inside a labor party, Cannon wrote:

It was the opinion of the majority that, although it certainly is not a pressing question of the moment, the labor party question has a great importance for the future when the radicalization of the workers will begin to seek political expression. Therefore it is imperative to have a clear and definite stand on it. A misjudgment of the probable line of development of the American workers or a sectarian doctrine which would prevent us from approaching and influencing new upward movements, might have the most serious consequences later on. The formulation of the Platform on the Perspective of a Labor Party was adopted by a majority after a thorough discussion.

I wish that I had known in 1938 about this stage of our thinking on the labor party nine years earlier. I think it might have helped me avoid a serious error. Because, in my opinion, our 1929 position was substantially correct. It did not make a principle out of what was actually a tactical question. It did not reject taking a clear and definite stand merely because there was no labor party movement of significance in existence. It distinguished between the labor party as a subject for propaganda, and the labor party as a subject for agitation or action. And it had what proved to be a realistic perspective on the relative future growth of the revolutionary party and the mass movement.

That was the position at our first convention, in mid-1929, before the start of the big depression and at a time when all factions of the Communist Party, right, center, and left, were in favor of advocating a labor party, although their motivations and reasoning varied greatly. This position was changed, and even criticized, at our second convention in mid-1931, when the depression was over a year old and when the CP, now deep into its third-period madness, also was opposed to any pro-labor party development.

I don’t mean to suggest that the CP’s opposition to labor party advocacy was the same as ours. To the CP, anybody who advocated a labor party was a social fascist. We condemned their position, first of all because the whole theory of social fascism was false and suicidal from start to end, and secondly because if that was all their opposition to a labor party rested on, it was insufficient, because it meant that when they ultimately gave up social fascism they might or would return to advocacy of a labor party. (Which, incidentally, they did, in 1935.)

The political resolution adopted at our second convention, in 1931, was a long document, and the section called “Social Reformism and the Perspectives of the Revolutionary Movement” was also long. Contrary to the CP, we warned that the basis

for social reformism, far from being “narrowed down,” was being extended in the form of a growth of a leftist bureaucracy in the unions and a revival of the social democracy. Most of the section is devoted to a discussion of how to fight the reformists—how the CP should fight them, through the united front correctly understood and applied and so on, in a period when it must not be assumed that the United States was fated to be the last capitalist country to enter the revolutionary crisis.

The labor party question was presented in this context. The resolution saw the AFL bureaucracy, “their socialist assistants and the ‘Left wing’ progressive toadies of the Muste school” working consciously to erect barriers to the growth of the revolutionary movement in every area. “On the political field most of these elements seek to erect a barrier in the form of a ‘Labor’ or ‘Farmer-Labor’ party, that is, a bourgeois workers’ party in the image of the British Labor Party.”

The 1931 resolution then criticizes the many false formulations of the labor party question held in the American CP from 1923 to 1928, saying that none was based on a Marxian conception of the role of the labor party or of the nature of our epoch. Of course many of these formulations and policies had been adventurist or opportunist, or a combination of both. Now, said the resolution:

all these conceptions and practices must be thrown overboard because they were originally wrong. . . . The American Communists cannot undertake to organize a petty bourgeois workers’ party “standing between” the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Abstractly considered, to be sure, were there a mass movement which would organize a labor party, the Communists would have to take up the question of working within it as a revolutionary nucleus. But this is a different matter

entirely. Moreover, it is a matter which has less of a timely significance today—even abstractly—than in past years, since there is no substantial movement at all for a labor party in the 1932 elections.

It is the reformists of all shades, the Thomases and the Mustes, who seek to set up this petty bourgeois party as a wall against the workers' progress towards Communism; in this work, they are only fulfilling their mission and role of prolonging as much as possible the "reformist period" in the development of the American working class. It is no accident that the Right wing liquidators of the Lovestone group have as the central point in their program the idea that the Labor Party's formation is an essential and imperative step for the American workers, which the Right wing is ready to initiate, to form and build up. It is this perspective which it recommends to the Communist movement as a whole to adopt. The Left Opposition, at its formative stage, leaned in the direction of this reformist perspective which constituted to a certain extent an uncritical carry-over of the preceding group struggles in the party, prior to the time when the Left wing took shape and was established as a political grouping distinct from all the others in the movement. The firmer establishment of its Marxian position dictates a break with this early standpoint and the adoption of the one outlined here. The adoption of this revised point of view, the result of clarification in its own ranks, marks a step forward that will enable the Opposition to bring greater clarity on this vital problem into the revolutionary and labor movements as a whole.

That was 1931. A year later, Trotsky had talks in Turkey with Albert, Weisbord, the leader of a small group that was making an approach to the Left Opposition, although it shared many of the ideas of the Right Opposition, including its labor party position. After their discussion, Trotsky wrote a letter to Weisbord and a statement on the labor party, both printed in

Writings 1932. In the letter he praised the position taken by the CLA at our second convention "because in the theses not only was a correct position taken on the essence of the question but also an open and courageous criticism of its own past was made. Only in this way can a revolutionary tendency seriously assure itself against backsliding."

In the labor party article, he said that he found the CLA convention position on the labor party "excellent in every part, and I subscribe to it with both hands." It is an article very worthwhile, especially for those who may think that we should have been or should be in favor of the formation of a labor party under all circumstances. But I leave all that out to quote two passages:

3. *A long period of confusion in the Comintern led many people to forget a very simple but absolutely irrevocable principle: that a Marxist, a proletarian revolutionist, cannot present himself before the working class with two banners. He cannot say at a workers' meeting: "I have a ticket for a first-class party and another, cheaper ticket for the backward worker." If I am a Communist, I must fight for the Communist Party.*

And a little later, after mentioning how the Comintern's policy toward the Kuomintang and the British Labor Party in the 1920s produced an opportunistic adaptation to the will of the Comintern's allies and, through them, to that of the class enemy, he said:

We must educate our cadres to believe in the invincibility of the Communist idea and the future of the Communist Party. The parallel struggle for another party inevitably produces in their minds a duality and turns them onto the road of opportunism.

It should be noted that there had been no explicit reference to a principle about the labor party in the 1931 convention's

resolution, but Trotsky's use of such a term was not inconsistent with that resolution; it merely spelled out what was implicit in the whole approach of the resolution.

By now it must be plain that there was a principle involved in the thinking behind the position we held between 1931 and 1938. And it was a most fundamental principle—the principle of the need and primacy of the revolutionary party, whose construction is indispensable for everything else. Those who depart from this principle, or subordinate it, or compromise it, like the social democrats or the Lovestoneites, cannot possibly have the right position on the labor party.

But it does not follow that everybody who advocates a labor party is necessarily subordinating or compromising the principle that the building of the revolutionary party comes foremost for Marxists. It does not follow that advocating a labor party is contradictory to building the revolutionary party; in fact, advocating a labor party is not only consistent with building the revolutionary party in certain conditions but also a means toward building the revolutionary party, if the revolutionaries know what they are doing and how to do it right.

So on the labor party there was a confusion between principle and the tactics that were presumed to flow from the principle, which, as I showed yesterday, is the same thing as happened with the Ludlow amendment. The difference is that the Ludlow amendment mistake was of relatively short duration, a few months, whereas the labor party mistake lasted for seven years and therefore was harder for many of us to correct. The Transitional Program, or, more exactly, the transitional method that it taught us, enabled us not only to understand this mistake, some of us sooner than others, but also to better grasp the dynamics of unfolding class struggles and how to relate to them in a way that was positive and creative rather than purely propagandist, abstentionist, or dogmatic.

It showed us that advocating a labor party does not necessarily make us responsible for everything that happens in connection with a labor party that is formed under the leadership of other forces, any more than advocating a strike makes us responsible for everything that happens during a strike under the leadership of other forces. The nature of our responsibility depends on the nature of our program and the way we present it. We are responsible only for what we advocate, not for the victory of opponents over what we advocate.

It showed us that advocating a labor party does not necessarily mean that you are advocating the formation of a reformist party. It depends on how you advocate it, on what content you give your advocacy, on what program you advance for the labor party. The posing of the question—can a labor party be revolutionary?—which seemed unreasonable to us before 1938, was very useful educationally. Trotsky did not give the question an absolute or direct yes answer. We will try to make it as revolutionary as we can, he said, and he might have added, just as we do with the unions.

It showed us that advocating a labor party does not inevitably produce in the minds of the revolutionary cadre a duality regarding the primacy of the revolutionary party or turn the cadre onto the road of opportunism. It can do these things, but it need not, if the cadre is firm in principle in the first place and if the leadership is always alert to maintain the cadre's educational-political level and consciousness. Advocating a labor party can result in these retrogressive things, but it does not follow that it must, therefore it does not follow that the mere possibility must compel us to abstain from what can be a fruitful tactic for the building of the revolutionary party.

Of course it is true that a party that is weak on the principle of the revolutionary party will get into trouble with a labor party tactic. But the SWP was not weak on that

principle, so that general truth was irrelevant in this case.

In 1931, when we replaced the 1929 position, we said that it had been wrong, for which Trotsky praised us. In 1938, when we replaced the 1931 position, we did not make any such explicit judgment. We said only that the 1931 position was abstract and that conditions had changed sufficiently to make the abstract formulas of the past obsolete. These were valid criticisms, and it is to the credit of the party and its leadership that, with help from Trotsky and the Transitional Program, we were able to arrive at a correct position, in a relatively short time, without the loss of cadres and without serious damage to morale. Perhaps this was the most that could have been achieved under those conditions.

I did not think so at that time. I resented what I took to be the leadership's refusal to make a judgment about the 1931 position, so much that my resentment prevented me from understanding what was correct and progressive in its 1938 position. In addition, I was basically wrong because I thought that the 1931 position was correct. Later I saw and now I see that the 1931 position was not just abstract but wrong, not just rendered obsolete by new conditions but wrong before the coming of new conditions—not in every word, but on the whole. I think that the public opinion of the party will reach this conclusion too, actually though not officially, when in the not-too-distant future we will make these old documents more available for study by the membership.

The personal lesson that I learned, rather painfully, was the need to be more objective in the analysis of political problems. It was hard for me to admit to myself that we had been mistaken, that I had been mistaken, so hard that I wanted to cling to the error. And I justified clinging to it by the less than perfect arguments used by the leadership to motivate the correction. That's not a good way to reach a decision. A position may be correct even though its proponents do not defend it in the best way possible. We have the obligation to

recognize a correct position independently, so to speak, of the arguments of others who find it correct. It took me almost three years after the end of the 1938 discussion before I was able to do that with the labor party question. Fortunately, the party was not so slow.

Although the subject of these talks played a decisive part in my political life, that is not the main reason that I have gone to the trouble of telling you about them.

Building the revolutionary party is a difficult and arduous process. Recently I read the translation of a 1933 article by Trotsky about how hard it is to achieve a healthy society even after the workers have come to power, written for an American bourgeois periodical but not published at that time.

“To achieve harmony in the state,” he wrote, “—even on the basis of collective ownership and planned management encompassing all facets of the economy—is only possible as the result of an indefinitely prolonged period of efforts, experiments, errors, crises, reforms and reorganization.” That description struck me as appropriate also for the task of building a party capable of leading the revolutionary workers to power—a prolonged “period of efforts, experiments, errors, crises, reforms and reorganization.

We have reason to be proud of the achievements of the SWP. It is qualitatively superior to any of its opponents in this country, and, thanks to the continuity of its leadership, which enabled it to avoid repeating the same errors over and over, it enjoys several advantages over other sympathizing groups or sections of the Fourth International. This did not come about by accident or sheer good luck; it is the result of struggle and consciousness. A correct appraisal of the SWP and its achievements, which is necessary for further progress, is furthered by an awareness of the difficulties it has encountered and the way it overcame them, rather than by an ignoring of those difficulties or a depreciation of their

magnitude.

