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*Trotskyism Confronts New Developments:
The British Miners' Strike of 1984-1985
The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua*

Workers of All Countries Unite!

TROTSKYISM CONFRONTS NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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ITR 2: Trotskyism Confronts New Developments

This number of *International Trotskyist Review* presents materials on two situations of central importance to the international class struggle in the recent period.

Both the British miners' strike of 1984-1985 and the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua present major challenges to Trotskyism. Both are critical test cases of the ability of organizations and leaderships to provide consistently revolutionary perspectives to workers caught up in acute class confrontations with an immediate potential to alter dramatically the overall balance of class forces in the world. Both have posed very sharply the central question of the fight for the independent revolutionary leadership of the proletariat.

1. "Resolution on the British Miners' Strike" (December 1984)

The year-long British miners' strike ended in March 1985 with a bitter defeat which left the British labor movement more polarized than at any time since World War II. (See "British Miners Lose Battle, Continue to Fight," *Fighting Worker* [paper of the Revolutionary Workers League/US], April 1985.) To the end the charismatic figure of Arthur Scargill dominated the strike. To the British ruling class Scargill seemed to embody a threat of perpetual class warfare. Not surprisingly, then, to the right wing of the British labor movement Scargill seemed to express everything likely to alienate "respectable public opinion" from the British Labour Party and its trade union base. To many on the left Scargill seemed to present an entirely new style of militant trade union leadership—a style of leadership fundamentally consistent with a revolutionary perspective for the British working class.

In fact Scargill did maintain throughout the strike an intransigent defense of his members' right to fight for their jobs, defiantly rejecting all pressures for a sellout and dealing with all questions of legalities and picket-line violence in clear class terms. Nevertheless, Scargill never moved effectively beyond abstract calls for solidarity action from other unions with the increasingly embattled miners. And his political program reached its highest point in rhetoric about the miners' willingness to force new parliamentary elections (as in 1972 and 1974)—combined with a call for the Labour Party to be "as loyal to its class as Thatcher is to hers."

British Trotskyism has had, over the course of the postwar period, an extremely rich experience, often deeply rooted in both the trade union movement and the volatile left wing (including the youth organization) of the British Labour Party. The crisis of the British labor movement since the Thatcher government was first elected in 1979 has plunged British Trotskyism into its own even more intense crisis. That most self-proclaimed Trotskyists in Britain responded to the enormous potential of the miners' strike of 1984-1985 by tailing Scargill—featuring slogans such as "Scargillise the labour movement"—makes clear the depth of this crisis. The resolution of this crisis depends very much on the fight for the perspectives put forward by the Revolutionary Internationalist

League—the International Trotskyist Committee’s British section—which are summed up in the resolution adopted last December by the International Executive Committee of the ITC.

2. The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua and the Crisis of the Fourth International

If the figure of Arthur Scargill has easily disoriented most British “Trotskyists” into abandoning the fight for the politically independent, revolutionary leadership of the working class, the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua has reduced would-be Trotskyist groupings around the world to a near orgy of adaptationism and liquidationism. In particular, within the forces of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), the leading factions have engaged in a virtual contest in revisionism over the Nicaraguan revolution.

The USFI minority headed by Jack Barnes’s American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has done the Sandinistas the courtesy of openly abandoning the perspective of permanent revolution in order to remove any obstacle to mindless enthusing over the FSLN’s “vanguard” role in the Nicaraguan revolution. In place of permanent revolution, the Barnesites have erected an elaboration and extension of Stalin’s distorted revival of Lenin’s pre-1917 theory of “the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.” Now it is the creation on a global scale of a chain of such “special” capitalist states which is presented by the Barnesites as the way forward for the international working class. In the Barnesite view, such “workers’ and farmers’ governments” constitute, in effect, a new *necessary stage* on the road to socialist revolution.

While now reduced within the USFI to relatively tiny numbers, the Barnesites—and the even more adaptationist and liquidationist supporters of the Australian Socialist Workers Party—still remain in the USFI as highly belligerent and effective sources of severe disorientation.

In fact, not to be outdone in enthusiastic tailing of the Sandinistas, the USFI “Mandelite” majority has “defended” permanent revolution against the Barnesites and the Australian Socialist Workers Party by declaring the Sandinista regime a form of the proletarian dictatorship. This profoundly revisionist position “defends orthodoxy” by emptying the conception of the proletarian dictatorship of any clear class content. In reality, this position represents a very grave deepening of the revisionism of the Trotskyist-centrist USFI majority— an important step in the direction of a *fundamental rejection* of Trotskyism through a *systematically falsifying redefinition* of all its key terms.

In such a context, the positions of the documents on the Nicaraguan revolution presented in this issue of ITR represent a critically important intervention in the ongoing and now gravely deepening crisis of the Fourth International. In recognizing the extremely contradictory character of the radical petty-bourgeois nationalism of the Sandinista regime, the ITC necessarily rejects the open revisionism of those one-time

Trotskyists whose support for the regime's gains leads them to reject the necessity of continuing the struggle in Nicaragua for proletarian political independence and the proletarian dictatorship. Similarly, the ITC's willingness to grapple with the contradictions of the Sandinistas is utterly counterposed to the Mandeliste false "orthodoxy" in which a perverse "defense" of permanent revolution combines a denial of essential realities with a theoretical project which, if carried through to completion, would render meaningless the basic political terminology of Marxist science.

3. "The Nicaraguan Revolution" (April/May 1980)

We reprint the resolution on the Nicaraguan revolution adopted in April 1980 by the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC—predecessor organization to the ITC) both as an important historical document and as evidence of the possibility, even quite early in the development of the Sandinista regime, of seeing the main dynamics of the Sandinista revolution without resort either to impressionistic revisionism (whether of the open or the pseudo-orthodox varieties) or the substitution of dogmatic denunciation for concrete, dialectical analysis.

4. "Resolution on Nicaragua" (December 1984)

The resolution on Nicaragua adopted by the ITC's International Executive Committee in December 1984 reviews, updates, refines, and develops the positions of the 1980 TILC statement.

Further, the ITC resolution is offered here as a contribution to the development of a systematic discussion of a general question which the Sandinista regime poses in an especially sharp manner: the significance of radical petty-bourgeois nationalist governments in the period since World War II. Although this question raises many of the same issues as the postwar development of deformed workers' states, it has not received anything like the same amount of attention and systematic discussion. The Nicaraguan revolution—and the political disorientation evident in the responses of the USFI and many other forces to the Nicaraguan revolution—makes the development of such a discussion an urgent task for Trotskyists.

The ITC calls on Trotskyists outside our ranks to join with us in developing this overdue discussion.

5. "The Fight for Women's Liberation in Nicaragua" (April 1985)

The final text in this issue of ITR calls attention to a central failure of the Sandinista regime: its incapacity to confront openly and systematically the special oppression of women in Nicaragua and therefore the entire complex of social, economic, and political problems stemming from the oppressiveness of the bourgeois nuclear family.

Since an assessment of this failure is critical to any serious evaluation of the Sandinista regime, the ITC will be working on a detailed analysis of the situation of women in the Nicaraguan revolution.

The overwhelming tendency of the bulk of the left to ignore or sugar-coat any treatment of this question is an extreme expression of the opportunism which has characterized most of the left's overall treatment of the Sandinistas. Genuine revolutionists *must* always remember, take seriously, and act on the fact—recognized by the founders of Marxism—that the situation of women is a decisive index of the general state of any society.

Resident Secretariat
International Trotskyist Committee
May 1985

NOTE ON TEXTS

We have reprinted the text of the April/May 1980 TILC resolution on the Nicaraguan revolution from the second number of TILC's mimeographed *International Discussion Bulletin*, after carefully editing this text to correct typographical and other technical problems in its original production. A draft of this resolution was adopted at a TILC meeting held 6-8 April 1980. The resolution was subsequently completed and updated—presumably by the TILC Secretariat—to take account of the events later that month (specifically the Chamorro and Robelo resignations from the Government of National Reconstruction). We have added titles to the first two sections and inserted footnotes on two substantive points where there is some danger of confusion arising from the original text.

The ITC International Executive Committee (IEC) approved the line and partial texts of the two ITC resolutions printed here, at a meeting held 28-31 December 1984. The ITC International Secretariat completed the texts in January 1985 for distribution at the “twelfth” USFI World Congress, held in Western Europe 28 January-6 February (the ITC having observer status at this Congress).

Subsequent to this distribution, the ITC Resident Secretariat made a few further changes in preparing the texts of the two ITC IEC resolutions for final publication here. In the ITC IEC resolution on the British miners' strike, point 13 (on Scargill) was slightly revised and considerably elaborated, at the suggestion of the British IEC member who had written the original draft. The changes clarify but do not substantially alter the sense of the text distributed at the USFI World Congress. The changes made in the IEC resolution on Nicaragua consist of a few minor improvements in the English translation from the Italian of the original draft.

“The Fight for Women’s Liberation in Nicaragua” is excerpted and edited from a longer article, “Women and Revolution in Nicaragua,” in *Fighting Worker*, April 1985.

Material in square brackets in the ITC texts has been inserted by the ITC Secretariat. Material in square brackets in the TILC resolution was originally inserted by TILC, with the exception of three insertions by *ITR*: the two footnotes and the translation of “*Tercerista*.”

