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Exchange on Trotskyism

We reprint below a letter from the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (MRCI) to the League for the Revolutionary Party (U.S.) and Workers Revolution (Australia), together with our reply. The MRCI, an international pseudo-Trotskyist tendency led by the British Workers Power group, wrote in criticism of a letter sent by the LRP and WR to the centrist Italian Gruppo Operaio Rivoluzionario (GOR), which appeared in Proletarian Revolution No. 29.

The MRCI letter testifies to the truth of our analysis of the present sorry state of international "Trotskyism." In our last three issues we have shown how an already decadent milieu has managed to degenerate even further into a morass of petty maneuverism where diplomatic pacts (bargained for today and broken tomorrow) have replaced political principle in the relations between organizations professing to be communist.

These groups are among the remnants of the degeneration of Trotsky's revolutionary Fourth International. By 1952, with the betrayal of the Bolivian Revolution, the Fourth International had ceased to be a revolutionary organization. As a result of a 1953 split, two main currents, "Pabloite" (soft on Stalinism) and "orthodox" (superficially hard on Stalinism), emerged. The schism on the surface was over differing theories explaining how Stalinism could spawn new workers' states. Today, the rationalizations have become so numerous that their own natural limit seems to be the number of "Trotskyist" groups the political ecology can tolerate. Aside from the major Pabloite current, the United Secretariat for the Fourth International (USec) and the now near-defunct orthodox

International Committee (IC), there has been a menagerie of groups circling them.

For many years our tendency has regarded this whole milieu as centrist betrayers of Trotskyism. Its redefinition of counterrevolutionary Stalinism as capable of creating "deformed workers states" is only a reflection of its capitulation to counterrevolutionary reformism (of either the social democratic or Stalinist variety) at home and to petty-bourgeois nationalism everywhere.

Our own reexamination led us to the understanding of the Stalinist countries as statified capitalist. This theory remains loyal to Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism as a counterrevolutionary prop for imperialist capitalism. While Trotsky correctly opposed notions that the Soviet workers' state had been overthrown in the 1920s, he failed to see the bureaucracy's transformation into a capitalist class by 1939. Contrary to Trotsky's prediction, Stalinism did not collapse but instead defeated the proletariat. After World War II its triumph led to an imperialist resurgence. The disoriented Fourth International degenerated as a consequence into the sterile orthodoxy of today.

In the wake of the explosion of the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), the dominating force in the IC, authentic Trotskyists had good reason to hope that genuine revolutionary elements would emerge. The reason behind the break up of Gerry Healy's thug-ruled empire was not to be found in the scandals which titillated superficial observers. It was rather the powerful renewal of class struggle internationally and the British miners' strike in

particular, which showed working class masses moving ahead of their own leadership, demanding by their actions an alternative to capitalism.

After the split the WRP showed signs of engaging in a deep political reconsideration; it called for an international discussion and conference to reexamine fundamentals. Many of the "Trotskyist" groups were attracted to this process — including the MRCI and the GOR (and the GOR's ally, the Revolutionary Workers Party of Sri Lanka), who had previously considered themselves to the left of the Healyite milieu and outside its pseudo-Trotskyist "family."

Alas, the once-promising fermentation has produced thus far only vinegar. The WRP issued a ten-point statement of orthodoxy and proclaimed that agreement with the document was the price other groups had to pay to take part in its conference. But this maneuver was itself only a cover for turning the conference into a merger convention between the WRP and the Morenoite International Workers League (LIT), which had a history of commuting between the USec and the IC, to say nothing of its frequent journeys into the camps of Peronism, Castroism and Sandinism.

As a result of the maneuvering by the WRP and the LIT, several groups including MRCI and GOR have found themselves frozen out of the conference. However, their cries of foul have a hollow ring. In Proletarian Revolution No. 28 and the letters printed below, we have exposed MRCI's unprincipled maneuvers.

As for GOR, the agreement they reached in February with the WRP (and the GOCQI of Michel Varga) not only endorsed the WRP's ten-point statement but also agreed that the continuity of the authentic Fourth International rested with the International Committee. GOR has retrospectively admitted that it was a "political mistake" to have signed a statement including formulations on political continuity that it disagreed with. It is obvious that GOR's opportunist outlook led it to make a diplomatic bloc rather than any genuine attempt to arrive at a principled agreement.