The other reason that I think discussions such as this are justified is that they contribute to party consciousness-raising about the abundance of weapons in our political and theoretical arsenal. The metaphor most commonly used to call our attention to the debt we owe our predecessors is that we are "standing on their shoulders," which explains why we can see some things that they couldn't. I think I prefer a less athletic figure of speech, that of the arsenal. It was built by the pioneers of the Marxist movement and expanded by their successors. It is bigger, and its contents are more varied and useful than anything they had at their disposal. Available to us now are not only the actual weapons—the ideas, theories, programs, principles, strategies, tactics, and so on—but the history of their development, refinement, and improvement, which includes trial and error and experiments that failed as well as those that succeeded. We don't have to start from scratch, with the bow and arrow, and we are not doomed to repeat errors merely because we don't know their history. We can learn from the past, both what to continue and perfect and what to avoid.

No other movement has such a rich arsenal; the others would like to forget the past. The Stalinists, for example, would never dream of reprinting the books they published in the early 1930s, during the period of social fascism; we, on the other hand, are using precious resources to print material from the 1930s by Trotsky and others that we were too poor to print in permanent book form then and that we are determined to add to our arsenal for the benefit of the youth of today and tomorrow.

This arsenal is big, but it's going to have to be bigger before humanity turns it into a museum. You are going to have to build new weapons to hasten that day, but before you can do that you have to master the ones in our present stockpile. These talks are intended as a contribution to that process.

From the Ground Up: The Leith Model and the Future of Your Party Organising

How Edinburgh activists are building a new kind of left politics through community roots, worker solidarity, and ecosocialist campaigning

Duncan Chapel, January 2026

Something is stirring in Leith. While much of the post-Corbyn left remains trapped in cycles of faction fights and social media outrage, a small group of Your Party activists in Edinburgh's historic port district have been quietly developing an approach to organising that deserves wider attention.

They call it the Leith Model. It's not a grand theory. It's a practical template for building political presence through three interconnected commitments: worker solidarity, community defence, and anti-fascist mobilisation. And it's already generating results that other branches across Scotland might learn from.

The Core Commitments

When Your Party Leith held its founding meeting in late 2025, around twelve committed members agreed on three core areas of action. The list is instructive for what it includes and what it refuses to defer.

Worker solidarity came first. This wasn't abstract commitment to "the working class" but concrete presence on picket lines. When workers at Rockstar Games Edinburgh began organising with

the IWGB Game Workers union, facing what the union describes as “Amazon-style” union busting, Leith activists were there. The dispute, which saw 31 workers summarily dismissed in October 2025 just one week after the union reached the statutory recognition threshold, has become a defining struggle for creative industry unionisation in Scotland. Your Party members have maintained visible solidarity throughout: attending protests outside the Holyrood Road headquarters, joining the march to the Scottish Parliament, and connecting the dispute to wider questions about precarious work in the digital economy.

Community defence meant partnership, not substitution. Leith already has Living Rent, the tenants’ union that has won real victories on rent controls and retrofit debt. Rather than competing or duplicating, Your Party activists joined existing campaigns. When Marionville fire station faced closure, they worked alongside Living Rent to oppose it. The principle is clear: we’re not here to replace the brilliant work being done by community groups; we’re here to amplify it.

Standing against racism required physical presence. When fascists terrorised refugees at a hotel in Falkirk, Leith members travelled to stand on the counter-demonstration. One organiser describes the surreal experience of dancing to Spice Girls while bottles and flares flew. “That was really restorative for me,” he told a recent branch meeting. Anti-fascism isn’t a position statement; it’s showing up.

Mutual Aid as Foundation

Alongside these three commitments, practical solidarity has anchored the branch’s community presence. The “Keep Leith Warm” initiative before Christmas 2025 brought together food, clothing, and toys for residents facing hardship. Activists leafleted the Kirkgate, inviting people directly: come along, you’re hungry, we’ll feed you; you need clothes, they’re yours.

One organiser, a former Labour member of nineteen years, reflected: “Never had I done something like that, where I was going out and saying, hey, come along next week.” The contrast with Labour’s hollowed-out electoralism could not be sharper. Mothers left with arms full of toys. Relationships were built that no canvassing database can capture.

The methodological insight matters. As the Leith Model document puts it: “Digital tools support communication, but face-to-face organising remains the core of community mobilisation.” WhatsApp groups and social media pages are useful for outreach. But lasting momentum came when organisers prioritised street stalls, leafleting, and open meetings.

The Freeport Campaign: Ecosocialism in Practice

The most strategically significant development is the emerging campaign against the Forth Green Freeport. This is where ecosocialist politics meets concrete local struggle.

The Freeport, designated in June 2024, stretches across the Forth estuary: Leith, Burntisland, Rosyth, Grangemouth, Edinburgh Airport. It promises 34,500 jobs and billions in investment. It delivers tax breaks for corporations, regulatory “flexibilities” that weaken planning oversight, and a “green” label that environmental groups call straightforward greenwashing.

Living Rent has already identified the housing angle: thousands of projected jobs without housing means rent increases for existing residents. They’re pushing the Council to direct Visitor Levy revenue toward social housing rather than unaffordable “mid-market rent” schemes.

Your Party Leith is developing a broader campaign: researching potential impacts on communities and labour standards, building a coalition to resist, preparing a conference motion, planning public demonstrations with affected communities. The

Freeport connects deregulation, weakened worker protections, and false climate solutions in a single site of struggle. It's exactly the kind of material issue that can ground anti-capitalist politics in everyday concerns.

The STUC has a representative on the Freeport Governance Board but warns that without enforceable collective bargaining guarantees, the model risks "a race to the bottom" in labour standards. At Grangemouth, the Petroineos refinery closed in April 2025 with 400 job losses. The promised "low carbon manufacturing hub" won't arrive until 2040. That's fifteen years of managed decline dressed as green transition.

An ecosocialist response demands more than opposition. It requires an alternative vision: public ownership of the Forth estuary's infrastructure, a genuine just transition for fossil fuel workers, democratic control over economic development. Your Party organisers in Leith are beginning to articulate exactly this.

Replication Across Edinburgh

The Leith Model is already spreading. At a recent Edinburgh branch meeting, constituency groups reported back on their emerging plans.

Edinburgh South identified local health campaigns linking lung conditions to air pollution, connecting individual illness to environmental crisis. They mapped their territory honestly: working-class areas in Oxgangs and Liberton/Gilmerton separated by more affluent Morningside. They're planning stalls at the library, the square, the Aldi: places where people actually gather.

Edinburgh Central drew on members' experience of Labour canvassing to articulate what they want to avoid: "instrumental and extractive" data harvesting without genuine conversation. They noted that young people have nowhere free

to exist, nowhere to hang out without paying. A party that can provide space, literally, builds roots.

Edinburgh Western focused on visibility: mapping festivals and farmers markets, preparing leaflets for community noticeboards, "free advertising" that establishes presence. They're thinking about how to respond to Reform talking points with positive class politics rather than defensive counter-messaging.

Each constituency is adapting the model to local conditions while maintaining the core commitments. The methodological suggestion from Leith is worth repeating: ask people "what are your key challenges?" rather than "what do you want to change?" The first elicits concrete grievances organisers can act on. The second produces abstract wish-lists.

What Makes This Different?

The Belgian political theorist Anton Jäger has diagnosed our era as one of "hyperpolitics": extreme politicisation without political consequences. Politics is everywhere; everyone has opinions; social media buzzes with moral urgency. And nothing changes. The old infrastructure of parties, unions, and civic solidarity has been hollowed out.

The Leith Model offers a modest counter-example. It doesn't promise revolution. It builds relationships. It shows up on picket lines. It feeds people. It connects struggles that might otherwise remain siloed: the Rockstar workers fighting for union recognition, the tenants organising against rent increases, the communities facing a Freeport that promises jobs but delivers deregulation.

The test will come. Local and national elections will reveal whether community organising translates into electoral presence. The full Rockstar tribunal, likely not until 2027 or 2028, will determine whether the union's legal claims succeed.

The Freeport campaign is only beginning.

But something is being built. Not a social media movement that surges and dissipates. Not an electoral machine that extracts data and disappears between campaigns. A presence. Roots.

How to Get Involved

For Your Party members in Edinburgh, constituency groups are forming now. WhatsApp groups and email lists are being established. The invitation is open.

For activists elsewhere in Scotland, the Leith Model offers a template worth adapting. Map your area: who's already doing good work? Where do people gather? What are the material grievances that could anchor political organising? Partner with existing campaigns rather than duplicating them. Show up on picket lines. Feed people.

The document circulated at the Edinburgh meeting concludes: "This approach offers a tangible blueprint for branch organisation across the four other Westminster constituencies of Edinburgh as well as at ward level."

It could offer a blueprint well beyond Edinburgh. The question is whether we're willing to build it.

Postscript: A Necessary Correction

Since drafting this piece, a comrade with direct knowledge of the Leith branch's activities has offered a sobering corrective. The account deserves honest acknowledgment.

The Rockstar solidarity was a single appearance at an IWGB picket line, uncoordinated with the union, which resulted in organisers asking Your Party to put their banner away. Self-promotion had displaced actual solidarity. The Living Rent "partnership" at Marionville amounted to one petition stall; LR had explicitly asked the branch not to wade in, given their

non-partisan stance. We proceeded regardless. And the Freeport campaign remains a discussion group without democratic mandate from the wider branch membership.

The gap between aspiration and execution is the gap between a model and a movement. The Leith document describes an orientation: towards workplace struggle, community defence, anti-fascism, ecosocialist campaigning rooted in material conditions. That orientation remains correct. But turning up uninvited with your banner is not worker solidarity. Ignoring an organisation's request to stay out is not partnership. A WhatsApp group is not a campaign.

The harder lesson: the united front method requires discipline, not enthusiasm. You strengthen existing organisations by actually coordinating with them, by subordinating your party profile to the struggle's needs, by doing the unglamorous work that builds trust over months and years. The impulse to plant flags, to claim credit, to turn every action into recruitment: this is the infantile disorder of a movement still learning to walk.

None of this invalidates the strategic insight. A left party that connects electoral ambitions to community roots, that builds from workplace and neighbourhood struggles rather than parachuting in at election time, that takes ecosocialist campaigning seriously as a material practice: this remains what Your Party Scotland needs. But the Leith Model is, at present, more manifesto than method. The work of translating intention into organisation has barely begun.

DC, 24th January 2026

Duncan Chapel is a member of Your Party in Edinburgh and is the creator of Red Mole Substack. Duncan wishes to thank Richard Parker for his permission to reuse his write-up of the

Venezuela from Imperialist Threats to Naked Aggression

Kunal Chattopadhyay, January 2026

After the US imperialist attack in Venezuela, many people ask, why? From Obama to Trump, U.S. presidents, Democrats and Republicans have said there is a dangerous drug cartel in Venezuela whose illicit drug exports are devastating American citizens.

In reality, Venezuela is in a two-way crisis. When Hugo Chavez was elected president in 1998, Venezuelan politics and society took a new turn. Venezuela is an oil-rich country. Venezuela was liberated from the Spanish Empire in 1821, but the country was then faced with widespread poverty and problems. With the discovery of petroleum in 1914, imperialist penetration of the Venezuelan economy increased. At that time, the president helped foreign, mainly American, oil companies. Until 1958, virtually one military-backed government after another remained in power. In 1958, a popular uprising overthrew the government of Marcos Pérez Jiménez and established liberal democracy. This was the period of the collaboration between the two main bourgeois parties, the Democratic Action and the Committee of Independent Electoral Political Organizations. In 1976, during the global petroleum crisis, President Carlos Andrés Pérez nationalized oil, and a state-owned enterprise, PDVSA, was created. But it was in the hands of foreign companies and domestic elites. Another decade of corruption and crisis created an atmosphere of rebellion.