ITR
May 1985

RESOLUTION ON THE BRITISH MINERS' STRIKE

**International Executive Committee of the
International Trotskyist Committee
30 December 1984**

1. The British miners' strike—the longest national strike in the history of the British working class—has already had a profound influence on the British labor movement. It will clearly influence the future development of the class struggle in Britain in significant ways and has important implications for the working class internationally.

2. The origins of the dispute go back to the acute class conflicts in Britain in the early 1970's. During the 1960's and 1970's the right-wing leaders of the National Union of Miners (NUM) cooperated with large-scale pit closures and the decline in coal-mining jobs. Opposition to pit closures was thus limited to piecemeal, isolated local actions. However, major national pay strikes by miners in 1972 and 1974 were central to the upsurge of militant working-class opposition to the Tory (Conservative Party) government of Edward Heath. These strikes won widespread support from other sections of workers and spread the tactics of the flying picket and mass picket. The 1974 strike led directly to the fall of the Heath government. It was in response to this wave of struggle that the British state, after 1972, began the series of major changes in police organization, tactics, and training, the results of which are being seen in the present conflict.

3. The 1972 and 1974 strikes saw the right-wing NUM leaders largely bypassed by the rank and file. This was one of the high points of the shop-floor movement of the 1960's and early 1970's. This movement had developed in the postwar boom and during the early, poorly prepared attempts of the state to attack working-class organization as the postwar boom broke up. It was in the main restricted to trade union demands, and its militancy had thus developed on essentially sectional lines. This made it politically vulnerable as conditions changed sharply with growing unemployment and changed tactics by the ruling class.

4. In fact it was the 1974-1979 Labour Party government which, in cooperation with the trade union bureaucrats, carried out the major attacks on the shop-floor movement, giving particular attention to the miners. Though conceding the miners' 1974 pay claim, this government proceeded with widespread closures of coal pits and introduced a productivity bonus scheme which set area against area within the NUM. Though rejected by the NUM national conference and in an NUM national ballot, the productivity bonus scheme was still implemented by the courts through actions instigated by right-wing leaders of the Nottingham area of the NUM (a major center of scabbing in the present strike).

5. When the Conservative Party government of Margaret Thatcher replaced this discredited Labour government in May 1979, it had a secret manifesto for dealing with the miners. This was the Ridley Report of 1978, which outlined a program for changes in the organization and use of the police, building up coal stocks, diversifying fuel consumption, playing on the divisions in the trade unions, and picking a fight on ground of the government's own choosing. This was the blueprint for the present conflict.

Between 1979 and 1983 the Tories inflicted a series of defeats on workers, each time counting on and getting the effective cooperation of the leadership of the British national trade union federation, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), directly or indirectly.

In 1981 the Tory government withdrew a program of pit closures in the face of a strike in South Wales, because it was not yet ready for the conflict. However, most of these closures were later carried out piecemeal. A sign of the growing discontent of miners with this situation was the election, in December 1981, of a new, "left-wing" leadership, strongly influenced by the politics of Stalinism, headed by Arthur Scargill.

6. The 1983 general Parliamentary election created a situation in which a miners' strike was inevitable. The second consecutive electoral defeat for the British Labour Party (in fact the party's worst electoral defeat ever) demonstrated that large sections of the working class, while having no independent political alternative, had little faith in the Labour Party's reformism.

The working class itself was not defeated by the election. In fact, the level of strike action increased following the election, for two general reasons. First, the Tories knew that to implement their policies they had to inflict major defeats on organized workers. Second, the bureaucrats, while moving to the right in this situation, were now unable to use the prospect of a future Labour government to hold back struggles. The result was a series of direct TUC sellouts—most notably the sellout of printing workers fighting antiunion laws (the National Graphical Association [NGA] dispute of the last months of 1983).

7. Half the unofficial strikes in 1983 took place in the mines. This showed a growing willingness to take militant action. But there were divisions along regional lines, those areas favored by the productivity bonus scheme being reluctant to strike. These divisions were exacerbated by the lack of leadership from the "lefts" now in control of the NUM. Repeatedly they failed to mobilize action, putting unity with the right wing of the NUM national executive first and hiding behind the supposed need to hold a national ballot before authorizing a strike over the closure of the Lewis Merthyr colliery in South Wales.

This attitude on the part of Scargill and the other NUM "left" national leaders determined the way the current strike developed in 1984—that is, on a rolling area-by-area

basis, starting over the closure of the Cortonwood pit in Yorkshire—a clear case of provocation by the National Coal Board (the management of the state-owned coal industry). Only then did the NUM national executive make the strike official, without holding the national union ballot they had previously presented as essential.

The previous history of divisions meant that from the start 20 percent of miners refused to join the strike.

8. The question of the holding of a national union ballot was used by the scabs to give themselves a cloak of “democracy” and by Labour Party leaders and union bureaucrats who wanted to distance themselves from the strike. Even some sections of the “revolutionary” left adapted to this pressure. The national-ballot argument was in fact an attempt to play on sectionalism and isolate the strikers. The role of a ballot would have been to atomize workers. The function of proletarian democracy is to mobilize the independent collective action of workers. The case for a national ballot was an argument from formal, bourgeois democracy, which breaks down the active class forces into passive individual voters. To accept this would have allowed the management to use those workers not immediately affected by closures against those who were facing the immediate threat of closures (a traditional management tactic).

9. The main problem for the strike has been its relative isolation in the face of the sectionalism of the labor movement. The key to the strike’s victory has therefore been—and is now—the spreading of the strike to the rest of the organized labor movement.

Solidarity action is clearly vital—and considerable solidarity has been shown, especially by rail workers. However, it has not been enough to win a major political strike at a time of mass unemployment, when many groups of workers have suffered serious setbacks themselves. It is essential to fight for united action to bring other workers out on their own wage claims, alongside the miners. Militants should be demanding that wage claims be brought forward in all unions and strike action taken now to win them.

Beyond this, militants in the NUM and other unions should be arguing for joint action to defend jobs and wages, each section staving out until the demands of all sections involved have been met. This would break down the current isolation and lack of confidence felt by many sections of the working class.

10. Such united action cannot be built by the bureaucracy, though it is essential to fight to commit the official trade union movement to it. As a first step, it is necessary to build joint rank- and-file committees of miners, transport workers, and other workers militantly supporting a struggle to spread the miners’ strike, to build and monitor solidarity action. Further, it is necessary for the miners to appeal directly to the rank and

file of other unions for joint strike action and to build local coordinating committees with other sections of the working class in struggle. These can become the means to involve the mass of workers and take control of action out of the hands of the bureaucrats.

11. The tactics of the NUM leadership have avoided such demands. While Scargill avoided official TUC involvement in the dispute because of the TUC national bureaucracy's history of betrayals, he did not attempt to mobilize the rank and file of unions other than the NUM. Instead, he relied on unilateral links with 'left' bureaucrats in other unions, in particular the rail, transport, and public service unions. These bureaucrats made fiery speeches and gave financial help, and the rail unions have done a lot to stop coal movements. However, they have so far consistently held back from any struggles that could mobilize their members alongside the miners.

Rail workers have suffered severe attacks on jobs and pay in recent years, and the management of the state-owned British Rail is demanding further staffing cuts. In the spring of 1984 it was insisting that this was a precondition for any pay raise, and a national rail strike was set for May. British Rail then offered a small pay raise and delayed the question of job loss for further talks. The "left" leaders of the rail unions seized on this as a way out of a strike, thus isolating the miners and selling out their own members. Moreover, these same leaders, while giving financial support to rail workers suspended for solidarity action, have refused to defend these members by industrial action.

Similarly, the leadership of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)—the largest union in Britain—has done little to fight for effective solidarity action. Dockers in the TGWU were called out on strike twice during the summer over scabbing. However, the TGWU leaders refused, on the one hand, to argue openly and clearly that this was action in support of the miners and, on the other hand, would not build these strikes into a consistent and clear fight in defense of their own members' interests. Dockers were often confused about these strikes, especially in the case of the second strike, which opened up divisions among ports and rapidly collapsed in confusion.

At no point did Scargill and the other national NUM leaders clearly oppose the betrayals by these "left" TUC bureaucrats or demand that they really fight. By the time of the TUC national conference in September, the NUM strategy had clearly collapsed, and Scargill had to choose between going to the rank and file or appeasing the right wing of the TUC. He chose the latter course.

12. Many sections of the socialist left hailed the adoption by the TUC national conference of a motion of support for the miners as a step forward. In fact, despite militant rhetoric supporting it, this motion was a maneuver against the strike. Its crucial points were that the NUM should consult with the TUC on the conduct of the strike and that the implementation of solidarity action should be decided by each individual union (the motion's sponsors knowing full well that some of the most crucial unions in the steel

industry and the power stations fully intended to carry on scabbing). Scargill, as a left bureaucrat, accepted this deal rather than polarize the trade union movement and put the other left bureaucrats on the spot.

Subsequently this policy was used to maintain the miners' isolation, providing no further support while obliging the NUM to go through a set of futile talks. All this has meant the development of conditions in which legal actions to have NUM funds sequestered could be seriously pressed. And even though such actions threaten the very existence of the NUM in its present form, the TUC national leadership has refused any supportive action for the miners in defying the law.

Essentially the TUC leadership wants a settlement on the basis of a deal already put before the mining foremen's unions (NACODS): "independent" arbitration on pit closures, which would not even be binding on the National Coal Board.