Moreover, it was the WRP, not the GOR, that broke the agreement: it had found a bigger fish in the centrist pond, the LIT. The MRCI's attempt to forge an alternative bloc based upon even less political agreement with the GOR did not work out either, as the letters below indicate.

Our own intervention has had an entirely different character. We always have made clear the principled character of our differences with all of these groups. We have always insisted that any regroupment in the direction of re-creation of the Fourth International would have to be based upon a programmatic recognition of the capitalist and counterrevolutionary nature of Stalinism, social democracy and nationalism. It would have to be based upon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and the understanding that only the proletariat and its vanguard party can make the socialist revolution.

However, we are not ultimatumists. We put forward a seven-point program (wildly misinterpreted by the

MRCI in its letter below) at the first sign of political motion to the left among the pseudo-Trotskyists. This program was a challenge from outside the entire milieu, designed to separate the revolutionary wheat from the centrist chaff. All seven points refer to concrete examples that pose the question of the independence of the proletariat and its vanguard party. We hoped to collaborate more closely with those who accepted these points; a genuine fight for proletarian independence would inevitably move them closer to the revolutionary program.

Finally, in its letter to us, MRCI refers to its "22 Theses in Defence of Trotskyism"; the GOR has also published a compilation of theses aimed at "revolutionary" regroupment. Both documents are models of how to cover capitulatory politics and deeds with revolutionary words. We will publish our analysis of these documents in a forthcoming issue.

MRCI LETTER TO LRP AND WR

June 26, 1987

Enclosed is a copy of "22 Theses in Defence of Trotskyism" that the MRCI is proposing as a starting point for a struggle against centrism at any International Conference, should one take place.

We will briefly take the opportunity to reply to your false accusations made against the MRCI in your letter to the GOR dated April 10th 1987. You attack the MRCI for proposing discussions leading to a revolutionary bloc against centrism at the proposed WRP-called International Conference. This you say is "counterposed to Trotsky's strategy in the 1930s." You imply that we are proposing "a diplomatic document whose signatories agree to a deliberately vague wording in order to hide their differences." This was a remarkable piece of foresight on your part since you had not seen the proposed basis for such a bloc!

You attack the MRCI statement of Jan. 1987 for not giving "the fundamental policies that characterize revolutionary politics in this period." For not outlining the "principled differences between revolutionaries and centrists." This should not be surprising in a short statement outlining our attitude to the conference. On the other hand you choose to ignore in a typically dishonest polemical style the basis of our proposal for a revolutionary bloc, that it should be built around "a principled common declaration against the distortion of Leninism and Trotskyism." We challenge you to show us where the 22 Theses are either "vague" or "diplomatic," on any question which separates revolutionaries from centrists.

We do however note that your own 7-Point basis for such a bloc manages to say nothing about what you yourself say is a "central question" (and we agree) — the Russian Question. You want to form a revolutionary bloc without dealing with the question of defense of the Soviet Union, etc. Now this would be a real diplomatic bloc designed to hide differences, and you are the proposers of it!

You attack us especially for naming the Bolshevik Tendency among the organizations we approached along

with the GOR/RWP and the WRP itself. You "forget" to mention, perhaps you did not know, that there was a fusion process going on at that time between the BTs and a group of ex-Morenoites (LTT). The political outcome of that was unclear, as a struggle was going on inside the fusion discussion. The capitulation of the LTT leaders to the politics of the BTs clearly makes the likelihood of that organization being part of a revolutionary bloc against centrism highly unlikely. The same would apply today to the WRP as an organization.

Your fears of the GOR/RWP entering an unprincipled bloc with the MRCI were therefore unfounded for the reason that the MRCI does not make such blocs. However we believe the GOR/RWP on the other hand did enter into an unprincipled bloc with the WRP and the GOCQI (Varga), on the basis of the WRP's "Ten Points" and a joint declaration which no doubt they will send to you if you ask for it. We have no doubt that you will take up this actual example of unprincipled combinationism with the GOR/RWP with the same rigor which you applied because of your mistaken understanding of the MRCI's proposals.

LRP REPLY TO MRCI

July 13, 1987

Your June 26th letter to the League for the Revolutionary Party/U.S. and Workers Revolution/Australia charges us with making "false accusations" about your proposed "revolutionary bloc against centrism" at the International Conference called for by the WRP. We do not accept your criticism, for the facts confirm the truth of our accusations. Your own letter, moreover, exposes further the unprincipled nature of the bloc you proposed.