1989-1998-2002

In 1989, Pérez was elected to a second term as president, and quickly embarked on a” “structural adjustment” prescribed by the International Monetary Fund, that is, spending cuts, privatization, and currency devaluation. The cost of food, fuel and transportation skyrocketted.

A huge crowd protested in the capital, Caracas, on February 27. Supermarkets were looted, buses were burned, and government offices were attacked. The government maintained its power by fighting many battles. More than 3,000 people were killed or went missing. Thousands more were arrested and tortured.

One of those affected by this incident was Army Major Hugo Chávez Frías. Inspired by the ideals of Simón Bolívar, Chávez wanted at least a partial redistribution of wealth towards ordinary countrymen. Chavez and his fellow officers formed a secret organization called MBR 200. In February 1992, Chávez, already a colonel, attempted a coup against Pérez. The coup failed, and Chávez claimed full responsibility, saying that” “as of now” “their goals had not been met. He was sentenced to prison, but was released within two years under the pressure of the mass movement. He then travelled around the country promoting his political views and founded an organization called the Fifth Republic Movement in 1997. He preached a doctrine combining Simon Bolívar (the main hero of the liberation of South America from Spanish rule) socialism, revolution and Jesus.
Chavez declared himself a presidential candidate. Many ‘Bolivarian circles’ were formed in his support from the bottom. He proposed that a new constitution be drafted, and that Venezuela’s oil resources be used to finance social projects for the poor. The main bourgeois parties formed a coalition to oppose him. But on 6 December 1998, he was elected with 56% of the vote. In April 1999, 87.75% of voters voted in favour of a new constitution. The Constituent

Assembly sat and after long discussion and consultation with public opinion, the constitution it adopted remained within the bourgeois framework, but was much more democratic and progressive than before. The state controlled natural resources, especially oil, and constitutionally prohibited the privatization of PDVSA. Equal rights for women were guaranteed, and elements of direct democracy, including referendums, were introduced. The right to health and education at no cost is recognized. It guaranteed the protection of the land, language and cultural rights of indigenous peoples and Afro-Venezuelans. The draft constitution was approved by 71.78% of the voters in the referendum. In July 2000, elections were held for the presidency and other elected positions under the new constitution. Chavez was elected with 59.76% of the vote. In November 2001, the National Assembly gave him the power to legislate for one year by decree in certain cases. Exercising this right, he enacted 49 decrees, including the Land Distribution Law, and the Hydrocarbons Law, which increased the state's income from oil.

The imperialists and the native elites were now enraged. They started calling Chavez a "communist" "and" "dictator," even though he was neither. The alliance of the richest companies and families created artificial shortages by hoarding essentials, including cooking oil and rice. They started closing factories, removing capital from the country, refusing to invest. The CIA was behind them. A coup took place in April 2002. The highest levels of the army mutinied, and surrounded the presidential palace with troops. When Chávez refused to resign, he was imprisoned on an island outside the country with the help of the Americans. So the overthrow of Maduro is not unprecedented in Venezuela's recent history. But in 2002, people's enthusiasm was much higher. On April 12, Pedro Carmona, the chosen representative of the reactionaries, was sworn in as president, and was immediately recognized by the administration of George Bush. Carmona tried to overturn all

democratic institutions and methods in the name of restoring democracy. Chavez's ministers were forced to go into hiding. But the common people came out on the streets. On April 13, crowds of people poured into the centre of Caracas from all directions. The pro-Chavez forces within the army also turned against the plotters. Some of the plotters were arrested, others fled. Chavez was brought back on the 14th.

For the first time in Latin American history, a U.S.-backed coup lost to the revolutionary struggle of the people. The old state apparatus had collapsed. Workers and other poor people occupied the streets. The lower echelons of the army were pro-revolution. If Chavez called for it, the revolution could move towards socialism. He could call for the seizure of factories and large estates, for the confiscation of imperialist property, for the cancellation of foreign debts. He could have called for the formation of an armed mass militia. He didn't do any of that. He urged everyone to maintain peace and return to their homes. No one has been prosecuted in connection with the case.

Petro-socialism and its inevitable limits

The forces of reaction lost a battle, but their power did not go away. Chavez tried to negotiate with them. The owners wanted to put the government on the path of a major economic crisis by locking out the oil industry in December 2002. Computers operating remotely from Houston were shut down. Billions of dollars were lost in damage.

The working class was fighting. A large part of the PDVSA removed the bureaucracy and came under the control of the workers. In the following years, workers occupied many factories in response to lockouts or closures. Leaving the old corrupt unions, a large, democratic trade union was formed – the UNT or National Labour Union.

Chavez's path to reform was remarkable. Subsidies in grocery

shops, promotion of public education, free education were introduced. Basic health care was introduced in poor neighbourhoods and remote villages, and doctors were sent from Cuba in exchange for oil. Land was distributed among the poor farmers, a scheme of cheap housing was started. This program was a fundamental transformation for millions of people. The Venezuelan state-owned company Citgo even supplied oil to Native Americans in the United States at nominal prices.

Naturally, imperialism did not sit on its hands. It organised attacks, carried out by right-wing mercenaries from Colombia. Bombs were hurled at government offices and vehicles of senior government officials. The bourgeois parties boycotted the elections in an attempt to subvert the democratic process. In 2004, they called for a referendum, using the unique democratic feature of the Venezuelan constitution that allowed a referendum on the president, but Chávez won the referendum with 59% of the vote. From these experiences, Chávez decided that there was no alternative to socialism. Speaking at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, he said socialism is needed to build a kingdom of heaven on earth.

In the 2006 presidential election, 78% of voters cast ballots, and Chávez received 62% of the total votes cast. Many international observers, including former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, were forced to say the vote was free. But the imperialist media said Chavez was an authoritarian dictator.

In 2007, he launched a new party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Within a few weeks, 5 million members had joined. There was a proposal to nationalize about 1200 institutions. But in reality only a small number of institutions were nationalized, and they relied on bureaucratic management, not on workers' control. Their obstacles were magnified by their dependence on the bureaucracy of the old bourgeois state. "As a result, Venezuelan" "socialism" gradually became a mere "petro-socialism". The standard of living was being improved not by

bringing the principal means of production under the control of the working class, but by subsidizing important needs by using the state's profits from rising oil prices on the world market. When prices fell after 2014, there was no room to rely on any productive force. That is, they not only failed to abolish capitalism and establish workers' democracy, but also did not look for alternatives in the economy. All industrial products were being imported, but due to the fall in oil prices, it could not be done so mush after 2014.

Hugo Chavez died on March 5, 2013 after a long battle with cancer. He was no doubt an honest revolutionary, a man of the people, but even though he spoke of socialism, he did not understand the importance of breaking the bourgeois state apparatus, of breaking the economic power of the bourgeoisie. Nicolás Maduro's government did not directly follow in the footsteps of Chávez's government. This government has its own characteristics. On the one hand, there were the Stalin-Mao type of rhetorics that helped them gain international solidarity, and on the other hand, there were attacks on those who differed among the Venezuelan left. Trade unions come under attack when they demand an increase in wages and a better life. A number of new initiatives have been taken. American companies began to sell oil at a lower price. Many of the industries that were nationalized were privatized. In the run-up to the 2024 elections, a section of the country's left was opposed to Maduro.

The imperialist pressure

The pressure and overt actions of US imperialism against Venezuela are not today's events. We can see that history in two parts – before the 21st century, and in the 21st century. Eduardo Galeano wrote in his 1971 book *The Open Veins of Latin America* that half of all the profits plundered from Latin America by U.S. capitalists come from Venezuela. Quoting Venezuelan politician Domingo Alberto Rangel, he said that no country has sent so much to world capital in such a short time

– the outflow from Venezuela is greater than what the Spanish took from Potosí, or the English took from India.

This aggressive U.S. policy did not begin with Trump, or Obama, or even Theodore Roosevelt (President 1901-1908). It began in 1823, when James Monroe was president. Monroe announced a new U.S. policy, considering Russia's claim to land on the North Pacific coast, and the possibility that powerful European powers might again attack newly independent Latin American countries. European powers could not interfere in the Western Hemisphere, and no new colonies could be established in the Americas. At first there was a little democratic content in this. But the more the Industrial Revolution strengthened American capitalism in the United States, the more the "Monroe Doctrine" meant that the United States would be the only empire in the two Americas. The most obvious example was the 1845-1848 war in which the United States captured the present-day states of Texas, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, and Oklahoma from Mexico.

In 1902, Venezuelan President Cipriano Castro declared that the foreign debt was unjustified. In response, Britain, France and Italy sent a combined fleet. President Theodore Roosevelt then elaborated on Monroe's policy that there could be intervention in Latin America, but only the United States would do so. Since then, there have been repeated US military interventions in various countries, support for military coups, the overthrow of democratic and leftist governments, etc.
In 1908, the Americans overthrew Castro in a military coup and installed his vice president and former supporter, Juan Vicente Gomes, as president (sounds like the present?). Gomes begged the Americans to keep the country quiet, and in return he carried out 25 years of dictatorship. The American periodical *Time* compared the tyranny of that dictatorship to the era of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin.

Even after this, greedy US looks at Venezuela did not disappear. But we'll just look at the Chavez and Maduro phases.

The US role during the April 2002 coup has already been mentioned. In the 2010s, the United States government gave large sums of money to various civil society groups to actively fight the opposition. After the 2014 riots, the U.S. government imposed various "sanctions," i.e. economic bans, when the government arrested protesters. In 2015, Obama declared Venezuela to be a unique threat to U.S. national security and foreign policy. In 2017, at a dinner hosted by the United Nations General Assembly, President Trump openly discussed the possibility of a US invasion of Venezuela with several Latin American leaders. From 2017 to 2020, massive US sanctions on Venezuela's state-owned oil companies reduced oil production by 75%, and the country's real gross domestic product per capita by 62%. On January 23, 2019, the United States unilaterally recognized Juan Guaidó as "provisional president." On June 28, they seized $7 billion of Venezuelan assets and gave Guaido the right to some of its spending.

Chávez, though not a Marxist, insisted on a continuous democratic process. But Maduro was narrowly elected after Chavez's death, and in 2015 the right-wing opposition won a legislative election majority. From 2017 to 2023, the opposition made several attempts to seize power, including the proclamation of Guaidó as provisional president, which was accepted by ten Latin American countries, and most of the European Union.

The bigger problem is that the participation of voters in the elections is decreasing as the opposition is not participating. The military increasingly shared power, and private interests in oil and mining continued to grow. Maduro signed the Barbados Agreement in 2023 to avoid economic sanctions. The presidential election was scheduled for 2024. The far-right initially nominated Maria Corina Machado. Left-

wing parties such as the Communist Party of Venezuela and Fatherland for All were in Chávez's coalition, but supported Enrique Márquez in 2024. Machado's candidacy was rejected, and the right-wing candidate was Edmundo Gonzales. The election was held on July 28. The government claims Maduro won with 51% of the vote. But the right-wing opposition posted on the Internet what it said were tallies from each booth, in accordance with Venezuela's electoral law. Apparently, they're the winners. The presidents of Venezuela's long-time allies Brazil, Colombia and Chile also refused to accept the results of the vote until the government provides evidence to the contrary. And, after the election, working people and angry leftists, not rightists, took to the streets to protest. Hundreds of trade union leaders, local observers in elections, and neighborhood-based social activists have been detained without trial, or forced into exile. Thousands of protesters have been arrested on terrorism charges. Enrique Marquez was also arrested.