13. Throughout the miners' strike, ruling-class propaganda has focused its attacks on the figure of NUM "left" leader Arthur Scargill. Revolutionaries must defend Arthur Scargill and the other "left" NUM leaders allied with him against the attacks of the British ruling class—expressed not only in the vitriolic invective of Tory speeches in Parliament and the hysterical headlines of the bourgeois press but also in the treacherous positions of right-wing Labour Party leaders and trade union bureaucrats.

The immediate aim of these attacks is to divide and isolate the miners and to break down the historic strength of the miners' union—its heroic traditions of militancy and solidarity in struggle. The larger objective of these attacks is to secure a defeat of the National Union of Mineworkers, historically the strongest and best organized trade union in Britain, in a way which can demoralize the British labor movement as a whole. More specifically, the most essential aim of the British ruling class in the strike has been to use a decisive defeat of the Mineworkers to bring a decisive end to the period of intense trade union militancy which, from the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes to the massive strike activity of the Winter of Discontent of 1978-1979, had jeopardized capitalist plans for a major restructuring of British capital on the backs of the industrial workers and had threatened to destabilize British bourgeois parliamentary politics in a fundamental and long-lasting way.

Revolutionaries must recognize the critical difference between a Scargill and the bulk of the labor bureaucracy, whose conscious preference is always the maximum possible confinement of the class struggle in the interests of capitalist stability. Under certain kinds of rank-and-file pressure, a Scargill chooses to give, to a certain extent, genuine and effective expression to the militant class-struggle impulses of rank-and-file workers. Given this conscious decision, a Scargill has the capacity, not only—like many right-wing trade union bureaucrats—to take leadership of rank-and-file struggles today in order to betray them tomorrow. Such a leader also can, in certain periods, *actively mobilize* workers in ways which actually raise the level of the class struggle to a significant degree.

It is precisely the fact that Scargill has actually—even though within definite limitations and in a bureaucratically deformed manner—expressed the militant class-struggle impulses and traditions of the British miners, which has accounted for the viciousness of the bourgeois press and Parliamentary attacks on him. And it is Scargill's contradictory but genuine identification with his ranks' militant class-struggle impulses which explains his correct intransigence on many tactical questions and his personal courage in defending the miners' cause.

At the same time, revolutionaries must point out that Scargill and the “left” bureaucrats allied with him bear the major responsibility for the limitation of the miners' strike to essentially sectional (and national) terrain. They have found themselves in the leadership of a strike recognized on all sides as having a political character and immediately involving the interests of all workers in a direct confrontation with the combined forces of a united ruling class and a belligerent bourgeois state. Scargill and his allies themselves have understood and openly declared that this is essentially a *political* strike. Yet they have maintained a policy of confining this strike within the limitations of the strategy and tactics of a highly militant *conventional economic* trade union struggle.

Revolutionaries must make clear that this contradictory policy flows precisely from the politics of Scargill and other “left” trade union bureaucrats like him, who—however much militancy and personal courage they may display in a given confrontation with the ruling class—see the real fight for workers' power and the building of socialist society as something to be taken up only in some perpetually postponed, eternally distant future. In practice, when militant workers look to them for militant leadership, such “left” bureaucrats seek to channel rank-and-file struggles strictly within the confines of policies designed to achieve at most a handful of reforms of the bourgeois state and the capitalist economy.

Such “left” trade union bureaucrats bring to the trade union arena essentially the same capacities and contradictions as such left social-democratic parliamentarians as the British Labour Party's Benn, Heffer, and Skinner bring to the arena of bourgeois parliamentary politics. Echoing what Lenin called ‘the “Kautskyite” distortion of Marxism,’ they draw a definite class line and even recognize:

... that the state is an organ of class rule ... [and] that class antagonisms are irreconcilable. But what is overlooked or glossed over is this: if the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class differences.... it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible, not only without a violent revolution, *but also without the destruction* of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, chap. 1, sec. 1; 1917)

Thus Scargill, in a June 1975 interview, could declare:

The issue is a very simple one: it is *them* and it is *us*. I will never accept that it is anything else, because it is a class battle, it is a class war. While it is them and us, my position is perfectly clear: I want to take fare them for us—in other words, I want to take into common ownership everything in Britain (*New Left Review*, July-August 1975)

While on the question of *how to achieve* socialism in Britain, Scargill in the same interview had only the following “revolutionary” strategy to propose:

I think that the ideal way that the working class can achieve working-class power is to change the Labour Party; not in total, because you can never transform a social-democratic party—it will always remain social-democratic. But you can change the Labour Party in the sense of pulling down the bans and proscriptions. Once you start to have the influence, the operation and the link between the left Marxist groups—all of them—and the Labour Party, you start to determine policies which are of a different kind. Once you have committed the Party—and the quicker this happens the better—to accept conference decisions, the trade union movement ought to be able to control that conference. The unions are the foundation of the Party and should control it. I’ve always supported the bloc vote, and the bloc vote would become ours if we won the leadership in the unions. Once you win those votes in the Party conference you can then win the positions which are necessary to change society. Then all sorts of things could happen In other words, circumstances will determine the type of attitude and the type of action which can be displayed at any one time. Having said all that, I believe it’s in the best interests of the socialist movement to fight for a Labour Party with members affiliated from *all* the Left organizations, committed to a socialist programme on a broad Left base. This can take us so far along the road to a socialist Britain, and then the social-democratic party will have completely served its purpose. We would then need a totally new socialist party embracing the whole of the Left that could complete the job of taking Britain into a new socialist era. That’s how I see the future.

And in 1981, in the theoretical magazine of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Scargill further explained his attitude toward parliamentarism:

Anybody who believes that we shall achieve socialism simply by electing a number of MPs [Members of Parliament] is deluding themselves Parliaments do not necessarily reflect the views of ordinary people, and if you have a Parliament that is not being pushed by a working-class movement demanding, expecting, and requiring change, then you will not get that change I believe that we can bring about a political change through Parliament, but only if it’s backed by mass mobilisation of ordinary working people desirous of change. If we do that, we’ve got the basis for a real revolutionary change in British politics that I want to see (*Marxism Today*, April 1981)

“Scargillism” boils down to just another strategy of “reforming one’s way to ‘revolution,’” in which mass action is no more than a necessary pressure to turn the British Parliament into a body genuinely committed to building a fully socialist Britain. In rejecting the concrete necessity of the destruction of the British bourgeois state and the creation of the proletarian dictatorship, Scargill and the Scargillites must end up as defenders of the bourgeois state and the capitalist economy and therefore as ultimate obstacles to the victory of the working class. And their contradictory loyalties to the proletarian class struggle and the British bourgeois Parliament mean that, in any immediate period of sharp class confrontation, Scargill and his allies will inevitably hedge and vacillate in their *overall policies* because of their fundamental opposition to a Leninist strategy of developing every class battle as far as possible in the direction of dual power, proletarian revolution, and the proletarian dictatorship.

Nevertheless, the British ruling class sees Scargill as extremely dangerous, because his ability to promote the militant struggle of the British miners could inspire millions of other British workers to militant struggle. Such a renewal of the fighting

strength of the British labor movement would put a stop to the entire Thatcher policy of breaking the back of the unions. It would place in jeopardy once again the entire capitalist strategy for reorganizing British capitalism at the expense of the British working class. Thus a defeat of Scargill and Scargillism is an immediate need of the British ruling class.

And the capitalists also sense in Scargill a longer-run and much deeper danger. For they see in Scargill a leader who could—however inadvertently—launch workers on a road of mass struggle that could ultimately lead to proletarian revolution.

Scargill himself in reality seeks only a set of reforms within the limitations of bourgeois democracy and views his bureaucratic control over his ranks as protection against “things getting out of hand.” Our aim as revolutionaries in such a situation must be to build the independent fighting spirit of the ranks themselves in ways that, beginning at the level of struggle militant workers have themselves already embraced, lead unequivocally in the direction of the revolutionary confrontation between proletarian and bourgeois power. As such struggle develops beyond the confines of trade unionism and bourgeois politics, its own dynamic will inevitably produce numerous confrontations between increasingly revolutionary ranks and their backward and vacillating leaders—ideal opportunities for the intervention of consistently revolutionary leadership to win the mass of workers to the perspective of proletarian revolution.

Both in order to attempt to aid the development of such a revolutionary process and to build the revolutionary leadership of the working class through the current struggle, revolutionaries must counterpose to the program of the Scargills a program of transitional demands, leading from posing a correct strategy for winning the current miners’ strike to posing the necessity of proletarian revolution and socialism as the only means of solving the basic problems of the British miners and the British working class as a whole.

14. The British miners’ strike for jobs is a direct challenge to the strategy of the British ruling class. There is no solution to the problems of British capitalism within the framework of British capitalism and its bourgeois state which does not directly and systematically attack the jobs, living standards, and basic rights of workers. The particular Stalinist-inspired policies of the NUM “left” leadership—concentrating on defense of a capitalist “Plan for Coal” from the 1970’s, the need for higher subsidies to make British coal more competitive, and British self-sufficiency in energy—are therefore totally illusory. Miners need a strategy which is based on *their* needs, not the needs of capitalism.

In their fight for the right to a job, when the capitalist government is saying it needs fewer Workers, the miners should demand the sharing of work, through a sliding scale of hours, under workers’ control, without loss in pay— and without prejudice to the fight to defend wages and living standards.