But first we would like to point out that your letter is a step forward on your part. The LRP has written a variety of political criticisms of Workers Power, dating back years before you founded MRCI; you have never before made any answer. This is the first time that you have even attempted to clarify the nature of our differences. It is not accidental that you choose to reply to our exposure of one of your organizational maneuvers instead of to our criticisms of your basic political approach. You certainly have your values straight — the wrong ones.

As well, we note that you still do not see fit to reply in print to criticisms which were published in our magazine. Your view seems to be that questions of Marxist principle should be debated privately and not before the working-class and radical public. This again reflects the unprincipled nature of the maneuver that we criticized.

Let us be perfectly clear: it is not unprincipled for Marxists to engage in maneuvers in order to present their ideas to the workers; but they must do so openly, in front of their class. Petty maneuvering behind the backs of the working class is impermissible for those who believe that class consciousness is the key element in communist politics.

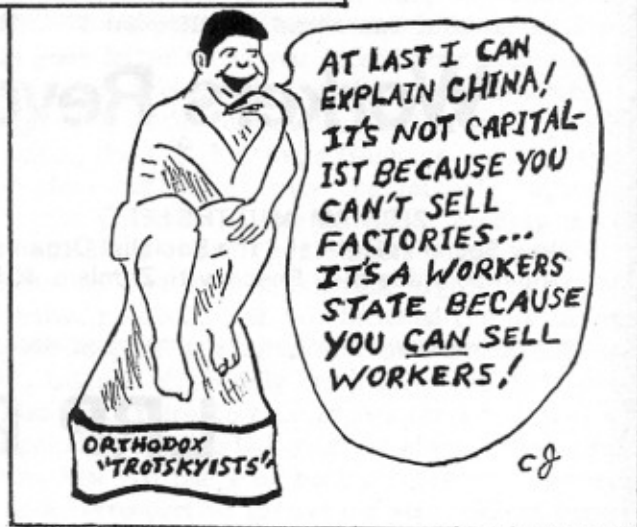
We now take up your specific criticisms of us in detail.

MRCI's 'Bloc Against Centrism' and '22 Theses'

In your letter you charge us with implying that your bloc proposal was "diplomatic" — designed to hide the differences among the signatory groups. You sarcastically call this a "remarkable piece of foresight" on our part since we had not seen the proposed basis for your bloc, the "22 Theses in Defence of Trotskyism." You claim that we based our accusation only on "a short statement outlining [MRCI's] attitude to the conference." Further, you charge that we

N.Y. Times 9/25/87

Chinese-American businessman Cheon Fung has a contract with the Chinese government to sell farm workers to U.S. agribusiness. He stated: "We are just meeting the needs of the market, like importing chemicals or slippers. It happens that the need of the market now is for labor."



"choose to ignore in a typically dishonest polemical style" the basis of your proposal as it was presented even in your short statement: that it should be built around "a principled common declaration against the distortion of Leninism and Trotskyism."

Your first charge is true: we not only implied that your bloc was diplomatic and unprincipled, we said so openly. But the rest of your catalogue is made up out of whole cloth, as a review of your original bloc proposal and our responses will demonstrate.

In the January MRCI Statement you wrote:

"... we will strive to build a bloc of all those willing to combat centrism, both in theory and in practice, in any such conference around a principled common declaration against the centrist distortions of Leninism and Trotskyism. We have already proposed such a perspective to the

GOR/RWP and the Bolshevik Tendency (USA). We invite the WRP and its fraternal organisations (as we have done before) to enter into such a political discussion process and struggle against centrism." (Workers Power, January 1987).

How was this statement to be interpreted? Anyone would read it as saying that you considered the GOR, RWP, and BT to be worthy partners in a bloc against centrism; that you believed a statement of Leninist and Trotskyist principles could be drafted in common with them. Your wording suggests that you were challenging the WRP to transform or at least clarify its politics in order to join in the fight against centrism; but as for the others, you expressed no doubts about where they stood. You may have changed your minds subsequently, but your January statement was plain. This was the basis of our criticism.

Moreover, we did not ignore, as you charge, your promise of a "principled common declaration." In our article on the conference we cited, word for word, your claim to be fighting for principles -- in order to explain to our readers how empty it was. (Proletarian Revolution, Spring 1987, page 16.) You might have read this before accusing us of being "typically dishonest" for not citing what we cited at length.