But the main reason for the decline in popular support is the US economic aggression and the misguided actions of Chavez and Maduro. Chavez's mistake was to rely solely on oil profits, and not to consult even progressive Keynesian economists. Since the first Trump administration began imposing sanctions in 2017, it has become increasingly impossible to revive the economy with the help of the international financial system. In one year (i.e. in 2018), inflation rose to one million percent. Seven million Venezuelans have fled the country. In the last few years, the Maduro government has managed to overcome the crisis, but following the path of right-wing reforms, returning to privatization, reducing the state sector, i.e., axing its own public base.

In the last few years of the Bolivarian Revolution, the combined effect of the economic crisis and the decline of democracy may have reduced the mass movement to such an extent that imperialism could take hold of the country. If

imperialism succeeds, it will be not because the Venezuelan people want it, it is because of the failure of leadership, the inability to get out of the clutches of fossil capital, and the inability to retain the democracy of the early revolution. Tariq Ali noted in a recent article, When the first results came in for the 2004 referendum, I asked Chávez, '*Compañero*, what are we going to do if we lose?' He said, 'What do you do if you lose? You leave office and fight again from outside, explaining why they were wrong'. He had a very strong sense of this. Which is why it's a travesty to accuse the *Chavistas* of being anti-democratic from the start. During the Chávez period, the opposition newspapers and television stations blasted propaganda non-stop, attacking the regime – something you could never have seen in Britain or the United States.

But the battle isn't over. What is the plan of American imperialism? Why has Maduro's government not been able to break with the Americans despite the setbacks of the past few years?

A War for Oil?

If we call the invasion of Venezuela only an invasion for oil, then the whole thing will not be said. Imperialism takes different paths for oil. Why this invasion occurred needs to be discussed in detail. In the last few months of the Biden administration, sanctions were re-imposed on Venezuela, as a blow by the US to the disputed elections of 2024. The Trump administration initially backed away from the attack. Richard Grenell visited Venezuela as the President's representative. Chevron was allowed to produce Venezuelan oil directly and export it to the United States. Relations between the United States and Venezuela appear to be improving. But suddenly things changed. Let's first look at the details of the events.

In mid-August 2025, the United States deployed a large naval force to the Caribbean Sea. Their main target was the coast of

Venezuela. After 1902-1903, such a large navy did not appear around Venezuela. The Iwo Jima Ready Group [amphibian], the 22nd Marines, some destroyers, a cruiser, a nuclear submarine, P-8 Poseidon aircraft, and military helicopters were assembled. On August 15, they departed from Norfolk, Virginia. On August 27, it was reported that they were patrolling off the coast of Venezuela in the southern Caribbean Sea. The Venezuelan government responded with a media offensive. First, they say that the Secretary of the Interior, Marco Rubio, is deceiving Trump, that is, they were making a laughable attempt to avoid a direct confrontation with Trump. At the same time, they activated the militias formed since 2009, calling for national unity, but refusing to release the royal prisoners. They did not deviate from their neo-liberal path.

On September 2, the United States announced Operation Southern Spear. Its purpose is the so-called narco-terrorism from Venezuela. On that day, 11 people were killed when a motorboat sank in a US attack. Attacks have continued and the death toll is rising. Maduro's government said Venezuela was ready, and Maduro declared that he would call for an armed republic if necessary. On September 10, U.S. Defense Secretary Peter Hegseth announced the creation of the Joint Narcotics Task Force. Ten other boats and boats were damaged. In October, the Venezuelan government began military exercises. But there is a crisis in the country. Not that most people in the country were supporting the US attack. But the spontaneous gathering of the Chavez era was not seen. In November, the United States sent more warships, including an aircraft carrier. By the end of November, the death toll had risen to 83. None of them had been arrested, put on trial, none have been proven to be smuggling drugs. On 21 November, the United States said, without evidence, that there was a drug trafficking organization called Cartel de los Soles, and that Maduro himself was involved. Rumours of a direct invasion of Venezuela began in late November.

From the point of view of the Venezuelan government, the attack was sudden and unwarranted. Brief descriptions and references are given of how far right the Maduro government has become in the past year. They have greatly reduced the share of workers in the national income since the Chavez era. (https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/ven/) The government has introduced a very strict cost-cutting policy, (https://www.ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/ven/). imf.org/external/datamapper/rev@FPP/VEN) They have transformed their police into a formidable anti-worker force (https://muflven.org / Org…/2024/04/MFL-Regional-Report-2024.pdf), banned left-wing parties and abolish the democratic rights of the Chavez era (https://links.org.au/what-happened-venezuelas-…) ; attacked environmentalists and tribal social activists as imperialist brokers because they worked hand in hand with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation of the De Linke party in Germany (https://links.org.au/venezuelas-authoritarian-turn-and-…) ; and strongly attacked transgenders (https://x.com/i/status/1785120397102362915).

But it's clear that Trump isn't interested. His goal is to establish direct control over Venezuela. Since 1991, US imperialism and other imperialists have tried to dismantle the international system that was established after World War II. The emergence of Russia from the collapse of the degenerated bureaucratic Soviet Union and the imperialist rise of Russian capitalism in the Putin era, the emergence of a strong capitalist economy in China to rival the US, the efforts to build an alternative economic alliance of China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and Europe's decline geopolitically and militarily have brought major changes in world politics and economics.

One of these factors is the decline of the US economy. When Europe was devastated by World War II, American capital helped capitalist Europe to stand up – not out of kindness, but for

the sake of American capital. The dollar was the world's main currency. This situation has changed in recent decades. In 1974, during the international oil crisis, the petrodollar was created on the basis of the US agreement with Saudi Arabia. The world market for oil will run in dollars, and in return, the United States will give Saudi Arabia a huge military aid. In the 21st century, the US has taken strong action against those who have challenged the monopoly of the petrodollar. Saddam Hussein wanted to trade oil with Europe in Euros. There was no need to say anything directly to Europe. In 2003, the US invaded Iraq under false pretences. In 2009, Libya's Gaddafi proposed an alternative currency. We know from Hillary Clinton's leaked emails that this was one of the reasons for the invasion of Libya in 2010. For several years, China has sought to create an alternative to the dollar, the dollar-denominated global currency system (SWIFT). The relationship between China and Venezuela is important.

Marco Rubio made it clear after the invasion of Venezuela. "We will not allow the US opponents to control Venezuela's oil industry," he told NBC News. In this context, he mentioned China, Russia and Iran. "The Western Hemisphere is ours," he said without hesitation. This demand was hindered by the fact that Venezuela was an important trade partner of Beijing. Since 2000, China has loaned $6 billion to Venezuela. Preventing the penetration of the Chinese economy into the Western Hemisphere, and thereby China's overall influence, is a major reason for the US attack, not just oil.
Everyone knows that Venezuela has a lot of oil. But Venezuela's crude oil refining is expensive. 75% of the 300 billion barrel reserve is Orinoco crude, which has high sulfur content, and to refine it, the Venezuelan oil industry will have to invest 85 billion in the next 6 years. For this, they need full confidence from international capital. It is difficult to say whether even American institutions will have such confidence. A big win for Trump is to deprive China of that oil. China buys 6,00,000 barrels of oil per day from

Venezuela. If that stops, they will have to buy oil from someone else at a higher price, maybe with dollars.

We also need to situate the assault on the sovereignty of Venezuela in a wider context. In the recent past, Latin America had been the continent most prone to leftwing mass struggles as well as the election of left-wing governments. This aggressive reassertion of the Monroe doctrine is a warning to all of them, that if they hurt US interests sufficiently, if they are aligned with what the US sees as hostile powers, their sovereignty will have to take a back seat, and the US is ready to step in with gun boats, helicopters, commando units, and carry out mafia tactics on an international stage. In particular, this is also a part of the never given up US war on Cuba. The Cubans had been considerably relying on Venezuelan oil. For them, cutting it off would not be an irritant as it will be for China, but a much more serious attack. Moreover, if Trump getsaway with regime control in Venezuela, the US will be emboldened to go in for forcible occupation and regime change in Cuba. Let us never forget that the US which gags the Palestinian diaspora as anti-Semitic, has the Cuban diaspora, a rabid right-wing gang that includes Rubio, in positions of power and money.

Maduro’s removal and resistance

Maduro was arrested and taken to the United States, where he was charged with drug trafficking. Maduro responded by saying he was a prisoner of war and could not be tried in an enemy court.
Trump and his team have already realized that the right-wing opposition cannot be brought to power, at least for now. The Supreme Court of Venezuela declared the vice president to be president pro tempore for 90 days. Trump is trying to pressure Maduro’s former allies to work for the United States.
But there is resistance.

The first prerequisite for a broad national unity against US

colonialism is whether such a coalition will fight for the release of the Maduro couple? They were so easily captured that it is natural to question whether the army and the administration of the country were betrayed. It is the responsibility of the new government to bring out who are the traitors and take action against them. Strengthening the mentality of the soldiers associated with him, because while many of them have died, not a single attacker has died. Trump has repeatedly said Rodriguez's government is cooperating with him. If they don't speak up against it, no resistance will be built around them. There is a resistance-oriented mindset in the country, but there is no clear leadership. The left-wing opposition, which has so far fought for democracy against Maduro, will also have to decide whether to abandon the demand for democracy and choose the "principal contradiction," or whether the condition of the alliance will be the expansion of democracy.

International Reactions and India:

The UN secretary general António Guterres was the first to raise concerns about the US action possibly disregarding international law, calling on countries to adhere to the UN charter. But government reactions have ranged from outright condemnations to quiet approvals, with some states questioning the means while welcoming the outcome. The split reaction lays bare a deeper problem – years of selective compliance have gradually eroded the authority of international law itself, to whatever extent it was accepted between roughly 1945 and 1991.

Under the UN Charter, the use of force against another state is prohibited except in cases of self-defence or with authorisation from the Security Council. Neither condition applies in this case. Yet, beyond declaratory condemnations, the international system appears largely powerless to respond. The Security Council held an emergency meeting on 6 January at Colombia's request. China, Russia, Venezuela, Brazil and Colombia itself, whose president has also faced US threats of

suffering Maduro's fate, issued some of the strongest condemnations, framing the US intervention as a violation of the UN Charter. Most Europeans raised concerns but stopped short of labelling it illegal. No resolution emerged, unsurprisingly given the likelihood of a US veto. Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz welcomed Maduro's fall in his early reactions, UK prime minister Keir Starmer has so far declined to condemn the operation while French president Emmanuel Macron has also left direct confrontation to his top ministers.

Unlike Malaysia and South Africa, which publicly criticised the US intervention and expressed solidarity with Venezuela, New Delhi's statement avoided taking sides. So, why did India, which positions itself as a leader of the Global South, not respond as forcefully? Michael Kugelman, an analyst on South Asian politics, wrote on X that this was based on pragmatism.

The day after the US action, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) issued a statement expressing "deep concern" over recent events in Venezuela and emphasising close monitoring of the situation.

"The recent developments in Venezuela are a matter of deep concern. We are closely monitoring the evolving situation there," the MEA said in a statement.

On Tuesday, in Luxembourg, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar reiterated the same. He urged all parties involved to prioritise the welfare and safety of the Venezuelan people. "We are concerned about the recent developments, and we appeal to all sides to arrive at a situation that serves the well-being and security of the people of Venezuela," he said.

In other words, India is following a transactional approach. During Operation Sindoor India received little US support. Possibly the Modi calculation is, by refusing to condemn the US in Venezuela India is buing US support for its next round

of conflict with Pakistan or some other neighbour. This cringing attitude is likely to get little concrete benefit, because Trump does not see Inda as in any sense an eual or near-equal partner in diplomacy.

