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TO ALL NC MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

The attached is a discussion article by Pierre Frank. It has not at this time been submitted to the United Secretariat as part of the pre-World Congress discussion.

This is for NC information only and not for general membership distribution.

Comradely,

Jack Barnes (jw)
Jack Barnes

ON THE PROBLEMS OF TACTICS IN CONSTRUCTING THE PARTY IN FRANCE

by Pierre Frank
October 4, 1968

Fifteen years ago, the PCI (French section of the Fourth International), after a grave crisis ending in a split, engaged in the tactic of so-called "entryism" in the PCF. Since then the party has had an independent sector and an entrust sector. It is pointless to dwell at length on the reasons for this tactic; they have been explained not only within the PCI but likewise in public documents ("Construire le Parti révolutionnaire," "Après de Gaulle," articles in "Quatrième Internationale"). About two years ago, without formally giving up this tactic, the PCI began to take a somewhat different orientation in its activities owing to developments in the student youth, particularly the UEC (Union des Etudiants Communistes).

Except during 1956-57, when oppositionist currents in the PCF formed, particularly among the Communist intellectuals, entryism in the PCF encountered great difficulties because of the quite low level of political life in an organization still strongly in the grip of a machine controlling a leadership -- which despite a certain amount of internal dissension -- has unanimously supported a policy aimed at uniting "the left." This class-collaborationist policy only episodically touched off resistance within the PCF. In contrast to this, the entrust work found a favorable field within the UEC, first during the Algerian war, to which the PCF responded tardily with only verbal opposition, after having for years advocated a "genuine French union." The entrust work in the UEC contributed to the formation of a left wing in that organization. As the international crisis of Stalinism developed (differences between the PCF and the Italian CP, Sino-Soviet conflict...), this left wing became politically consolidated in a UEC divided by tendency struggles that reflected the various positions, from right to left, common to the Communist parties.

Subsequently, the war in Vietnam, the political developments in Cuba and in French politics, the vote for Mitterand at the time of the presidential election, led the left wing of the UEC to break with that organization and create an independent organization, the JCR. The left wing of the UEC moved under the impulse of comrades who had joined the PCI. From that time on, a very large part of the activities of members of the PCI, whose composition had been largely renewed through the recruitment of youth from the UEC, was devoted to developing the JCR, at times to the detriment of other tasks. Without being abandoned, the entrust work became more and more limited and offered only minimum perspectives.

During 1967, the need to redetermine the orientation of revolutionary party construction was felt within the PCI as in

several other European sections of the Fourth International. The events of May 1968 made it possible to probe the question at close range.

Entryism was a tactic established at the beginning of the fifties on two essential elements. One was linked to a conjunctural appreciation; namely, rather rapid exacerbation of the "cold war," which turned out wrong and which the International rectified rather rapidly, the rectification being made as soon as the boom around the middle fifties became apparent. The other element was of a structural order; namely, the construction of the revolutionary party could not occur except through great crises within the mass parties, for France the PCF, and the tactic was based on the perspective that these crises would give rise first of all to strong centrist currents whose evolution toward the left we had to aim at speeding up. The structural element remains, in the sense that it cannot be conceived that a big revolutionary crisis will not affect the mass party of the working class. In addition to the normal conditions is to be added the fact that the PCF like all the Communist parties is deeply affected by the international crisis of Stalinism.

But the events of May 1968 showed that during the fifteen years that have passed since the entrism tactic was adopted, the conditions of the French political scene have altered in such a way as to oblige the Trotskyists to undertake a rectification in orientation.

When this tactic was adopted, the weight of the PCF was crushing and the authority of its leadership in the party and the broad working masses was considerable. Against this, the revolutionary opposition in the working class in general, particularly the Trotskyist organizations, was extremely weak numerically. Then during the years of economic prosperity, the workers movement suffered a political ebb. For many years, the workers mass movement recruited hardly any youth. The Trotskyist movement likewise suffered from this state of affairs. The lowest point was reached at the time de Gaulle came to power (1958) and throughout the immediately following years. Then began a very deep process in the working class, indicated by two phenomena that we called attention to from the very first -- (a) pressure within the working class from the end of 1959 toward Socialist-Communist unity in action, (b) the recruitment of youth to the workers organizations, particularly the trade unions.