We quoted your promise to produce a common program against centrist distortions and we replied: "This reads like the pinnacle of Bolshevik candor, except that the 'centrist distortions' remain unspecified." We showed in some detail, in this article and in our letter to the GOR published in the following issue, that the groups you invited advocate vastly different political programs -- on the Fourth International, on the "anti-imperialist united front" tactic and on Stalinism. You all could not possibly agree on what was centrism and what was not. We concluded that "the MRCI's 'anti-centrist' bloc is itself a centrist dodge."

Now you say that your January document, billed as an official MRCI statement, didn't count and that we should have referred to the "22 Theses." That is all very well, but please remember that your bloc proposal was published in January, our first comment on the international conference maneuvers (quoted above) came out in March, our letter to the GOR (the document you chose to reply to) was written in April -- and your "22 Theses" were first published in late May and shown to us in June! It takes another bit of gall on your part to blame us for not referring to them.

You challenge us to comment on the politics of your theses. We will do so, in depth, as soon as we have a chance to digest them. For the moment, however, it suffices to point out that they are not what you say they are, "the proposed basis for [your] bloc" with the other groups. They are an outline of your full political program. You every right to produce such a document, but you cannot claim that this is the same thing as a "common declaration" of principles that you share with the GOR, the RWP and the BT. The 22 theses emphasize long-standing differences

that you have with these groups.

In fact your document proves our point: there is no way that groups with such differences could form a principled bloc against centrism. When you finally got around to a declaration of principles, you had to exclude the others. It seems clear now that the belated appearance of your theses was due less to MRCI's need for a programmatic statement than to your perception that you have been outmaneuvered by the WRP and the Morenoites and that all attempts to form your pseudo-revolutionary bloc have collapsed. Accordingly, you now come out with a hard statement of views that none of the groups you cited could come close to agreeing with. In context, your document might better be called "22 Theses in Defense of Sour Grapes."

MRCI and the Bolshevik Tendency

As you say, we attacked you especially for including the BT among your proposed bloc partners. This is because the BT's differences are over immediate life-and-death questions: they stood on the wrong side of the class line in the violent confrontation between the Polish workers and the Jaruzelski's Stalinist regime in December 1981. We wrote, "If MRCI's bloc has to embrace both sides of a civil war, no wonder the specifics of its political basis are left murky."

In your letter to us you defend your inclusion of the BT on the grounds that at the time you wrote, it was engaged in fusion discussions with a group of ex-Morenoites, the LTT. You write (without any political explanation) that it was only the latter's capitulation to the politics of the BT that "clearly makes the likelihood of that organisation being part of a revolutionary bloc against centrism highly unlikely."

We have no doubt that you included the BT in your statement as part of a maneuver toward the LTT and the BT. Instead of publicly criticizing the BT's pro-Stalinism and trying to counterpose correct working-class politics, you misled your readers about their position. Now you use your behind-the-scenes maneuvers as a retrospective excuse for your lack of honesty in public. And you snidely comment that "[we] 'forget' to mention, perhaps [we] did not know" that you were making overtures at the time which ostensibly would have changed the BT's line. No, we did not know. Neither we nor any workers reading your article could tell that you thought that the BT, as it stood, was anything but revolutionary.

As well, we must say that we doubt you really thought that you could win the BT as a group away from their pro-Jaruzelski position. Consider: the BTers came out of the Spartacist League; many of them spent long years in that organization. They now object to its bureaucratic degeneration, but they have remarkably few criticisms of its political program -- and they have always solidarized fully with the need to suppress the Polish workers. Now you tell us that you expected them to change their spots overnight, without any indication in advance, and adopt a revolutionary proletarian position on this question after

so many years of capitulation.

We cannot accept that you mean what you say. Moreover, if you really believe that the BT was only exposed as non-revolutionary after your January article, where was your follow-up article in your press correcting the distinct impression you gave that the BT was already revolutionary? Even if your belated excuse is true, your paper is still not telling its readers what you insist to us is the truth. A revolutionary propaganda organ is not a public relations handout but a medium for developing consciousness by saying what is.

Nor are you telling the whole story now. In its magazine the BT has reported what you omit to say in your letter: that you were working with a minority of the LTT sympathetic to your politics. That too is your right, but it is no excuse for diplomatic accounts in public. It now seems clear that the real reason for your overture to the BT was a maneuver to win over more LTTers by "exposing" the BT for not joining your bloc. Yet most of the people you were trying to win "capitulated." Perhaps they did so because the BT stuck to its principles, bad as they are, and turned the tables by exposing you. The BT does not hide what it thinks of you. If our guess is right, we offer you no condolences.