Kunal Chattopadhyay is a member of Radical Socialist, India and Professor of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University

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The Liberating Influence of the Transitional Program – George Breitman (1974). Part 1 – The Ludlow Amendment

[Revolutionary Marxists face a perennial challenge, to avoid the twin dangers of sectarianism and opportunism, by engaging with the actual struggles of the working class and the oppressed, whilst simultaneously working towards the ultimate goal of socialism. In the following contribution, veteran American Trotskyist George Breitman, discusses this challenge and outlines the *transitional method*, examining the difference between tactics and principles and the relationship between them. While Breitman's focus is on aspects of the history of the American SWP, and some of his terminology is rather dated, the essence of his approach is still of immense value. It outlines how revolutionaries should relate to movements around immediate and democratic demands and stresses the importance of the *experience* of struggling for partial demands in raising class consciousness. In this first talk Breitman outlines the

approach of the American SWP towards the ‘antiwar’ Ludlow amendment and how, under the influence of Trotsky, it moved from an abstentionist position to one of critical support. In the second talk, which we intend to publish later this month, Breitman considers the approach of the American SWP towards the formation of an independent ‘labor’ party in the United States, and Trotsky’s view on this, a topic that remains highly relevant to the debate about the formation of new left parties both here in Scotland and elsewhere. *Ecosocialist Scotland, 7th January 2026*]

The following are transcripts of three talks I gave under the title “The Liberating Influence of the Transitional Program” at the Socialist Activist and Educational Conference held in Ohio in August 1974. They are part of a larger study I am trying to prepare about important chapters in the history of the Socialist Workers party and its predecessors that were not dealt with or not dealt with much by James P. Cannon’s *History of American Trotskyism*. These transcripts can be considered “work-in-progress”, which I hope to revise and improve (especially the talk on the labor party) before their publication in final form. I hope this will spark criticisms and suggestions that will help improve them.

George Breitman, May 1975

1. The Ludlow Amendment

Many of you know that in our movement there are no official versions of history, whether it’s the history of our own movement or anything else. But for the benefit of those who don’t know it, I want to mention it at the outset. The only thing you have to accept in order to join our party is its program and the obligation to promote it in accord with its rules and constitution, which of course includes the right to try to persuade the party to change this or that part of its

program or constitution. You don't have to agree with every conclusion in Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, with every formulation in Cannon's books about party building and the development of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its predecessors, with every opinion in the books by Farrell Dobbs and Art Preis on the Teamsters and the CIO, or the writings of George Novack on the philosophy of Marxism, of Mary-Alice Waters on the relations between feminism and the Marxist movement, of Evelyn Reed on anthropology and the matriarchy. We publish and circulate these works because of their value for our Marxist education, because of their general consonance with our revolutionary program, but it would be as silly to demand that all of us must agree with everything they write as it would be to demand that they should write only what we would all agree with 100 percent.

This is my way of saying that my remarks today about certain aspects of the early history of our party, centering around the year 1938, are neither "official" nor "approved." All they represent is my opinion, which is based partly on my memory of that period and partly on recent research, including the reading of documents that I had not seen at that time. I think that the facts I will cite are reliable, and I hope that you will be able to distinguish without difficulty between those facts and my interpretation of them.

In November of this year [1974] it will be forty-six years since James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman, and Martin Abern, expelled from the leadership of the Communist Party, began publishing the *Militant*. But it wasn't until New Year's 1938, in the tenth year of our movement, that the Socialist Workers Party was founded at a national convention in Chicago. 1938 was also the year when the Fourth International was founded at an international conference in Paris in September, one year before the start of World War II. At this founding conference the delegates adopted as their major programmatic document a resolution written by Trotsky in Mexico, entitled "The Death

Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International," which later came to be referred to as the "Transitional Program."

I am going to talk about some of the problems that arose in the process by which the SWP endorsed the Transitional Program, and changes resulting from this endorsement that continue to influence the SWP to this day. If I do not speak as much about the transitional program itself as the title of this talk might have led you to expect, it is because of (1) a lack of time, (2) the belief that most of you already know about the transitional program, and (3) the abundance of literature available on the subject in the book, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution.* Published last year, that book contains the Transitional Program resolution itself, a series of discussions by Trotsky with different SWP leaders and members about the program, and at least two useful introductions by Joseph Hansen and George Novack. A second edition of this book has just been published, and that contains a number of additional stenograms of Trotsky's discussions on the transitional program, taken down before the program itself was written, some of which are relevant to my talks.

However, I do want to say a couple of things about the Transitional Program and the transitional method. Of Trotsky's many valuable contributions to Marxist theory there are two, in my opinion, that stand out above the others. One is his theory of the permanent revolution, conceived when he was twenty-six years old, which challenged the conventional wisdom of the movement of his time about the possibilities and perspectives of revolution in most of the world and, after it was confirmed by the Russian Revolution of 1917, became a keystone in the reorientation of the international Marxist vanguard (although for a number of years after 1917 the term "permanent revolution" was not used by anyone).

The other contribution of which I speak was made by Trotsky in

1938, when he was fifty-eight years old and completing the fortieth year of his revolutionary career. Here, in his full maturity, a few weeks after Stalin's liquidation of Bukharin and Rykov in the third big Moscow trial and two and a half years before his own death, Lenin's collaborator and continuator drew on the experiences of the most eventful four decades in revolutionary history and put them together in a new synthesis that we call the Transitional Program.

That is usually what new great ideas consist of—a rearrangement of old ones, the sifting out of some, a new emphasis for others, a recasting of priorities and relationships. In and of itself, there was not much that was new in the Transitional Program; some of the parts dated back, as Trotsky noted, ninety years to the *Communist Manifesto*; other parts were so recent that they had not yet been assimilated or expressed in writing, deriving from the actions of the workers themselves, such as the sit-down strikes in the mid-1930s in France and the United States.

Trotsky's contribution was to take these parts and put them together, to unify them, in a way that even his closest collaborators were at first to find unique, maybe even disturbing. His aim was to write a program that would help the revolutionary vanguard to intervene successfully in the class struggle in a period when conditions were objectively prerevolutionary but the masses were still under the influence of the counterrevolutionary Second and Third Internationals or without any leadership at all. As he put it:

"The strategic task of the next period— a prerevolutionary period of agitation, propaganda, and organization— consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation; the inexperience of the younger generation). It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present

demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and from today's conscious ness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

The Transitional Program was written for specific purposes, in the midst of a world depression, on the eve of a world war, for the founding conference of the Fourth International. That has led some people to question or belittle its usefulness for today or tomorrow, when conditions are different. This seems to me the worst kind of formalist thinking, if thinking is the right word. In the first place, it overlooks the fact that the essential conditions are not different– that the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard is even greater and more pregnant than it was in 1938. If not all the 1938 demands are applicable today (some weren't even applicable yet in 1938), the essential tasks are the same, and the *method* of the Transitional Program as it was written in 1938 is absolutely applicable today. In fact, the transitional method, in my opinion, is an even greater contribution than the Transitional Program itself. In presenting the transitional program, Trotsky emphasized its continuity with the past, rather than what was innovative in it. He said that it "draws the balance of the already accumulated experience of our national sections and on the basis of this experience opens up broader international perspectives." But this was even truer of the transitional method than of the Transitional Program itself. The transitional method was being used by us before the Transitional Program was written– after all, the disparity between the maturity of objective conditions and the subjective immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard did not begin in 1938, and the need for bridges between the vanguard and the masses had existed for a long time.

But before 1938 we weren't conscious of the transitional method that we used on occasion; we certainly were not fully conscious, and we used it haphazardly therefore, or incompletely, or empirically. Trotsky generalized it, concretized it, drew out its implications, showed its logic and necessity, named it, and indelibly imprinted it in our consciousness. For most of us the exposition of the transitional method was quite a revelation, bigger than the one the Moliere character had when he learned that he had been speaking prose all his life.

In 1938 the SWP was rather an exceptional organization. That also is an opinion, but there is plenty of objective evidence to back it up. It was the only organization in the United States that fought against the prevailing tidal waves of New Deal reformism and Stalinist opportunism from a revolutionary standpoint, and it was the only organization inside the Movement for the Fourth International that approached the norms of Bolshevism in the quality of its cadres, the solidity of its principles, and the level of its organizational practice. This is not to say that it was free of serious weaknesses, but it is to say that it had serious strengths as well. This was Trotsky's opinion, and it was for this reason in 1938 that he turned to the SWP leaders for discussion before writing the Transitional Program and that he asked the SWP to adopt and sponsor it at the founding conference of the Fourth International.

A history of our movement in this country from its inception in 1928 to the founding of the SWP in 1938 has been written by Comrade Cannon in the book called *The History of American Trotskyism*. It will have to suffice here to say that the first major turning point in this history came in 1933, after Hitler's victory in Germany, when our movement discontinued its ef forts to reform the Communist International and its affiliated parties and set out here in the United States to gather the cadres of a new Marxist party as part of a new,

Fourth International.

This meant that we now turned our primary attention away from the Communist Party, and that our main activity, the dissemination of propaganda, began to be combined with intervention and action, where possible, in the class struggle. At the end of 1934, after the Minneapolis strike had shown our competence in intervention and action, our movement merged with a left-centrist current led by A. J. Muste (this became the Workers Party) and then, in the spring of 1936, we entered the Socialist Party in order to merge with young revolutionary elements who had been attracted to that organization. Our forces, considerably augmented, were expelled from the Socialist Party and its youth organization, the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), in the summer of 1937 (although they represented the majority of the YPSL). The expelled left-wingers then called a national convention to create a new revolutionary party affiliated with the Fourth Internationalist movement and, after an extensive internal discussion, that is how the SWP came to be founded in 1938.

The discussion preceding that convention was very rich, covering a broad number of current international and national problems as well as the fundamental principles to govern and guide the new revolutionary party. From Mexico, Trotsky, who had recently completed his historic work of exposing the Moscow trial frame-ups, participated in this discussion to some extent, but chiefly on the so-called international questions– the Spanish civil war, the Sino-Japanese war, the class character of the Soviet Union, and the nature of democratic centralism in general.

A declaration of principles and a constitution were adopted; a political resolution, resolutions on trade union and unemployed work, resolutions on the Soviet Union and Spain, a resolution on organizational principles and standards, reports on the international movement, the youth movement, the election of a national committee– these were only some of the

important things taken up and acted on at the convention. As a young delegate to the convention, I left it not only tired but inspired and certain that we had taken a big step toward the American revolution; and I am sure that that attitude was shared by most of the rank-and-file delegates.

In 1937 Trotsky had been pressing for an international conference to found the Fourth International. He felt that the international conference of July 1936 had made a mistake in not taking that step then, and he kept urging after his arrival in Mexico in 1937 that it be done by the end of that year. But it didn't prove possible, for various reasons, one of them being that the U.S. leadership felt that it had to concentrate first on the founding of the SWP. So after the new party was launched, it was agreed that a delegation of SWP leaders would go to Mexico for talks about the international conference and related matters. And this took place at the end of March 1938, less than three months after the SWP convention.

The SWP delegation consisted of Cannon, Shachtman, V. R. Dunne, and Rose Karsner, and they met with Trotsky and others at Trotsky's home for an entire week. After some initial, introductory discussions, more formal sessions were held on six consecutive days, four of which were devoted entirely or largely to the Transitional Program and the method it implied. Stenograms were made of these six discussions, which were not corrected or revised by the participants but gave the essence of the exchanges. For security reasons mainly– to protect Trotsky's right of asylum in Mexico– these six stenograms were shown only to the National Committee members of the SWP at a plenum the next month and then were retrieved.