Further, miners should demand that, where the National Coal Board claims that pits are “exhausted,” the workers must carry out their own independent examination and

draw up their own plans for the development of reserves, opening new seams, etc. Where the National Coal Board argues that pits are economically nonviable, miners must demand the opening of the books to rank-and-file committees to reveal the true finances of the industry, including the massive profits made by the banks and the ripoffs by private contractors.

This should be the basis for a political campaign for the suspension of interest payments and the nationalization of the private contracting firms that are parasitic on the coal industry.

15. Militants in the NUM should broaden this fight for workers' control into every aspect of their struggle. Where management claims that pits are in danger from neglect, miners should demand that they carry out their own inspection and that necessary maintenance is carried out under workers' control. This necessitates pithead occupations and the election of occupation committees to exclude management. Similarly, where management tries to send in scabs, miners should oppose this by occupation.

The fight for workers' control is also directly related to the struggle for solidarity action in support of the miners-workers' control of rail depots, for example—and to the struggle for united action with other workers fighting job losses.

At the level of the coal industry nationally, militants should campaign for full, democratic workers' management of this major nationalized enterprise.

16. The attack by the British ruling class on the coal industry has been paralleled by massive cuts by the Thatcher government in public transport, public health, child care, education, and other public services; and by continuing moves to privatize nationalized industries and services.

To unite the struggles to defend jobs and services in these sections of the economy, it is necessary to have a political strategy for the defense of working-class needs and interests against capitalist profiteering. Militants in the NUM and all public-sector unions should demand a massive program of socially useful public works, with full trade union rights and under workers' control. Such a program could not be left to the capitalists. It would have to be based on a workers' plan drawn up by elected workers' committees on the basis of their independent assessments of *their* needs.

17. The issues of united action, rank-and-file links, and workers' control are also vital to the women's support committees, which have played an extremely important role in this strike.

The self-organization of women in the mining communities has been one of the most significant developments of the strike. Nearly all communities in the coalfields now

have a women's support committee or miners' wives' committee. These committees have had a major role in maintaining the struggle. Beginning as local committees to raise material support for the strikers, they have over time taken on more and more of an independent political and organizational character. Their members have regularly been on the picket lines and have toured the labor movement across Britain to build political as well as financial support for the strike. The committees have established links at a national level.

This development is unprecedented in the history of British industrial disputes. It represents the resistance of entire working-class communities to a political threat to their existence. As a result, these committees are having to grapple with many of the immediate material problems affecting their communities—most immediately, the economic pressures which the state is applying to undermine the strike. For example, sixteen pounds per week is automatically deducted from welfare benefits, because the government officially “assumes” miners are getting strike pay, even though there has been no strike pay at any stage. Money has also been deducted if families are thought to be receiving food parcels. Such measures have to be fought by establishing Links with workers in the benefit offices, setting up rank-and-file liaison committees of benefit workers, miners' wives, and miners. These liaison committees should campaign for industrial action in the offices against the government's economic blackmail of the strikers, including occupation of offices under workers' and users' control.

Women's support committees should insist that welfare benefits should serve the needs of the working class, instead of being a weapon in the hands of the government. Their demand should be for a sliding scale of benefits based on the cost of living. The assessment of the cost of living cannot be left to the state, however. It has to be made by the women's support committees themselves, who should also establish minimum levels for the scale. The campaign for this policy needs to be carried on throughout the labor movement.

The experience of these committees and their role in the strike and the degree of independence the strike-support movement has afforded thousands of working-class women, raise wider issues concerning the role of the family in capitalist society and its use as a means of social and political control. This situation should be the basis of a campaign for the socialization of child-care facilities and for socialized catering, under workers' and users' control, so that workers' needs are met and women are released from the position of having to be unpaid providers of essential services.

18. The women's support committees have won considerable support from many women outside the mining communities, who have recognized the importance of this movement among miners' wives in relation to the struggle for the independence of women generally.

The miners' strike has also won important support among other specially oppressed sectors, in particular in the black communities and among lesbians and gay

men. There is a real recognition in these communities of the political importance of the miners' strike and its relationship to the constant oppression which they suffer at the hands of the state.

This has had a profound effect on the attitude of thousands of rank-and-file miners. It was no accident that, at the autumn 1984 Labour Party national conference, the NUM was the largest union to support the setting up of autonomous black sections of the party and one of the few unions to support women's demands for greater independence in the party—and that the NUM sent a public message of support to the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights.

It is essential that these links are built on and that every opportunity is used to draw together the struggles of the different sections of the working class against exploitation and oppression.

19. From the very beginning, the striking miners have come face to face with the force of the state in a more naked and brutal fashion than in any British trade union struggle in this century. The strike has actually seen a new style of highly centralized policing in Britain, with local police drawn from all over the country and employed against the strike as parts of a virtual national police force. Basic rights and civil liberties have been totally ignored and systematically violated, pit villages have been occupied and constantly harassed, and pickets have been brutally attacked and picketing rendered ineffective in many cases by massive police operations. The miners who defend themselves against this violence and try to counter police operations are absolutely right. Miners and the mining communities in general cannot passively suffer these attacks on their struggle.

Victory in the miners' strike is clearly impossible unless picket lines are defended against police attacks. The high degree of organization and coordination of police operations against the strike requires a high degree of organization and coordination of the striking miners' defense. The police have to be driven out of the communities they are trying to terrorize. Nor can the miners' struggle be raised to the necessary level of pithead occupations and the fight for workers' control in the absence of highly organized physical protection of the miners. All this requires the organization of workers' defense squads under the democratic control of local rank-and-file strike committees and the development of national rank-and-file bodies to coordinate the miners' response to the national antistrike campaign by the police.

The NUM is right to refuse to obey the court decisions imposing fines and sequestering union funds. And it is correct to link this refusal to the Thatcher government's systematic intensification of the use of the law against the working class. Since 1979, three antiunion laws have been enacted in quick succession. These laws hang over all workers in struggle and will doubtless be used far more widely if the miners should be defeated. However, it is important that militants realize that it is not in the main these particular new laws which have been used against the miners. Most of the cases

against the NUM have been brought under long-established, “ordinary” laws and legal precedents. It is the whole legal system which is a system of class justice, not merely the Thatcher government’s new antiunion laws.

20. The miners’ strike is clearly a political strike. That is how the government sees it, and that is how the miners see it. They know that they are standing in the way of government policy and that the Tories want to defeat them in order to demoralize the rest of the trade union movement.

But objectively every other working-class struggle in Britain to defend jobs, pay, and basic rights has the same dynamic. Every attempt to unite these struggles will make their political character clearer to militant workers. The fight against the government is central. Thus we have to see the campaign for united action to spread the strike, for rank-and-file control of the strike, for workers’ defense squads—all this and every other effort to strengthen the strike and make victory possible—as preparation to bring down the government.

Such a struggle to bring down the government will mean a general strike, but this cannot be posed in the abstract or as a routine call on the TUC. It has to be based on the struggle for united action and rank-and-file control. Nor can it be left to the bureaucracy. As the experience of the British working class in the General Strike of 1926 made clear, even if the TUC bureaucracy can be forced to launch a general strike, the bureaucrats will surely undermine and betray it. The effective development of a general strike must lead to the creation of Councils of Action in every area, based on the militant rank and file and independent of the bureaucracy, made up of elected delegates of all workers in struggle, and linked in a national network. These Councils of Action would direct the strike, control supplies and services, and organize defense. They would cut across sectional and trade union lines and oppose any attempts at a sellout by the bureaucracy.

21. To pose the need for a general strike to bring down the government raises the question of what is to replace the present government. After all, in 1974, following a very high level of class struggle, a Tory government fell only to be replaced by a Labour Party government which implemented a long series of attacks on the British working class that prepared the way for Thatcher. Now many Labour “lefts” are calling for the election of a Labour government “as loyal to the working class as Thatcher is to her class.” However, if this is seen as simply another parliamentary “solution,” it will in reality be no answer to the needs of the working class.

It is necessary to fight for a *workers’ government*. This would not be another parliamentary “Labour” government of capitalism. It would be a government *based on the independent organizations of struggle of the working class and acting in the interests of the workers over against the capitalists*. It would be a government that immediately acted against the capitalist state machine, instead of relying on the “neutrality” of the police, the army, the courts, and the government bureaucracy. It would have to rely on

the mass organization of rank-and-file workers in Councils of Action, workers' defense squads, etc. Only such a government could prevent the ruling class returning to power to launch even more vicious attacks on the workers.

22. The miners' strike has deepened the crisis of the Labour Party in Britain, threatening the Labour Party right wing's strategy of reestablishing the party as a respectable alternative capitalist government.

The NUM is one of the most important unions affiliated to the Labour Party. For this union to take direct action against government policy and to defy the courts, with the support of large sections of the Labour Party's membership, threatens to polarize the labor movement around the question of class struggle or class collaboration. This would undermine the potential usefulness of Labour's leaders to the ruling class— that is, their ability to restrict and control workers' struggles.

It has been difficult for Neil Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party, to participate in a direct sellout of the strike because of the determination of the miners, the support they have won in the Labour Party, and the general acknowledgment of the negative political effect of a defeat for the NUM. Initially most of the Labour leaders simply distanced themselves from the strike, lending their support to the calls for a national union ballot. But after the first few months of the strike, this became impossible. Their tactics changed to a combination of minimal verbal support with frenzied attempts to arrange a "compromise." Since it has become obvious that there is no room for such a "compromise" in the current situation, Kinnock's policy has been to do all he can get away with to weaken and isolate the strike, in the hope of making the miners more amenable to a sellout.