The LRP's Seven-Point Bloc

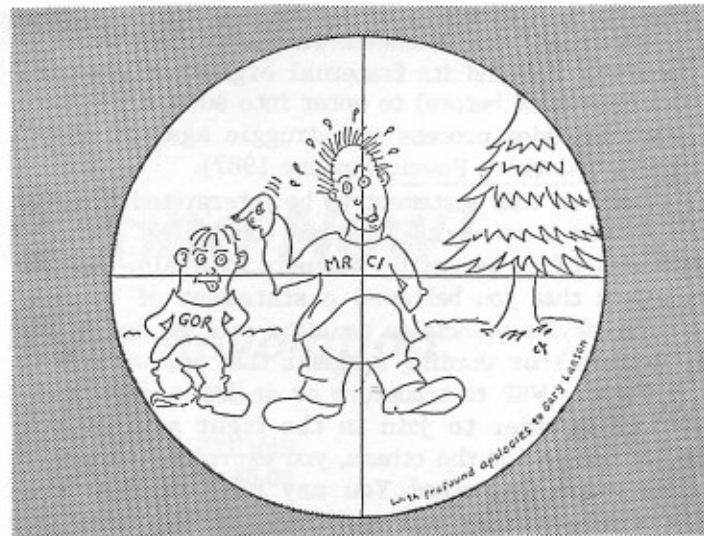
In your letter you accuse us of proposing "a real diplomatic bloc designed to hide differences" by trying to "form a revolutionary bloc" around seven points which did not include our position on the Russian Question. Again you are misrepresenting what we wrote, this time on a central question.

First of all, our seven points were designed and clearly expressed as a challenge to you and other "Trotskyist"-centrist groups to unite around genuine principles of Trotskyism — we were trying to demonstrate by example precisely what was omitted from the MRCI proposal. Since we openly and explicitly excluded ourselves from your defensist "family" by virtue of our positions on reformism, Stalinism and the class nature of the Fourth Internationalist parties, we did not include ourselves in this proposed bloc. Thus we wrote:

"As outsiders to the defensist milieu, we hold that those who see themselves as its left wing should fight over the decisive questions that stain their tradition's recent history, and therefore adopt the following points as the basis for their bloc." (Proletarian Revolution, Spring 1987, page 18.)

The seven points that followed were all linked to the question of the class independence of the proletariat and its revolutionary party, the principle so often violated by pseudo-Trotskyists in the past 40 years. We then summed up:

"We challenge the WRP, the MRCI, the GOR, the RWP and all comrades who see the need for fight for a revolutionary policy against the right-wing drift



MRCI to LRP: Why don't you attack GOR?

to adopt such a program. The above points are by no means the full program of a revolutionary international, but their adoption would be a major step towards a principled regroupment around the most fundamental questions of our time."

That is, we proposed a struggle by left-moving centrists over the party question and its many ramifications with the "orthodox" pseudo-Trotskyists. We proposed that they form a bloc on basic principles; but we also openly said that the groups we named were centrist and could not agree to these principles without transforming their politics. At the same time we acknowledged an objective desire for revolutionary politics within their membership. Our proposed bloc was designed to show the difference between their self-description as Trotskyists and their real actions on the question of the independence of the proletarian party.

Secondly, we did not call our proposed bloc "revolutionary" — since it would not be, if its members still held a defensist attitude toward the imperialist USSR. But we did say that the political logic of the seven points, along with international developments like the Gorbachev reforms — the "adoption of openly capitalist techniques to stimulate their crisis-ridden economies" — would sharply call Soviet-defensist views into question and push left-moving centrists towards our revolutionary program. We wrote:

"Defensist comrades today who carry their fight against party liquidation to the end will have no alternative but to jettison their position that socialist revolutions can be made by anyone other than the proletariat under vanguard leadership."

That is, we predicted that such a struggle, with our intervention, would lead to a reassessment on the Russian question. We further indicated that the formation of such a bloc would enable us to collaborate with its constituents in order to stimulate the process of transformation. We are not ultimatumists who demand full agreement as the price for united action.

But we do demand such agreement for "revolution-

ary blocs" — which are stepping-stones to the revolutionary party. In no way did we try to hide our central differences with the "Trotskyist"-centrist milieu. This tactic contrasts distinctly with your method of hiding from your readers your political differences with those you are maneuvering with or against.