None was ever published in any form, not even an internal bulletin, during Trotsky's life, and until just this year none was ever published anywhere, with one exception– a discussion about the labor party, which was printed in an SWP educational bulletin in 1948. Fortunately, copies of the six stenograms

were kept by Trotsky and included by him in the archives sold to Harvard in 1940. Last year Pathfinder Press got access to the stenograms for the first time and permission to print them, and they have just been published as material added in the second edition of *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*. There, in the back of the volume, you can read the material from the four stenograms that dealt with the transitional program (and next year you will be able to read the rest of these stenograms, dealing with other questions, in the second edition of the *Writings 1937-38*). The newly added material should not be confused with the other stenograms about the Transitional Program in that book, most of them from the period *after* Trotsky wrote the program, which were in the first edition.

No memoirs or reminiscences of the discussions have been published, but it is clear from the stenograms– not just by reading between the lines, but from some passages– that the SWPers must have been startled and even shaken up by some of Trotsky's proposals and arguments and his way of looking at certain things that struck them as new.

On the fourth day of the discussions transcribed, Trotsky began the session by saying, "In the preceding discussions some comrades had the impression that some of my propositions or demands were opportunistic, and others that they were too revolutionary, not corresponding to the objective situation. And this combination is very compromising, and that's why I'll briefly defend this apparent contradiction." Perhaps Trotsky was exaggerating a little here, but he apparently felt that he had not yet fully convinced the other participants in the discussion, because they were not sure about the "orthodoxy" (a word I dislike) or the realism of his positions.

In a number of places the stenograms show them asking Trotsky the same questions, getting him to restate his arguments so that they can grasp them better; in other places, they voice doubts or reservations; in still others, disagreement

(Shachtman in particular could not see how slogans on workers' control and workers' militia were applicable in the United States in 1938). Such a thing is of course quite common, even inevitable, in any free political discussion where new proposals are introduced that require recon sideration of long-established patterns of thought. Besides, this was not an ordinary discussion or an abstract discussion. Some of the positions Trotsky was asking them to reconsider had been passionately reaffirmed less than three months before, in the declaration of principles and the political resolution adopted by the founding SWP convention. So they wanted to be damned sure that they understood what Trotsky was proposing, because even if they were convinced, that wouldn't settle it— they would still have to go home and convince first the Political Committee, then the National Committee, and then the party as a whole. So nobody reading those stenograms today is entitled to cheap feelings of condescension toward those comrades, who bore heavy responsibilities in this situation and acquitted themselves well.

Trotsky himself was aware of the problem facing the SWPers, and his tone throughout was patient, friendly, and pedagogic, for he was talking to close comrades, not opponents. And by the time they left to return to the United States, they had become convinced, if perhaps not fully aware of all the implications, and had agreed that they would ask the SWP to sponsor the Transitional Program at the coming international conference and to modify certain important points in its national program.

Before continuing the narrative, I am going to turn to two of the questions on which Trotsky wanted the SWP to change its positions. These, I think, are at the heart of the transitional method, and discussing them in some detail will be my substitute for discussing the transitional program and the method as a whole, which I've said has already been done more than adequately by Comrades Hansen and Novack in their

introductions to the Transitional Program book. I should add that I am inclined to do it this way because these two questions were the ones that I personally, as a young SWP activist, found the hardest to figure out. These two questions were the Ludlow amendment and the labor party.

In the 1930s, as the American people began to learn more about World War I, partly through muckraking congressional investigations, and as the threat of World War II began to come closer, a considerable antiwar or pacifist sentiment developed in this country. One of the forms this took was that of so-called isolationism, an expression of a desire not to get involved in foreign wars. Beginning in 1935, the Stalinists attempted to exploit this antiwar sentiment by channeling it behind Roosevelt's foreign policy and the policy of "collective security," according to which war would be prevented through an alliance by the peace-loving countries (the United States, USSR, etc.) against the bad, aggressive, peace-hating countries (Germany, Italy, and Japan).

In 1935 a Democratic congressman from Indiana named Ludlow introduced a bill in the House of amend the U.S. Constitution so that Congress would not have the authority to declare war until such a declaration had been approved by the people voting in a national referendum. Of course the bill had many loopholes, one of which was that this limitation on the war-making power of Congress would not apply if the United States were invaded or attacked; and this wasn't its only weakness. Support began to build for the amendment as fears of war were deepened in this country by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the Spanish Civil War in 1936, and the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. The Ludlow amendment was reintroduced in the House in 1937 and in the Senate by La Follette of Wisconsin, and it finally came to a vote in the House in January 1938, nine days after our convention.

The Roosevelt administration was bitterly opposed to the amendment and used all its patronage pressures to bring about

its defeat. The Communist Party also opposed it, charging that it was in the interests of the reactionaries and fascists because it would limit the ability of the U.S. government to deter the fascist powers from starting a war. Just before the vote in the House, a Gallup poll showed that 72 percent of the population favored the Ludlow amendment. Most of the new industrial unions supported the bill, along with the National Farmers Union. The pro-Ludlow sentiment in the United Auto Workers (UAW) was so strong that the Stalinist members of its executive board were forced to vote in favor of it. In the House of Representatives the bill was defeated 209-188, a rather close vote, considering all the circumstances.

So far I haven't been able to find any references to the Ludlow amendment in our press before the vote in the House in January 1938, but without any specific articles in our press, I knew at that time what our position on the amendment was, and I approved of it wholeheartedly.

Before explaining what our position was, I shall have to make a correction of what Comrade Hansen said about it in 1971 in a speech included with the introductory matter in the Transitional Program book. After telling who Ludlow was and what his amendment called for, Comrade Hansen said, "Comrade Trotsky proposed that the Socialist Workers Party should offer critical support to the Indiana Democrat's proposed amendment to the bourgeois constitution of the United States. After a bit of hesitation by some comrades our party adopted this position. Trotsky considered the matter so important that he included a paragraph about it in the Transitional Program." I am afraid that Comrade Hansen must have relied on his memory here instead of checking the facts; perhaps because he didn't have access to the records when he was making the speech, but in any case, he doesn't have it right.

The fact is that we were opposed to the Ludlow amendment before Trotsky had any opinion about it. If we had had a member in the House on January 10, 1938, he would have voted

against the amendment, after making or trying to make a revolutionary speech differentiating the SWP from the nonrevolutionary forces opposing it. And if you had been a sympathizer in 1938, asking me why we were opposed, I would have answered at length along the following lines:

"Pacifism is one of the most pernicious elements obstructing the revolutionary struggle against imperialist war. It misleads and disarms the workers, delivering them defenseless at the crucial moment into the hands of the war makers. Lenin and the Bolsheviks taught us that implacable opposition to pacifism and the illusions it creates is obligatory for all revolutionaries. All the documents of the Left Opposition and Fourth International stress the principled character of the struggle against pacifism in all its forms. Our stand on this question demarcates us from all other tendencies. The Ludlow amendment is a pacifist measure, designed to create the illusion that it is possible to prevent war at the ballot box while leaving power in the hands of the capitalists. It misdirects the workers from the real struggle against war, and therefore we cannot support it or assume any responsibility for it. Not to oppose it would be a betrayal of our revolutionary principles."

On the same day that the House voted down the Ludlow amendment, the newly elected Political Committee (PC) of the SWP held its first meeting. The PC minutes of that date show that under one point on the agenda Burnham proposed launching an antiwar campaign, consisting of eight "concrete points." The eighth point read as follows: "For the Ludlow amendment on the general motivation of the opportunities which it, as an issue, provides." All the points were approved, except the eighth, which was defeated by a vote of six to one. A countermotion to that eighth point was made by Shachtman, as follows: "That in our press we criticize the Ludlow amendment and the pacifist agitation connected with it from a principled revolutionary standpoint." This was carried— six for, one

against.

In accord with this motion, our paper the *Socialist Appeal* carried a front page article by Albert Goldman, introduced with an editorial statement pronouncing it to be "the Marxian view on the amendment." Goldman's article begins by saying that the Ludlow amendment poses an old problem in a new form for Marxists and workers generally. But, he assures the readers, "It is only necessary to apply the accepted principles of revolutionary Marxism to solve the problem correctly." Applying them, he showed all the shortcomings of the Ludlow amendment and the pacifist illusions fostered by its advocates, demonstrated that it would not really prevent war, differentiated our position from that of the Stalinists, and pointed to the destruction of the capitalist system as the only solution to war. I might add that he also said that the Ludlow amendment carried even greater dangers than other pacifist schemes precisely because it added "an element of democratic procedure."

Also in accord with the PC motion were two editorials in the next issue of our magazine. The longer one, which could have been written by Burnham, denounced the pro-imperialist forces that voted down the Ludlow bill and explained why. The shorter editorial, which could have been written by Shachtman, sought to "represent the standpoint of revolutionary Marxism." Among other things, it said: Where pacifist nostrums are not outright frauds and deceptions, they are pernicious illusions which drug the masses into pleasant dreams and hallucinations and paralyze their fighting power. To teach the masses that they can "prevent war" by a popular referendum is to foster a disastrous illusion among them. . . . Like the panacea of "disarmament," or "international arbitration courts," the referendum illusion diverts attention from the need of an intransigent class struggle policy against war every day in the year, because it cultivates the idea that when the "real" was danger faces us in the remote future the masses will be

able to avert it by the mere casting of a ballot. … In sum, to support the Ludlow resolution is to inculcate in the minds of the workers the idea that war can be "prevented" or fought by some means other than the class struggle, that imperialist war can be averted otherwise than by the revolutionary socialist overturn of capitalist rule."

The PC minutes of February 18 have a point called "Ludlow Amendment," followed by this information: "Letter read supporting Burnham's position on the Ludlow Amendment." Not included with the minutes, and not identified as to author, this letter turns out to have been written by Trotsky, although it was signed "Hansen" for security reasons; its text can be found in the second edition of Writings 3 7-38, which should be out next year. The letter was addressed to Cannon, whom Trotsky gave permission to show it to Burnham if he wished. Cannon did, and he also turned it over to the Political Committee as a whole. The letter said that on the Ludlow question Trotsky was with Burnham, not with the majority of the Political Committee. He felt that after the congressional vote the question was settled practically, but he wanted to make some comments on the important question of methodology. The government position against the Ludlow amendment, Trotsky wrote, represented the position of the imperialists and big business, who want their hands free for international maneuvering, including the declaration of war. What is the Ludlow bill? Trotsky wrote: It represents the apprehension of the man-in-the-street, of the average citizen, of the middle bourgeois, the petty bourgeois, and even the farmer and the worker . . . looking for a brake upon the bad will of big business. In this case they name the brake the referendum. We know that the brake is not sufficient and even not efficient and we openly proclaim this opinion, but at the same time we are ready to go through his experience against the dictatorial pretensions of big business. The referendum is an illusion? Not more or less an illusion than universal suffrage and other means of democracy. Why can we not use the

referendum as we use the presidential elections? . . .

“The referendum illusion of the American little man has also its progressive features. Our idea is not to turn away from it, but utilize these progressive features without taking the responsibility for the illusion. If the referendum motion should be adopted, it would give us in case of a war crisis tremendous opportunities for agitation. That is precisely why big business stifled the referendum illusion.”