Kinnock has repeatedly attacked the "violence" of the strikers, while ignoring the brutality of the state. He has refused to speak at NUM regional rallies. He has declared that "the law must be respected" and has joined chauvinistic witchhunts against the NUM's getting money from Libya. All along the line he has operated in tandem with the right-wing TUC bureaucrats.

The rank and file of the labor movement must deal with such traitors. The militant ranks must make it clear that Kinnock has no place as a leader of the labor movement. As an affiliated union, the NUM should demand that Kinnock resign and call on the left-wing Campaign Group of Labour Members of Parliament to put forward a candidate for the leadership of the party who fully supports the striking miners' fight. This is a demand that should be taken up throughout the labor movement. The rank and file must insist that the Labour Party lefts and the left-wing trade union leaders act to support the miners and prevent a sellout by Kinnock and the TUC.

23. The inability of the Labour Party leadership to prevent a major political struggle by a trade union on the scale of the miners' strike, weakens reformism's base of

support within the capitalist state, among the bourgeoisie themselves and among vacillating “middle-class” elements. But this at the same time weakens the strength of reformism in the working class. A major element in working-class support for reformism has been the apparent ability of the reformists to work through the capitalist state to defend working-class interests. The clear inability of the Labour Party to play this role over the last fifteen years has led to a sharp fall in electoral support and widespread skepticism towards the party among workers.

There is no solution to the problems posed by the miners’ strike within the reformist, parliamentary perspectives of the Labour Party. The strike poses very sharply the need for a genuinely independent political alternative for the working class, which can only lie in the construction of a revolutionary leadership. It is essential to win the most militant elements in the working class to this perspective: this is the key strategic task of Trotskyists in Britain today.

24. The British miners’ strike has implications for the class struggle internationally and for the international awareness of workers in Britain.

The connections are greatest in the case of the other countries of Western Europe, where the working class faces problems very similar to those in Britain: unemployment, a series of defeats, the collaboration of the bureaucrats with the state in selling out struggles, a high degree of sectionalism. And, as in Britain, in Western Europe generally both ruling-class attacks and major working-class struggles have recently focused on the core industrial sectors of the economy (coal, steel, auto, etc.), where the capitalists now feel the greatest need to reduce costs at the expense of the workforce—in order to achieve sufficient profitability to make major outlays for new technological developments possible—and where workers are generally most strongly organized. Important groups of these workers have shown a high level of combativity in the recent period, including major strikes in several Western European countries over the course of 1984.

In fact, there has been significant support for the British miners’ strike from Western European trade unionists. Nevertheless, large quantities of coal are reaching Britain via European Continental ports. The relationship of the working class of Western Europe to the British miners’ strike thus reflects (though in a less sharp and immediate fashion) many of the problems within Britain. A victory for the British miners would not only lead to an upsurge of struggles in Britain but would also increase the confidence of the workers in the rest of Western Europe.

Mineworkers in South Africa have recognized the potential importance of this strike to their struggles and sent expressions of solidarity, including financial support. In Canada and the United States, in particular as the strike continued into the recent months, militant workers have become aware that the British miners’ strike has a special significance.

The level of struggle in the imperialist countries will affect the ability of imperialism to control developments in the semi-colonies, which are in a constant state of ferment and

turmoil. A victory for the British miners and an increase in class struggle in Britain and other imperialist countries would be likely to lead to an escalation of struggles in the semicolonial countries. A defeat for the British miners would most probably contribute to prolonging the present state of ferment, while delaying major revolutionary upsurges. Clearly militants in a number of semicolonial countries have been following the strike with great interest. Trade unionists in India, recognizing the strike's importance, have sent financial aid, despite their own poverty.

Coal imports to Britain during the strike have come largely from South Africa, semicolonial countries, and deformed workers' states, including Vietnam and, most notably, Poland. This underlines the capacity of the national bourgeoisies to collaborate internationally to attempt to defeat trade union struggles with the clear potential for raising the level of the proletarian class struggle internationally. And it also clearly poses the willingness of the Stalinist bureaucracies to collaborate in such international anti-labor attacks. The case of Poland in particular has raised questions about Stalinism in the British labor movement. The "left" leadership of the NUM is heavily influenced by Stalinism and has in the past supported the Polish bureaucrats against Solidarnosc. However, the aid given to Thatcher by the Polish bureaucracy has called into question their support for the Polish Stalinists and the Stalinist bureaucrats' claims to be "defending socialism and proletarian internationalism" in suppressing the Polish working class.

Within Poland the British miners' strike has contributed to the polarization of Solidarnosc. A section of the leadership around Walesa is moving to the right, and Walesa has apparently stated his support for Thatcher. However, underground left-wing Solidarnosc leaders, especially in the Silesian coalfields, have declared the necessity of support for the British miners' strike.

Thus, the British miners' strike has, the longer it has been prolonged, more and more posed a series of international issues and tended to awaken international proletarian solidarity. This has happened despite the commitment of the "left" NUM bureaucrats to fight the British government on the basis of a falsely counterposed set of narrowly national bourgeois economic policies. Even as the difficulties of the strike have intensified because of the limited basis on which Scargill and the other NUM "left" leaders have insisted on waging it, the actual dynamic of the strike has created conditions for a significant advance in internationalism on the part of militant rank-and-file miners.

25. Whatever the immediate outcome of the strike, this sort of advance in consciousness on the part of the most militant miners and other workers will represent a major gain for the British working class, which must in particular be favorable to—and can in fact only be developed by—the building of a consistent, orthodox Trotskyist party in Britain as a section of a regenerated and reconstructed Fourth International.

THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION

**Trotskyist International Liaison Committee
April/May 1980**

1. The Beginning of the Nicaraguan Revolution

The Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International) hails the victory gained by the workers and peasants of Nicaragua with the revolutionary overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship. Their victory has dealt a blow against imperialism and strengthened the revolutionary forces of the international proletariat in its struggle for socialism.

But the Nicaraguan revolution remains uncompleted: its vast potential has not yet been realized. The gains which have already been made are great but limited, and they have not been secured against the threats of attacks from imperialism and international reaction. The strongest defense of the Nicaraguan revolution is the fight to consolidate and develop these existing gains by a proletarian-internationalist struggle for a socialist revolution in Nicaragua.

2. The Challenge of the Nicaraguan Revolution

The smashing of the Somoza tyranny struck a heavy blow against US imperialism, which had sustained the dictatorship as a vital force in its strategy of dominating the turbulent southern states of the Americas. Maimed by a succession of attacks, from their defeat in Southeast Asia to the Iranian revolution, the US imperialists now faced the certain prospect of renewed revolutionary mobilizations throughout the region, spurred on by the example of Nicaragua. This threat has already taken concrete form in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

Revolution in Nicaragua also brought fresh anxieties to world Stalinism, already grappling with the mounting problems of how to maintain a counterrevolutionary hold on the advancing struggles of the international proletariat. This new problem centered on the role to be adopted by the Castro regime in Cuba, the local agents of the Kremlin bureaucracy.

But at the same time the world Trotskyist movement was confronted with vital questions of revolutionary strategy and the application of the revolutionary program. The Nicaraguan revolution brought once again to the fore issues which have underlain every stage of the postwar crisis of the Fourth International: the theory of permanent revolution and the essential political independence both of the proletariat as a class and of its revolutionary leadership.

Faced with these issues, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) split, and so a new phase was opened up in the struggle to reconstruct the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution.

These developments make it all the more urgent for us to approach the necessary task of assessing the Nicaraguan revolution and answering the two key questions:

1. What lessons are to be learned from the revolutionary struggles which overthrew Somoza's dictatorship?
2. What tasks are posed for Trotskyists to give a consistently revolutionary leadership to the struggles of the Nicaraguan proletariat and its potential allies in the peasantry and other oppressed social layers?

3. The Somoza Dictatorship

The particular character of the Somoza dictatorship must first be understood. Installed and maintained in power by US imperialism, Somoza ensured the continued superexploitation of the Nicaraguan workers and peasants through the repressive apparatus of a brutal dictatorship—in particular through the US-trained National Guard. These conditions, with the total suppression of democratic rights, also drove the layers of the urban petty bourgeoisie into opposition.

Yet Somoza's tyranny also produced enemies among wide sections of the capitalist class itself, for its dictatorship was not merely political. The Somoza family owned 25 percent of all industry and 40 percent of all workable land. The economic dictatorship of this Somoza monopoly antagonized other capitalists, who were prevented by its stranglehold from developing the economy to satisfy their own drive for profits.

Along with the reactionary power of the Roman Catholic church, this “anti-Somoza bourgeoisie” recognized the highly explosive state of the class struggle in Nicaragua. Seeking to avert the threat of revolution, these elements called for the “democratization” of the regime and turned for support to the Carter administration and, especially, to the European Social Democracy, which had begun (through the vehicle of the “Socialist International”) to pay particular attention to the hard tasks of counterrevolutionary activity in South and Central America.

In this way they hoped to establish a bourgeois democracy which would either limit or eliminate the power of Somoza and leave them free to develop the exploitation of the workers and peasants for their own profits and not to stuff the private coffers of the Somoza family and its small surrounding clique.

The Somoza dictatorship thus created the conditions for a “national revolution.” As in Tsarist Russia or as in Iran under the tyranny of the Shah, bourgeoisie, peasantry,

and proletariat shared a common interest in the overthrow of the autocracy. The crucial question was which class would give the political leadership to that revolution and determine its class content.

4. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN)

It was in these conditions that the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) came forward into increasing prominence as a force in the struggle against Somoza. Formed in July 1962, the FSLN was a petty-bourgeois nationalist movement which identified itself as “Marxist” and set itself the task of “national democratic revolution.” Different currents emerged within and split the FSLN over the course of the 1970’s. One developed a relatively fiercer anti-imperialist stance than the others (the *Guerra Popular Prolongada* tendency [GPP]). Another proclaimed itself “Leninist” and called for a primary orientation of building a party in the working class (*Tendencia Proletaria* [TP]).

But with ‘unification’ early in 1979, hegemony over the FSLN was established by the *Tercerista* (“third-force”) tendency, which combined the traditional strategy of rural guerrilla warfare (based on an interpretation of the Cuban revolution) with a popular-frontist alliance with the anti-Somoza bourgeoisie, backed by the Latin American “social democracies” (Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica).

Despite its defeat, the rising of September 1978 revealed both the strength of the FSLN itself and the high degree of mass support which existed for a military victory of the FSLN over Somoza’s forces. But it is particularly important to stress the character of the mass strike action which gripped the cities in this period. Although there was undoubtedly mass enthusiasm among workers for this action, it was not independent class action by the proletariat—neither spontaneous nor led by a revolutionary proletarian leadership.

On the contrary, these strikes were blessed by the Catholic hierarchy and in many cases directly organized by employers from the “anti-Somoza bourgeoisie,” who continued to pay wages throughout the stoppages. As in any other variety of popular-frontist alliance at whatever level between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, it was the class interests of the proletariat which were inevitably subordinated to the political dominance of the bourgeoisie in this confusion of class interests. The “anti-Somoza bourgeoisie,” led by *Las Doce* [“The Twelve”], sought to gain political power by harnessing the revolutionary energies of the proletariat.

It was clearly the essential task of Trotskyists to fight for the political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie, in opposition to every section of the FSLN which opposed this strategy in the name of the “democratic” or “anti-imperialist” front. The direction of this strategy could be followed only by fighting to build soviets as organs of workers’ power independent of the “anti-Somoza bourgeoisie” and of the Sandinista leadership itself.

After the September rising, the FSLN was clearly established as the leadership of the mass struggles against the tyranny. Over the next few months—and with their “unification” once accomplished—the FSLN leaders proceeded to consolidate their alliance with bourgeois forces in preparation for the final offensive against Somoza’s dictatorship.

5. The Government of National Reconstruction (GNR)

As the last bloody days of the revolution of July 1979 were reached, the FSLN established a junta to replace the crumbling dictatorship. The Government of National Reconstruction (GNR) consisted of one leading Sandinista—and four bourgeois members: a millionaire sugar plantation owner, a large landowner, another major employer, and a technocrat formerly employed by the World Bank.

The relationship between the FSLN leadership and the GNR was clearly spelled out by Daniel Ortega from the Joint National Directorate of the FSLN:

Some people have asked whether the government is the FSLN or the Government of National Reconstruction....The truth is that the government Junta is in charge of all the high functions of the state. Then the FSLN, which at the beginning took charge of the country, is now in the process of handing over the administrative and government apparatus to the Junta. (*Barricada*, 31 July 1979)

Politically dominated by the bourgeoisie, the Government of National Reconstruction derived all its power from the authority of the FSLN forces and was clearly powerless to act in any direction without securing the agreement of—and indeed working through—the agency of the FSLN leadership. Once the Junta had appointed its ministers, it was actually the second tier of new state institutions, *directly controlled by the FSLN*, which put into practice the decrees of the GNR.

But if the FSLN leadership was able to formalize rapidly the intimate bonds it sought with the bourgeoisie, its relationship with the proletariat and peasantry was a more complex affair.

The final struggles to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship had taken place in conditions of tremendous mass mobilizations in both the urban and rural areas. The neighborhood “Sandinista Defense Committees,”¹ spontaneously organized on a local basis, were the characteristic form taken by this movement. As their name implies, these bodies were in no way set up in conscious opposition to the FSLN leadership. Nevertheless, they represented a serious potential threat to the popular-frontist strategy of the FSLN, both by their independent class nature and, in particular, by the class demands which they soon began to raise.

The “Sandinista Defense Committees” could have developed into a genuine soviet movement of dual-power proportions, and it was therefore necessary for the FSLN

leadership to curb their powers and control their evolution. This process was carried out alongside the first measures of the Government of National Reconstruction.

6. Capitalist Reconstruction Begins

Protracted civil war and revolutionary struggles had brought the economy of Nicaragua to the brink of collapse. Agricultural production had been severely disrupted by the campaigns of the FSLN, while industrial production had been thrown into chaos by the mass strike action. The pro-Somoza bourgeoisie had fled, closing down businesses and removing capital, as the international agencies of finance capital (IMF, etc.) vacillated on granting desperately needed loans to a regime clearly on the point of destruction.

Under these circumstances, the GNR set about its task of “reconstruction.” With the political dominance of the bourgeoisie and its class interests conceded by the FSLN, this could mean only one thing: the reconstruction of a *capitalist* Nicaragua. But the scale of the mass mobilizations and the peculiar character of the Somoza dictatorship meant that the bourgeoisie was forced to act within specific constraints.

The capitalists were unable to move directly to a redistribution of Somoza’s property among themselves. Pressure from the mobilized workers and peasants forced them to concede the nationalization of Somoza’s property, along with that of his family and the *Somocistas* (those elements most closely identified with the old regime). But the progressive aspect of these substantial nationalizations must be understood as inextricably bound up with the reality that they were carried through by a state committed to the defense of capital. As FSLN Commander Bayardo Ace declared: “Private property will not only be respected, but absolutely guaranteed” (*La Prensa*, Buenos Aires, 1 August 1979).

State control of the national banks and the state monopoly on exports of agricultural produce were measures whose dual nature was even more strongly dominated by the immediate economic needs of the bourgeoisie.

It was in the field of international relations that the character of the new regime was most sharply revealed. The Government of National Reconstruction set about rescheduling the foreign debt with capitalist states and institutions and opened fresh negotiations for aid from the imperialist powers and the international bodies of finance capital.

At first these approaches coincided with the new strategy imposed on US imperialism by the overthrow of Somoza. As Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher argued:

With aid the chances will be enhanced [that the revolution] will move in the direction of a democratic regime If we walk away we will almost certainly assure what we don’t want, a

Communist or Cuban regime.

But the US has vacillated and, a year later, is still refusing aid on any substantial scale.

7. The Government of National Reconstruction and the Workers' Organizations

While the Government of National Reconstruction pursued its aim of a deal with imperialism to stabilize capitalism on a new footing in Nicaragua, the mobilizations of workers and peasants had not subsided into passivity.

The regime could afford no delay in tackling the problems posed to its political orientation by this class activity. But at the same time it was prevented from launching into direct confrontation with the workers and peasants by the precarious balance of class forces, where the weight of the bourgeoisie was maintained at all only by the firm hand of the FSLN leadership.

The Government of National Reconstruction and the FSLN combined, therefore, specific attacks on individual actions taken by workers and peasants with a general drive to incorporate the independent political organs that had been formed into a reconstructed state apparatus. For example, peasants occupying land were ejected from the property of the “anti-Somoza bourgeoisie” by the FSLN–organized peasant union (the ATC) and the state agrarian reform agency (the INRA, headed by Jaime Wheelock, leader of the former *Tendencia Proletaria*).

This dual offensive inevitably entailed an attack on those organizations which represented– in however distorted or inadequate a form–the independent interests of the proletariat. In particular, the regime has worked to suppress three organizations: 1) the Revolutionary Marxist League (*Liga Marxista Revolucionaria*: LMR), formerly a sympathizing section of the USFI; 2) the Popular Action Movement (*Movimiento de Accion Popular*: MAP), with its trade union face, the Workers Front (*Frente Obrero*: FO), a grouping dominated by Maoism, but including self-styled Trotskyists along with other forces; and 3) the Simon Bolivar Brigade.

8. The Simon Bolivar Brigade

Because its intervention has received massive international publicity as an example of Trotskyism in practice and because its expulsion from Nicaragua was the immediate cause of the splitting of the USFI, it is critically important that we make an assessment of this brigade.

The Simon Bolivar Brigade was organized by the Morenist Bolshevik Faction of the USFI and recruited from 13 June 1979 by its Colombian section, the Socialist Workers Party (*Partido Socialista de Trabajadores*: PST/Columbia).

After an initial period of adaptation to petty-bourgeois nationalism and to the FSLN, the Bolshevik Faction had at length put forward its own program for Nicaragua, which called for a “workers’ and peasants’ government based on the FSLN” without giving any political support to the FSLN. The formal correctness of this demand—and of the rest of the program—was critically weakened by the failure to call for the building of soviet-type bodies to represent the independent interests of the proletariat. This was at the time—and remains—the key demand for Trotskyists to raise in Nicaragua.

However, the Simon Bolivar Brigade was not recruited on the basis of this program. The Bolshevik Faction insisted that the Brigade should be open to all forces prepared to fight “under the military discipline of the FSLN” for what was actually the Brigade’s sole point of program: “to support the struggle of the Sandinista people” (*El Socialista* [paper of the PST], 22 June 1979). This position was clearly agreed to by the FSLN, but at no stage does the formation of the Simon Bolivar Brigade seem to have been agreed to by the international leadership of the USFI.