In the months preceding May 1968, the ferment among the youth became more and more manifest. (Among other things, attendance increased at Trotskyist meetings.) The events of May 1968 showed that if the grip of the PCF and the CGT on the bulk of the working class remained, although with the authority of the leadership lowered, the student and high-school youth, and also broad layers of the worker youth, had now slipped out of that grip and were looking for revolutionary solutions. The phenomenon, while having

forms specific to France, is not peculiar to this country.

Under these new conditions, the problem of constructing the revolutionary party is posed in different terms. Already, several years ago in the pamphlet "Constructing the Revolutionary Party" (May 1965) we mentioned the differences in the rate of political development among the adults and the youth; we indicated that this posed particular problems among the youth, but we did not modify our general tactic then because of reasons having to do, at the time, above all with the weakness of the Trotskyist movement and the currents in the youth.

May 1968 showed that now there was a different relationship of forces within the class. To be noted was the existence of a rather broad revolutionary vanguard, nonorganized as a whole but including politicized groups in the student circles, extending likewise into the worker youth, and this in the face of a quite discredited post-Stalinist leadership whose authority in their own party was not very high compared to the past. Older revolutionists likewise saw this, especially workers, who during the preceding years, had abandoned or reduced their activities as militants, not because they had abandoned their convictions but out of the weariness engendered by the absence of immediate or early revolutionary perspectives.

The conditions were thus modified on the level of the purely objective facts on the one hand, and on that of relations within the class on the other hand. This makes it possible at present to envisage not the rapid construction of a party already linked to the broad masses, but of a revolutionary Marxist organization possessing a certain political weight, linked to layers of workers, around which the vanguard in the broadest sense of the term could be polarized to a considerable degree, and which primarily through independent public action could play a not negligible role in the working class, particularly in the crisis which cannot fail to develop within the PCF.

In this sense the events of May 1968 posed the problem of regrouping the Trotskyist forces. It was posed objectively by the events. The government repression did not create the problem, it only gave it a particular form.

At present the problem is to seek to regroup in a political organization, on a principled basis, as large a force as possible compared to the previous situation in the Trotskyist movement. It is not only a numerical problem. Its political importance lies in the fact, above all in France, where recognition of the authority of Trotskyist ideas has never been negligible, that this recognition has too often been accompanied by skepticism on the organizational level owing to the splits which have particularly affected the French Trotskyist movement.

We will not dwell on the effect which even a limited regroupment could have on the multiple groups that have proliferated in France to the left of the mass movement, as well as on many former Trotskyist militants who became discouraged by the crises and splits. The problem of constructing the revolutionary party will not be resolved by this regroupment but it could be considered as a preliminary stage to other tactics and other stages.

The possibilities for direct, open Trotskyist work of much greater scope than was ever the case in the past will easily be appreciated by everyone. The entrism tactic at bottom was only the price our movement paid for its weakness; objective and subjective conditions permit us to abandon it. Nonetheless it does not appear to us that we ought to return simply and purely to the old tactic of solely independent work. Among the considerations that led us to adopt the entrism tactic, a part which we mentioned above remains completely valid -- we cannot think that there will be nothing of numerical and political value to be won from the PCF, particularly among the trade-union militants who constitute both the framework of the CGT and the link between the PCF and the broad layers of the working class. It is a part of the workers movement whose relative weight has diminished with the years, but which still remains decisive for many daily combats and also for big class combats. One must not take a negative view of this part of the class by invoking, for example, the fact that during the May 1968 events it constituted the most important field of maneuver for the leadership of the PCF and the CGT to block the penetration of revolutionary ideas in the plants and to abort the revolutionary crisis. The inertia of the trade-union militants in the PCF is obviously very great compared to the less proletarian layers of the PCF (local cells...). These militants do not readily incline to enter into conflict with their leadership, especially the leadership of the CGT, but they are far from being insensitive to the needs of their class. They will probably be among the last to come into conflict, they will have a tendency to go much further than all the other categories to be found in the PCF.