Today’s average SWP member will not find Trotsky’s thinking on the Ludlow amendment extraordinary or controversial; in fact, it may seem rather commonplace and hardly worth the time I am giving it. This testifies to the political development of our movement since 1938; in certain respects we have come a long way; we live on a higher political plateau now. But what seems simple now to a new member didn’t seem at all simple to the politically most astute leaders of our party then, as we can see from what happened after Trotsky’s letter was read by the Political Committee. Trotsky thought that because the referendum had been rejected in the House nothing more could be done about it. The members of the Political Committee knew better, realizing that the amendment would continue to be an important American political question for some time. So they decided, after hearing Trotsky’s letter, to formulate their position anew. Goldman introduced a series of four motions, some of which were amended by Shachtman. The first two motions stressed the need to use the interest aroused by the amendment to expose the war preparations and the bourgeois and Stalinist opponents of the bill and to expose all pacifist illusions, by clearly stating at all times that whoever says any kind of referendum will stop war is seriously mistaken. The third motion declared that we cannot assume responsibility for the amendment under any circumstances, and it is impermissible for us or our members in mass movements to organize or participate in or endorse any campaign for the amendment.

Up to this point it’s clear and consistent. Goldman’s fourth

motion, however, says that since the amendment has been adopted by the most progressive forces of the labor movement, since the working class learns through experience, and since we need to be closely connected with those forces, our comrades in the mass movement are instructed to vote in favor of the Ludlow amendment, and to introduce pro-Ludlow clauses in antiwar resolutions, “at all times making clear our position on the amendment.”

Shachtman disagreed with Goldman’s point four and amended it to in struct our comrades to state our specific position on the Ludlow amendment, either orally or in writing, and to abstain when the vote is cast. Instead of stopping there, however, he added an exception: in those exceptional circumstances where our comrades hold the balance of power between the Stalinists and patriots on one side and pro-Ludlow forces on the other, our comrades are instructed to defeat the Stalinists and patriots by casting their vote for the Ludlow amendment with the qualifications given above.

And this was the position adopted by the SWP on February 10, by five to two (Cannon was absent)— to abstain, except in special circumstances where we should vote in favor in order to defeat the Stalinists and patriots. And although the Political Committee held other discussions on antiwar work during February, this was and remained the SWP’s position when its delegation went to talk with Trotsky the following month.

In the back of the second edition of the Transitional Program book you will find the stenogram of the discussion in Mexico about the Ludlow amendment. There we can see Shachtman especially— who was the chief formulator of the abstentionist position, although of course the Political Committee as a whole was responsible for it— still dragging his heels: “there is great danger that in jumping into a so-called mass movement against war— pacifist in nature— the revolutionary education of the vanguard will be neglected. At the same time, not to enter the movement leaves us mainly in a propaganda position.”

And at the end, returning to a point he had made in the February magazine article, he asks: “How do you distinguish between our support of the Ludlow amendment and our attitude toward disarmament programs, international arbitration, etc.?”

Trotsky’s answer: “They have nothing to do with one another. The Ludlow amendment is only a way for the masses to control their government. If the Ludlow amendment is accepted and made part of the constitution it will absolutely not be analogous to disarmament but to inclusion in the right to vote of those eighteen years old”– that is, a democratic right.

Trotsky’s arguments in this discussion were so persuasive that the others were convinced. The Ludlow amendment was not the subject of much debate at the stormy plenum of the SWP National Committee held a month later. It was not taken up until the last hours of the plenum. Then two motions were presented.

Cannon’s motion said: “That the Plenum finds that the Political Committee took a correct principled position on the Ludlow amendment but made a tactical error in failing to give critical support to this movement without making any concessions whatever to its pacifist and illusory character.”

Motion by Carter: “That the Plenum reverses the position of the Political Committee on the Ludlow Amendment and declares it incorrect; that the PC be instructed to issue a statement in support of a popular referendum on the question of war, with a critical declaration in reference to the pacifist and illusory tendencies in the pro-Ludlow movement.”

Seven members spoke during the discussion, and then Cannon made a substitute motion for the whole: “The Plenum finds that the Political Committee was correct in principled opposition to the pacifist illusions contained in the Ludlow amendment– an opposition that was fully justified– the PC nevertheless took a purely negative position which prevented the party from

utilizing the entirely progressive sentiment of the masses who supported the idea of submitting the warmongers to the control of a popular referendum before the declaration of war. The Plenum instructs the PC to correct its position accordingly."

This substitute motion carried, and the Carter motion was defeated, the vote not given. A month later, our paper printed a public National Committee (NC) statement reporting the change in the SWP's position on the Ludlow amendment and explaining why. At this point it could be said that the error was corrected and the differences liquidated— so completely that three months later, in August, nobody thought, that it was out of order for the Political Committee to send the National Committee members the copy of a draft written by Goldman for an improved version of the Ludlow amendment, that is, one free of the defects in Ludlow's bill, which we were to try to get some member of Congress to introduce so that we could use it in our antiwar propaganda and agitation.

I have traced the course of this thing, perhaps in too much detail, because I think that a study of mistakes of this kind, frankly recognized and correctly analyzed, can be at least as useful educationally as a study of correct policies or actions. Everybody makes mistakes, even geniuses like Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky. The Russian Revolution of 1917 would have been impossible if the Bolsheviks had not learned many valuable lessons from the defeat of 1905. In politics mistakes are unavoidable, said Trotsky; what is reprehensible is clinging to mistakes and refusing to correct them. This of course does not apply to the Ludlow dispute. But the Ludlow thing was important methodologically, as Trotsky said in his letter to Cannon. So it deserves further comment.

Reading Trotsky's approach to the Ludlow question now, I am struck by how much more rounded and all-sided it was than the one we had at the time. This enabled him more effectively to select out the major elements of the problem— for example, he began with a concrete class analysis, taking off from the fact

that the ruling class was opposed to the Ludlow amendment, whereas that fact was subordinated in our analysis, which tended to center on a secondary factor, the illusions that the Ludlow forces fostered. Of course, what the ruling class wants in a particular case need not always be conclusive (sometimes they make mistakes, too), and sometimes it is not even clear what the ruling class wants (that certainly was the case with the impeachment problem last year). But what the ruling class wanted on the Ludlow amendment was both relevant and clear, and it fructified Trotsky's thinking. For us, the position of the ruling class was something of an embarrassment that we didn't care to dwell on and didn't altogether explain, even poorly, concentrating instead on the question of illusions.

Illusions and the necessity to combat them were a prominent feature not only of the Ludlow discussion but also of other questions facing the SWP at that time. This stems from the abiding obligation we have to help the masses overcome bourgeois ideology in all its forms and variants, including illusions about the nature of bourgeois democracy. Recently, for example, our propaganda and action around Watergate had to take into account, and include material to counteract, the illusions widely generated about Congress, the courts, and the Constitution.

But here, as with everything else in politics, a sense of proportion is needed, and I am afraid that it was sometimes lacking. Sometimes, like today's TV housewife who is driven frantic by the absence of sparkle on a drinking glass or the presence of a ring around her husband's collar, we were a little obsessed by the illusion factor. Perhaps "obsessed" is too strong, perhaps a better word is "overpreoccupied."

But the struggle against illusions is not an end in itself. It is only a means toward an end, and not the central means. Its weight varies from one situation to another, sometimes considerably. And the way in which we struggle against illusions is not uniform and unvarying in all situations; in

one case it is best done head-on, in another a more indirect approach proves more effective. And since effectiveness is or should be a paramount factor, a distinction has to be made between merely making the record against illusions, no matter how loudly and vehemently, and setting into motion forces that actually help people to raise their political consciousness.

We tended to throw all illusions into one bag marked "Dangerous, Expose at All Costs." Trotsky was more selective, more discriminating. In a different context, in a 1930 pamphlet that will be in English later this year, he had occasion to refer to the consciousness, mood, and expectations of the revolutionary workers in Russia at the time of the October Revolution, and there he discussed what he called their "creative illusion" in "overestimating hopes for a rapid change in their fate." It was an underestimation of the effort, suffering, and sacrifice they would be required to make before they would attain the kind of just, humane, socialist society they were fighting for. It was an illusion in the sense that between that generation and that kind of society lay civil war, imperialist intervention, famine and cannibalism, the rise of a privileged bureaucracy, totalitarian regimentation and terror, decimation in the Second World War, and much more that they did not foresee; it was an illusion based on an underestimation of the difficulties that would face them after the workers took power in backward Russia, which would have been infinitely smaller if the revolution had succeeded in spreading to the rest of Europe.

And it was creative because the workers' expectations enabled them to deal the first powerful blow against the world capitalist system and open up the era of proletarian revolutions and colonial uprisings. The record shows that the Bolsheviks did not spend much time or energy combating such illusions; they were too busy trying to imbue the masses with the determination to make the revolution.

In any case, Trotsky was able to differentiate among illusions if he could designate some as creative. Even more important, he was able to distinguish different sides or aspects of an illusion, as in the Ludlow discussion. Instead of a single label on the illusion or illusions connected with the Ludlow amendment, he called attention to the fact that certain aspects were progressive at the same time that others were not.

The idea that war can be abolished or prevented without ending the capitalist system that spawns war does not have much to recommend it from a Marxist standpoint. But if the spread of that idea leads masses of people into action to try to prevent the government from going to war, or to set limits on its power to declare war, isn't that a good thing from the standpoint of Marxists? Even if the idea that sets them into motion against the capitalist government is not scientific, and is therefore wrong and illusory, isn't it good, that is, progressive for them to conduct such a struggle? Isn't that precisely the way that they can learn what is wrong and illusory about their ideas on how to end war?

When I read you the second position adopted by the Political Committee on the Ludlow amendment, in February 1938, after Trotsky's letter was read, you may recall that in one place Goldman's motion said, "the working class learns through experience." This was a commonplace in our movement; everyone subscribed to it. But the difference was that Trotsky held that the workers' experience with a struggle for something like the Ludlow amendment was exactly the thing that could help them learn about and go beyond their illusion. The Political Committee, even as it was saying "the working class learns through experience," took the view that we should try to discourage the workers from having such an experience with the amendment and that we should dissociate ourselves from the experience if they went ahead with it anyway.

The PC view was that this is an illusion, therefore we can

only expose and denounce it. Trotsky's view was that this is an illusion, but it has a progressive potential. Therefore, without assuming any responsibility for the illusion, and without hiding our belief that it is an illusion– but without making our belief that it is an illusion the major feature of our approach to it– because it has a progressive potential, let us encourage and help the workers to fight against the government on the war question. Let us join this movement and become its best builders, because this is the most effective way of helping them overcome some of their illusions about war and democratic capitalism.

It seems to be the difference between the approach of narrow propagandism and the approach of revolutionary activism. In the first case you write an article explaining "the Marxian principles on war" and hand it out to those who are interested in such matters; you won't affect many people that way, but you have done your duty and presumably can sleep well. In the second case you intervene in the class struggle, helping to set masses into motion against the ruling class or to provide bridges for those in motion from the elementary, one-sided, and illusory conceptions they start out with toward better, more realistic, and more revolutionary concepts about capitalism and war and how to fight them.

I do think that the source of our error was in great part the remnants of the narrow propagandism that prevailed in the first years of the Left Opposition in this country, when we were restricted almost entirely to trying to reach the ranks of the Communist Party with our written and spoken ideas. Subsequently we consciously set out to transcend this phase, with increasing success. But occasionally, especially when new problems were posed, we had a tendency to slip back. The transitional method that Trotsky recommended to us was precisely the thing we needed to enable us to say good-bye forever to such lapses.

If it was not an error of propagandism then it is hard to

explain the thing Shachtman said Mexico that I have already cited: “There is great danger that in jumping into a so-called mass movement against war– pacifist in nature– the revolutionary education of the vanguard will be neglected.”