Much criticism of the Simon Bolivar Brigade has failed to distinguish two separate issues which were at stake: first, the urgent necessity for Trotskyists to intervene in the mass struggles against Somoza to fight for a revolutionary program, organized as a political force but preferably not trapped in isolation as a military unit; second, the proletarian internationalist duty of Trotskyists to organize material support in solidarity with the revolution against Somoza. (From its statements after the expulsion, the Bolshevik Faction seems, at least later, to have sometimes fallen into the same confusion as its critics.)

The call to form the Simon Bolivar Brigade was a correct, principled action of proletarian internationalism, but such a limited united front was not—and never could have been—an adequate vehicle for Trotskyists to fight for their revolutionary program amid the mass struggles of the Nicaraguan workers and peasants.

When Somoza fled to the USA on 17 July 1979 and the National Guard surrendered on 19 July, most of the Simon Bolivar Brigade was still in fact receiving military training in Costa Rica, and only a few dozen of its militants had been directly involved in the civil war for a couple of days.

The main activities of the Brigade began with the overthrow of the tyranny, in districts of the capital Managua and in the Atlantic port of Bluefields. Here, whatever the program on which it had been recruited, the Simon Bolivar Brigade does seem to have worked strongly and consistently to develop the organizational and political independence of the proletariat. One particular sphere of activity was the building of independent trade unions, and militants of the Simon Bolivar Brigade were instrumental in forming some 100 factory-based unions. A pressing demand from many workers at this time was for the Government of National Reconstruction to guarantee the back-payment of wages lost since they followed the FSLN to come out on strike early in July.

At the same time, the Simon Bolivar Brigade intervened in the Sandinista Defense Committees. In some areas these committees had begun to realize their potential of developing into soviet-type bodies by assuming administrative functions, and many organized the neighborhood armed militias. The Simon Bolivar Brigade attempted to defend these activities against the attacks of the Government of National Reconstruction.

The regime did not have the ability to dismantle the Defense Committees. Rather, it followed the line of trying to control them and to exploit them to its own advantage by transforming them bureaucratically into an arm of the state. The clearest evidence of this process was the move to disarm and dissolve the militias, as explained by FSLN Commander Luis Carron: “The militias are being concentrated and trained to incorporate them into the army” (*Barricada*, 27 July 1979).

And this new army that was being forged was not designed as a weapon of the proletariat:

The members of the National Army will not be allowed to engage in party political activities, but their political rights as citizens will be guaranteed. (Program of the Government of National Reconstruction, June 1979, paragraph 1.12)

Alongside this fake promise of armed forces free of class interests was the reality that this army was being trained by the military of the bourgeois Panamanian state.

The Simon Bolivar Brigade had already come into conflict with the FSLN over its attempts to agitate around democratic demands within the guerrilla forces and to carry out a propaganda campaign there for a revolutionary socialist perspective for the Nicaraguan revolution. As rumors spread that the Brigade was threatened with expulsion from Nicaragua, correctly a demonstration was organized to accompany the Simon Bolivar Brigade when it was summoned to the FSLN headquarters on 14 August. Three thousand workers marched on that day, their central demand the call for rights of citizenship to be granted to the non-Nicaraguan members of the Simon Bolivar Brigade. They also protested against the disarming of the militias and layoffs, demanded the back-payment of wages, and raised the slogans: “Long live the FSLN!,” “Long live the Simon Bolivar Brigade!,” and, apparently, “Power to the proletariat!” and “The revolution is in the hands of the bourgeoisie!” The FSLN took no action at this point, but within two days the non-Nicaraguan members of the Simon Bolivar Brigade had been deported, with the active and violent cooperation of Panamanian security forces, who beat up these militants and imprisoned them.²

9. The USFI Splits

At the next meeting of the international secretariat of the USFI (early October 1979), the Bolshevik Faction—supported by the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency—demanded that the USFI condemn this expulsion.

In July the USFI majority leadership had issued a political statement on Nicaragua (Intercontinental Press, 16 July 1979) which did not differ in essentials from the formal correctness and crucial weaknesses of the Bolshevik Faction's own program. But, in the meantime, the USFI's official delegation to Nicaragua had developed (under the leadership of the American Socialist Workers Party) a quite new and sharply contrasting assessment of the revolution, based on their vivid but superficial impressions of the character of the mass mobilizations.

This dramatic revision of position led the delegation to its *support* for the expulsion of the Simon Bolivar Brigade in a public letter to the FSLN leadership:

To defend this revolution means to support the struggle whose vanguard is the FSLN. All activities which seek today to create divisions between the mobilized masses and the FSLN are contrary to the interests of the revolution.

This was the case, specifically, with the activities of the Simon Bolivar Brigade. This group actually had a dual policy: to capitalize on the prestige of the FSLN, it cloaked itself with the Sandinista banner; but, at the same time, in the mass organizations its sectarian policy tried to separate the workers from their vanguard.

According to certain assertions that have appeared in the press, the activities of this group represented the attitude of our organization toward the revolution and its leadership. This is totally false. This group acted on its own.

In a political and economic situation that required the greatest possible unity in struggle, the FSLN was right to demand that the non-Nicaraguan members of this group—which defined itself above all as a military organization—leave the country. (“Statement by United Secretariat Delegation,” 3 September 1979; *Intercontinental Press*, 24 September 1979)

The logic of this scandalous position was argued through at the October meeting of the USFI international secretariat by Jack Barnes, leader of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP/US). Barnes called for the USFI to give full support to the Government of National Reconstruction (a government dedicated to the *capitalist* reconstruction of Nicaragua), arguing that the GNR was not to be characterized as a class-collaborationist, counterrevolutionary popular front but as an alliance between the forces of the bourgeoisie and a *revolutionary* party (that is, the FSLN) in which the politics of the revolutionary party predominates. Thus the Government of National Reconstruction was, he claimed, “a revolutionary government,” and the USFI should give it support against those “sectarian” forces which sought to drive a wedge between it and the masses.

Barnes also argued that the USFI should campaign for a defensive front of the Latin American bourgeois democracies to support the Nicaraguan revolution against the threat of imperialist intervention and that the USFI should make the major thrust of its solidarity campaign the demand on bourgeois and imperialist governments that they give aid to the Government of National Reconstruction—this at a time when the US imperialists were seeking precisely to exploit aid as a method of controlling the development of the Nicaraguan revolution.

Since then, the pages of the USFI's SWP/US-produced *Intercontinental Press* have been opened to totally uncritical reproduction of FSLN propaganda—the same treatment already given to the speeches and declarations of Castro's "revolutionary" Stalinist regime in Havana.

The USFI majority agreed to the fundamental line of these positions in a less blatantly revisionist form and went on to take organizational steps to ensure that they were implemented:

The United Secretariat resolves that in Nicaragua, in El Salvador, in Guatemala, and in Honduras, all the political activity of the members of the Fourth International [that is, the USFI] or those who accept the leadership of the Fourth International, should be undertaken under the direct control of the leadership of the United Secretariat on the basis of the political line adopted by it [in practice, the direct control of the USFI delegation in Nicaragua and so, in practical reality, of the American SWP].

The OST of Costa Rica and the Bolshevik Faction in particular are instructed to cease all activity in Nicaragua—including the construction of organizations – and to limit themselves to activities undertaken in collaboration with the United Secretariat and on the basis of the line of the International [that is, the USFI].

As the resolution on the Nicaraguan revolution adopted by the United Secretariat of 1st October 1979 outlined, all Nicaraguans who are members or sympathizers of the Fourth International [the USFI] should act "as loyal militants in the framework of the organization which led the overthrow of Somoza and leads this revolution ... to defend the fundamental ideas of revolutionary Marxism."

The Bolshevik Faction and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency withdrew from the United Secretariat and issued the call for an open conference against liquidationism in Nicaragua. This call was immediately supported by the Lambertist OCRFI, and these three groupings set up the present Parity Commission. For this action the Bolshevik Faction and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency were both expelled from the USFI shortly before its "eleventh" World Congress (held 17-25 November).

We have declared our assessment of these developments in other documents. What must be stressed here is the depth of the questions involved, which reach right back through the postwar crisis of the Fourth International to the origins of Pabloism. As Pablo had done before them, today's leaders of the USFI denied the independent Trotskyist party its leading role as the conscious vanguard of the proletariat in the struggle to realize the perspective of permanent revolution.

Indeed, they went further than Pablo had done in 1953 and followed the example of his later liquidationist exploits in Algeria. They did not only fail to fight for the building of an independent Trotskyist party in Nicaragua and fail to raise demands to develop the political independence of the proletariat; as if this were not enough, they also ordered the liquidation of the Trotskyist forces already there in Nicaragua, ordered them to undertake no factional work within the FSLN, and supported FSLN repression of forces actually fighting for the independent interests of the proletariat.

Beside this foul record of sordid opportunism and gross betrayals, the positions of the Morenist Bolshevik Faction could scarcely fail to appear in a more favorable light. Yet when we recognize the important strengths of their positions, we cannot overlook their failings and weaknesses. We must attempt to understand how they have been able to develop.

For all the formally correct demands of its program—and even despite the apparently principled work of its cadres inside Nicaragua under very difficult conditions—the Bolshevik Faction never raised the critically important demand for the building of soviet-type bodies in Nicaragua.