The question of entryism as a tactic does not arise. The perspective of constructing the party mainly through the prior formation of centrist groups to the left of the old formations, and first of all within them, has been outmoded by reality, at least so far as the PCF is concerned. But we should not draw the conclusion that there are no more elements in the PCF capable of being won later to the revolutionary party. I am unable to say what the situation is in Italy, but I am afraid that the document passed by the last congress of the GCR [Gruppi Comunisti Rivoluzionari, the Italian section of the Fourth International], as it was edited, may be interpreted by some as meaning that there is nothing more to be won from the CP in that country. What ought to be forcibly stressed, in my opinion, is that from now on, without neglecting certain internal activity, the evolution of the crisis in the CPs, which must be followed attentively, will depend mainly on the external independent activity of the Trotskyists.

In certain countries -- and particularly in France -- what is posed is political and organizational work aimed at conquering for the Trotskyist movement an important, if not preponderant, place within the revolutionary vanguard.

In several countries, certain youth organizations by force of circumstance are tending to play a role going beyond that of a youth organization and assuming, in part, the role of the party. Such a situation is largely inevitable. From the outset, owing to the conditions under which they were created, these youth organizations had an audience in certain milieux and a capacity for mobilizing superior to that of some of the sections of the Fourth International. Even on a series of key questions, these organizations hold positions identical or close to those of our movement. It must not be forgotten that so long as the essential question of the Fourth International has not been settled by them, the dangers exist of a crystallization of centrist positions and the possible formation of political organizations that would become obstacles to the formation of a revolutionary Marxist party.

Thus one of the important tasks in constructing the party is to succeed in winning these young forces or organizations to the Fourth International. This cannot be done in an arbitrary, mechanical way; events and the political maturity of the youth involved must be taken into account.

Consequently, for the coming period, the construction of the revolutionary party in France is presented in the form of a regroupment aimed at creating a numerically much stronger organization than the PCI was before it was banned by the government, without altering its character as a Bolshevik party and without abandoning the program of the Fourth International.

Such a regroupment cannot be accomplished solely through the indispensable theoretical and political discussions; these must be accompanied by the political activity demanded by the situation, and at bottom this is what will really test the success of the operation in the best sense of the term, that is, the fusion of elements regrouped in an organization can have considerable effect in advancing the vanguard in the direction of a revolutionary Marxist mass party.

According to the size of this regroupment and the degree of its success, the other party-building tasks will be solved progressively, the main ones appearing to be the following:

(a) Following up the regroupment of the Trotskyists, because the problem would not be completely resolved but only posed under much more favorable conditions than in the past.

(b) A correct attitude toward the many miniscule groups where militants of a certain capacity are to be found, who have no sense

of organization, but who are attracted by the Trotskyist wealth in ideas with regard to Stalinism while being repelled by the shattered state of the Trotskyist movement. It is to be expected that a Trotskyist regroupment would exercise an influence among these circles.

(c) A regroupment of the Trotskyists will also exercise an influence on the left wing of the PSU. It should be taken into account that during the May events, and afterwards, the PSU recruited considerably, and many of the new recruits are oriented toward the left.

(d) As we have indicated above, special work in the direction of the PCF cannot be omitted, not only from the outside. We know that the leadership of the PCF is particularly sensitive on this point. Creditable reports attribute to sources close to this leadership the "discoveries" made by the police on "entryism" and on the dissolved organizations after the May events. We think that the nature of the work in the PCF cannot be determined as of now, except in a purely negative way: it will not be the long-range entryism that we have practiced nor simple demonstrations aimed at immediate expulsions; discussions as well as partial experiments must be conducted on this subject before precise conclusions can be reached.