We understand that the WRP's International Conference is now unlikely to offer anything like the open, wide-ranging and fundamental discussion that was indicated at one time. Most of the "Trotskyist family" will be excluded, it seems. So forming a left bloc around any program is not an immediate issue. Nevertheless, should elements at the Conference have the opportunity to fight the direction of the WRP and LIT leaderships, our seven-point platform would still be an excellent starting point.

If we may make an analogy, our seven point challenge shares the same method as Trotsky's Transitional Program. Like the Transitional Program, it aims at bringing other working-class organizations and individuals closer to the revolutionary program without presenting them the ultimatum of accepting revolutionary politics at one gulp. In our case, we meant the centrist groups such as your own. In the case of the Transitional Program, these organizations were the trade unions, the proposed labor party in the United States, etc. As Trotsky said,

"Yes, we propagandize this program in the trade unions, propose it as the basic program for the labor party. For us, it is the transitional program; but for them it is the program."

Where the Transitional Program was designed to lead the workers' organizations to the point where the need for socialist revolution becomes overwhelming, our seven points similarly are meant to lead centrist organizations to the point where a break with centrism becomes a necessity for any further advance. Your misunderstanding of our proposal as a call for a "revolutionary" bloc is similar to the familiar pseudo-Trotskyist misrepresentation of the Transitional Program as the full program of the Fourth International. Trotsky again:

"The draft [transitional] program is not a complete program. ... the end of the program is not complete, because we don't speak here about the social revolution... ."

The fact that Trotsky proposed this program for other groups and did not include the full program for revolution did not make him duplicitous. He was merely honest about what he could expect from them.

The GOR-RWP Bloc with the WRP

Finally, you invite us to criticize the actual bloc (later aborted) agreed to by the GOR and RWP with the WRP and GOCQI in February "with the same rigor which you applied because of your mistaken understanding of the MRCI's proposals." Your irony is misplaced. Since you consider our method to be not one of rigor but of "a typically dishonest polemical style," it is disingenuous of you to wish it applied

to others.

Your ill wishes aside, we have no reason not to criticize this monstrously unprincipled bloc — which was made with the WRP, moreover, after that organization had abandoned its former interest in wide-ranging and probing international discussions in favor of Moreno-worship and an uncritical identification with the Morenoite LIT. The only reason we did not give it the same concrete treatment we gave yours is that we did not hear of it in time. We first saw mention of it in sketchy form in an IKL pamphlet just as our Summer issue was in preparation; and we did include it among the examples of unprincipled dervish-dancing around the WRP conference that we listed in our article (page 18) — along with your proposal.

We regret that organizations such as yourselves and the GOR do not see fit to keep us promptly informed of their political turns and organizational proposals. We understand that the fundamental reason, even more significant than our geographical distance, is our political distance — our non-membership in the "Trotskyist"-defensist family and our willingness to call things publicly by their right names.

But may we also note that Workers Power, despite your closer contact with the WRP and those dancing at its feet, has not yet commented on the GOR/WRP maneuver. You now would find it useful for us to criticize the GOR. Your own diplomacy, in helping to keep the various centrist machinations under wraps, is partly to blame for our past inability to do so.

You do not have to challenge us to take on the GOR or anyone else publicly; we have done so often. But take up the challenge yourselves. Now that your little maneuvers toward GOR, the WRP and the BT have fallen through, you should have no compunctions about trying to look as if you were principled people.

As we write, we have just received the July issue of Workers Power in which you at last imply what you long ago should have claimed from your point of view: that the GOR is centrist. But it is characteristic that you do so over the GOR's refusal to support the Communist Party of Italy in the recent elections. The PCI was running with openly bourgeois elements on its slate, the better to demand class-collaborationist representation in the bourgeois government if it polled well. A vote for it would have contributed to this strategy, whatever rhetoric its centrist backers might have attached. Your attitude in this case reflects your centrism, not the GOR's.

After all is said and done with the WRP's International Conference maneuvers, what we feared has largely come true. Around the world the proletariat is rising, struggling to create a new leadership. Just when the opportunity occurs for a fundamental discussion which could lay the basis for the renewal of such a principled leadership, the "Trotskyist"-centrists use the occasion to perform their familiar act of petty organizational aggrandizement. Once again the lot of you have succeeded in tarnishing the communist banner at the expense of the masses. ■