At first sight this seems like a non sequitur. Why should jumping into a mass movement, or only entering one with more dignity than jumping provides, present a danger, a great danger, that the revolutionary education of the vanguard will be neglected? How does it follow? What is the possible connection? It doesn’t make sense unless the reasoning is being done from the standpoint of propagandism, where you feel that the most urgent task you have is to present your entire program without ambiguity or possibility of misrepresentation on all occasions– a necessity that occurs to you because you lack confidence about the revolutionary education, the ideological solidity of the vanguard, that is, of yourselves.

In such a case, if you are not sure of it, the main thing becomes the strengthening of the revolutionary education or ideological condition of the vanguard group, and doing something about that seems more important, much more important, than taking advantage of an opportunity to intervene in the class struggle.

By contrast, let us consider how we would pose the same problem today, after having absorbed the meaning of the transitional method. We would say, “Here is a mass movement that we can enter, where we can win over people to our revolutionary positions and help raise the consciousness of many more. It is a pacifist movement, which means that in order to work effectively there our own members must be well educated about the nature of pacifism, what’s wrong with it, and how to counter its influence. Which means, therefore, that before we enter and after we enter we must make sure that our members are immunized politically against pacifism, if that is not already the case. That is, instead of neglecting, we must increase the revolutionary education of the vanguard on this

point.” Shachtman counterposed mass work and revolutionary education of the vanguard. We, on the other hand, combine them, because not only the masses learn that way, but we, the vanguard, do too.

Methodologically we also seemed to be suffering from a confusion about the relation between principles and tactics.

Principles are propositions embodying fundamental conclusions derived from theory and historical experience to govern and guide our struggle for socialism. Relating broadly to our goals, they set a framework within which we operate. Although they are not eternal, they have a long-range character and are not easily or often changed. In fact, we have essentially the same principles today that we had in 1938. The dictatorship of the proletariat, or the struggle for a workers’ state, as the form of state transitional between capitalism and socialism– that is a principle with us. Insistence on class-struggle methods against class- collaborationist methods– that is another. Unremitting opposition to pacifism in all its guises, because pacifism is an obstacle to revolutionary struggle– that is a third.

Tactics, on the other hand, are only means to an end. “Only” in this context is not meant to disparage them; without the appropriate tactics, principles cannot be brought to life, so there is clearly an interdependence between principles and tactics. But tactics are subordinate in the same way that means are subordinate to an end. They are good if they enhance and promote the principle, not good if they don’t. In addition, tactics are flexible, adjustable, variable. They depend (or their applicability depends) on concrete circumstances. To advance a particular principle, tactic A may be best today; but it may have to be replaced by tactic B tomorrow morning, or tactic C tomorrow night. Meanwhile, the principle remains unchanged.

Principle tells us to oppose pacifism, but it does not tell us

whether or not to participate in a certain mass movement; it only tells us that under all circumstances, whether participating or not, we should so function as to counterpose revolutionary ideas and influence to those of the pacifists. There is not a single tactic that follows from any principle; after understanding and grasping the principle, we still have to consider tactics; and tactics, although they are subordinate to principles, have laws, logic, and a domain of their own. Tactics must not, cannot, be in violation of principle (no tactical considerations could even get us to say that we think war can be abolished through a referendum vote), but tactics are not limited to formal reaffirmations of our principles– they are not worth much if that is all they are.

What was the nature of the Ludlow amendment problem? Was it for us a matter of principle or a matter of tactics? If the SWP in 1938 had had any doubts about pacifism, any ambiguity about it, then the matter of principle would properly have been foremost. But if ever there was any party whose members had been trained, indoctrinated, drilled, and virtually bred on a hostility to pacifism, surely it was the SWP. I can testify to that personally; long before I knew some of the most elementary ideas of Marxism, I had been taught about the dangers of pacifism.

Let me try to suggest an analogy: Comrade Smith takes the floor to propose that the branch should participate in a local election campaign by running our own candidates, and explains not only the benefits that would accrue to us from such a campaign but also the facts demonstrating that we have the forces and the resources to run such a campaign effectively, etc. But I take the floor to oppose Comrade Smith’s proposal on the grounds that the workers have electoral illusions and that these illusions can only be reinforced and perpetuated if we, the revolutionary opponents of bourgeois electoralism, take part in these fraudulent elections. No, I say, our revolutionary principles forbid our participation in bourgeois

elections and require that we call on the workers to boycott the elections; any other course would be in violation of our principled opposition to bourgeois parliamentarism.

Such a scene has never occurred at any SWP branch meeting, although it could occur and probably does in some of the Maoist and other sectarian groups in this country. Something not too different occurred in the Fourth International as recently as five years ago, when the French Communist League ran a presidential campaign dominated by the theme that its main task was to combat the electoralist illusions of the French workers. Such a scene has not occurred at any SWP meetings, but if it did occur, there would not be any lack of comrades, new as well as old, who would point out that Comrade Smith had raised a tactical question and that instead of answering him on the level of tactics I had switched the discussion to the level of principles, leaving aside the question of whether the principles I had invoked were at all relevant to the point at issue.

Nobody in the SWP has ever done this– mix up principles and tactics– in relation to elections and our participation in them. But isn't that precisely what happened in connection with the Ludlow amendment?

From the very beginning of the discussion in January, when Burnham proposed support for the amendment, all that was needed was an answer on the level of tactics, assuming that there were no differences on the level of principle. But Shachtman, instead of giving a tactical answer, replied with a motion to criticize the amendment "from a principled revolutionary standpoint." And even at the end of the discussion, at the plenum in April, Cannon's initial motion, later withdrawn, wanted to affirm that the Political Committee had taken "a correct principled position" on the amendment "but made a tactical error" by not giving the movement critical support.

But it was even worse than that, methodologically, in my opinion. When we are confronted with the need for a tactical decision, to be offered instead “a correct principled position” is to be offered at best an irrelevancy, and at worst an evasion, but in all cases not what the situation calls for politically. Pointing in such circumstances to the correctness of the principled position may provide us a measure of psychological consolation – “see, we were only 50 percent wrong”– but how much correctness can a principled position provide in read life if it is given as a substitute for a tactical position?

I think that I have been justified in devoting so much time to the Ludlow dispute for at least three reasons. First, I think that the details were needed, because without them, you would have only some generalizations and would lack the data through which to judge my conclusions.

Second is that the problems posed in that dispute related rather closely to other questions of importance. For example, there was the slogan of the workers’ and farmers’ government in the Transitional Program (which more recently we have shortened to the slogan of the workers’ government in this country). The stenograms show that the SWPers kept putting questions about this to Trotsky– did he mean by the workers’ and farmers’ government the same thing that we meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat?– lurking behind which was the implied question: if the workers, and farmers’ government means something different from dictatorship of the proletariat, don’t we have the obligation to state this very forcibly, to emphasize it, in order to counteract the illusions that the workers may have in anything less than the dictatorship of the proletariat?

In tomorrow’s talk I shall show additional evidence of the prominence in the thinking of the SWP leadership of the illusion factor, as well as more about the confusion over tactics and principles. But my point is that clarification of

the issues involved in the Ludlow dispute helped the SWP to better understand the Transitional Program and its method as a whole. And without that clarification, if we had continued to cling to the SWP's first and second positions on the Ludlow amendment, what do you think would have happened decades later when a mass movement against the Vietnam War began to develop in this country? One thing you can be sure of is that we could never have played the role we did in that movement if we had not previously learned the lessons of the Ludlow question through the Transitional Program discussion. In that case the SWP would be considerably different from what it is today, and I don't mean better.

The other reason I feel justified in giving so much time to the Ludlow dispute is because it helps us to view our party, its cadres, its program, and its method the same way we try to view everything else– historically. Sometimes there is a tendency to think that they suddenly developed out of nowhere, fully formed and finished, with results and acquisitions that can be taken for granted. But it wasn't like that at all. We got where we are ideologically, politically, and organizationally as the result of a good deal of sweat, heart's blood, sleepless nights, trial and error– and struggle.

And that's how it will be as we continue to develop further. We have the advantage over our predecessors of not having to plow up the same ideological and methodological ground that they covered. If we really absorb the lessons they learned and the methods they pioneered, then we should be able to go beyond them and plow up new ground. And we certainly can do that better, the more realistically we understand how they did their work.

Two comrades whose opinions I respect made some suggestions after seeing the first draft of the notes for this talk a couple of weeks ago. I didn't succeed in incorporating most of their suggestions into the talk, mainly because it got so long

without them, but I would like to take them up now.

One comrade thought that the emphasis of my talk might be misleading, especially for those who were not familiar with the early years of our movement. After all, he pointed out, we were not on the whole sectarians or abstentionists before 1938; even with our small forces and limited resources, we did some very good work when the opportunity came along. Furthermore, he added, although we didn't have the words "transitional method" or "transitional demands" in our vocabulary then, we did frequently and even effectively use that method and raise such demands in our work, especially after the big turn in 1933. Otherwise, he said, some of our most important work of that period— such as the Minneapolis experience— is inexplicable.

I must say that I agree with his concern, and if I did, or to the extent that I did, derogate or seem to derogate the party or its leadership in the pre-Transitional Program period of our existence, I certainly want to correct that now. There isn't any trace of muckraking or debunking in my motives for giving these talks. I don't know anyone who has a higher regard than I have for the pre-1938 party and its leadership. I said that it was a remarkable organization, and the more I think about the conditions of that period, the more strongly I hold this opinion. From my own extensive activity in the three years before 1938, I know that the party was not at all sectarian, and it was not abstentionist or dogmatic or doctrinaire, on the whole by at least 95 percent.

If it had been, it could never have accepted the Transitional Program, it could never have absorbed the transitional method so fast. Certainly no other organization in this country ever understood them at all.

So please understand what I have been speaking about in that context. We were not abstentionists, but sometimes we made abstentionist errors, and the transitional method helped us to

overcome them once we understood it and incorporated it into our arsenal. Does telling this story discredit the comrades of that time? Not at all. On the contrary, it seems to me greatly to their credit that they were able to correct their errors and lift the whole movement onto higher ground.

The other comrade's criticism was that in my discussion of principles and tactics, I entirely omitted the question of strategy, which he feels is the area where the Transitional Program makes its central contribution. I think that he is completely correct on this latter point: the Transitional Program did provide us with a coherent and viable strategy or set of strategic concepts, perhaps for the first time in this country, and certainly on a scale we had never known before.

(Strategy, I should say parenthetically, was explained by Trotsky as follows in 1928: "Prior to the war [World War I] we spoke only of the tactics of the proletarian party; this conception conformed adequately enough to the then prevailing trade union, parliamentary methods which did not transcend the limits of day-to-day demands and tasks. By the conception of tactics is understood the system of measures that serves a single current task or a single branch of the class struggle. Revolutionary strategy on the contrary embraces a combined system of actions which by their association, consistency, and growth must lead the proletariat to the conquest of power." Tactics are subordinate to strategy, and strategy serves a mediating role between principle and tactics.)

But I did not go into the question of strategy in my talk deliberately: because it was virtually omitted from the 1938 discussion in the SWP; the focus was almost entirely on the principle-tactic relationship. The stimulus given to strategical thinking instead also marked an important step forward, thanks again to the Transitional Program. My not going into that aspect was not intended to deny that or minimize it. Anyhow, I hope that the comrade who made this criticism will, as I suggested, someday himself speak about

the danger of what he calls “tactical thinking that is not rooted in strategical thinking,” and how the Transitional Program relates to this.

Tomorrow I shall resume the narrative, concluding my account of the chaotic plenum of the National Committee held in April 1938 after the return of the SWP delegation from Mexico, with major attention on the dispute over the labor party question. The following day, I shall make some comparisons between the SWP of then and the SWP of today, based upon a recent reading for the first time of the 1938 minutes of the Political Committee.