We do not suggest that the application of this demand would somehow have prevented the expulsion of the Simon Bolivar Brigade. But we do recognize that the adoption of a similarly inadequate program paved the way for the revisionist capitulation of the USFI majority to the forces of petty-bourgeois nationalism. If the comrades of the Bolshevik Faction are to grasp fully the lessons which the Nicaraguan revolution holds for Trotskyists and so be able to play a positive role in the struggle to reconstruct the Fourth International as the democratic-centralist world party of socialist revolution, it is essential that they too understand the way in which the poison of Pabloism, lingering undetected, infected their own political positions.

The sole point of program for recruitment to the Simon Bolivar Brigade represented in its way a parallel capitulation to the ideology of petty-bourgeois nationalism. The Bolshevik Faction did not call for political support to the FSLN, but it did demand support for the “struggle of the Sandinista people” [emphasis added]—one small phrase, yet a formulation which conceded the cross-class, “anti-imperialist,” “national-democratic” character of the revolution, failed utterly to focus on the independent leading role that must be played by the proletariat, and so strengthened the ultimate counterrevolutionary trajectory of the FSLN leadership, which could lead to only one immediate point: the placing of power in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

But any assessment of the Simon Bolivar Brigade must recognize that the initiative of the Bolshevik Faction has posed to all Trotskyists questions of the practice of proletarian internationalism that have been ignored for decades. Their intervention into the Nicaraguan revolution opened up a vital discussion on the methods of work which Trotskyists can use to develop material forms of international solidarity and extend their fight for the revolutionary program into previously inaccessible areas of crisis in the class struggle.

The lessons of this practical experience in struggle will not be won by erecting a defensive barricade of “principled” criticism of the Bolshevik Faction’s activities around the Simon Bolivar Brigade. Abstention, with splendid ritual denunciations of “opportunism,” offers no way forward to resolving the historic crisis of proletarian leadership. These lessons will be grasped only through a full discussion of the opportunities which the concrete situation opened to Trotskyists, of the way in which the Bolshevik Faction sought to exploit those opportunities to fight for the revolutionary

program in Nicaragua, and of the implications which that experience in struggle holds for Trotskyists fighting to reconstruct the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution. That discussion can be in no way separated from discussion of the postwar crisis of the Fourth International; on the contrary, the response of Trotskyists to the Nicaraguan revolution reveals in an undeniably living form all the major elements which have compounded that disastrous crisis.

Such discussion must take place on the widest possible basis, and above all it must involve the comrades of the Bolshevik Faction themselves, as they provide their own account and assessment of the Simon Bolivar Brigade.

10. The FSLN and the Postrevolutionary Crisis

What direction has the Nicaraguan revolution taken since the overthrow of Somoza?

As the barely disputed leadership of the mass struggles against Somoza's dictatorship, the FSLN came to power at the head of a *political* revolution whose particular character posed sharply, in a concrete form, the necessity of moving forward with the tasks of social revolution.

Political and economic conditions combined to determine the nationalization of the Somoza holdings, and other measures of state centralization. Cripplingly deformed by the burden of Somoza's private plundering and maimed by the struggles of civil war, capitalism offered no solution to the crisis of the economy.

Such a situation demanded the repudiation of the foreign debt to imperialism; expropriation of all the major capitalist holdings in land, industry, finance, and other sectors; and the development of a socialist plan for the reconstruction and development of the economy. A massive program of public works was needed urgently to provide for the needs of the workers and peasants (housing; hospitals and clinics; nurseries, schools, and colleges; irrigation and roads; etc.) and to reduce the huge mass of unemployed workers. Beyond the redistribution of land, a cheap credit scheme for small peasants was essential, along with incentives to encourage cooperative methods and collective farming.

These methods offered the only alternative to a capitalist reconstruction of Nicaragua, and they were all rejected by the FSLN. When a delegation from COSEP (the bosses' federation) visited New York in December, they argued vehemently that the Government of National Reconstruction and the FSLN were not heading a "communist" regime and declared their firm intention of continuing their business of profitable exploitation in Nicaragua. It was not reprisals they were seeking from the imperialists but economic aid for the "national reconstruction."

Unemployment shows every sign of rising rather than falling from November's level of 45 percent. In December Jaime Wheelock (former leader of the *Tendencia*

Proletaria) announced that “Nicaragua” could no longer afford to pay the Christmas bonus—the payment of a month’s wages, won from the Somoza regime by workers in struggle.

After the eviction of peasants occupying land owned by the “anti-Somoza bourgeoisie,” the Government of National Reconstruction proceeded at the end of November to annul the decree of expropriation of the *Somocistas*, with the argument that this authority was being abused by some local Sandinista leaders. Three birds were killed with this stone: the process of nationalization was halted; a gesture was made to still the rising protests against the arrogance, greed, and various abuses of authority of some local FSLN representatives who were preparing themselves for a future as a corrupt and parasitic bureaucratic caste; and, at the same time, the investigations which were promised to follow would undoubtedly be used as a weapon in the internal power struggles of the FSLN.

Since establishing the Government of National Reconstruction, the FSLN leadership has followed a consistent strategy of *bureaucratizing* the revolution. The economic measures it has taken in the ultimate defense of capitalist property relations and profitability have been accompanied by counterrevolutionary initiatives to weld the independent bodies of trade unions, peasant unions, and Sandinista Defense Committees into rigid national institutions, subservient to the political authority of the FSLN leadership and intended to function as an arm of the state reaching into the very heart of the labor movement. These initiatives required the expulsion of the Simon Bolivar Brigade and the repression directed against the LMR and MAP/FO (their publications have been suppressed and many of their militants imprisoned—though later to be released after pressure from sections of workers, only to be imprisoned again more recently). And all the while the FSLN leadership has continued to work for the disarming of the workers and the building of some classless, apolitical army, dedicated to serving “Nicaragua” and the “Sandinista people.”

This bureaucratization has been particularly evident with regard to the trade union movement. It was their role in building independent unions which partly prompted the victimization of the members of the Simon Bolivar Brigade. And the suppression of *El Pueblo*, the paper of the *Frente Obrero*, followed its attempts to mobilize the workers and its accusations that the FSLN “had sold out to the local bourgeoisie.” More recently, even the trade union body established by the Communist Party, the *Centro de Accion y Unidad Sindical* (CAUS), has been the object of repression.

But, despite the energy of the FSLN in suppressing any symptoms of the independent mobilization of the masses, it continues to be under pressure from its supporters whom it has failed to bring fully under control. By May 1980 this pressure was being reflected in growing strains between the FSLN and the representatives of the bourgeoisie in the Junta.

First conservative figurehead Violetta Chamorro left the government (on 19 April) to live in Panama. She was followed out (on 22 April) by millionaire capitalist Alfonso

Robelo, who remains in Nicaragua at the head of the right-wing Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN). The break coincided with the “coming into being” (announced on 21 April) of the new forty-seven-seat unelected Council of State. The MDN was allocated one seat in this fake legislature. The FSLN only took six seats for itself but packed it with nominees from the Sandinista Defense Committees.

While one of the effects of the retirement of important bourgeois elements from the Junta is to permit the FSLN to refurbish its radical image, the break shows that, regardless of the FSLN’s intentions, the direction in which it will be forced to move is by no means yet finally and definitively decided.

11. Nicaragua, Imperialism, and Stalinism

The process of bureaucratization has brought a measure of relief to both the imperialist powers and to the ruling Stalinist bureaucracies. Each had seen most to fear in the independent class mobilization of the proletariat, with the attendant specter of communism.

It has been precisely through the Government of National Reconstruction’s international relations with the imperialists and the Stalinist bureaucracies (specifically, Castro’s regime) that the FSLN has exposed most clearly its own political essence and revealed the pressures bearing down upon it.

Through reaching an agreement with the “anti-Somoza” wing of the bourgeoisie, the FSLN leadership secured the backing of the “social democracies” of Costa Rica, Panama, and Venezuela. Deepening its alliance with the bourgeoisie once in power, the FSLN leadership then sought aid from the imperialist powers, including above all the USA—the only force which had sustained Somoza in his dictatorship! It was the military of capitalist Panama which was brought in to train the re-formed armed forces.

The imperialists have not been slow to take advantage of the FSLN’s evident desire for accommodation and have made the most of the leverage this gives them. Broad promises and partial negotiations have not yet resulted in a flow of funds, as the imperialists (acting especially through the World Bank) have held back both to ensure that the FSLN is capable of controlling the mass movement of workers and peasants and to increase the pressure on the FSLN to make further guarantees of capitalist stability in Nicaragua. This tactical position of the imperialists has been reinforced by developments beyond Nicaragua.

On the one hand has come the new aggressive stance adopted by the US imperialists towards the Kremlin bureaucracy—an aggression already primed, but actually triggered by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This latest posture has involved a shift back to the central position of US foreign policy since the second world war: the maintenance of military dictatorships and other fiercely repressive regimes as bastions of imperialist might against the “threat of communism”—in the shape of independent action

by workers and peasants within these states at least as much as against the forces controlled by the Soviet bureaucracy and its underlings.

The implications of this have been evident in Central America, where the rising tide of revolutionary struggles threatens to sweep away the pro-imperialist regimes in El Salvador, Honduras, and now Guatemala. The mass mobilizations in these states have been spurred on to new heights by the example of the Nicaraguan revolution, yet they have received absolutely no direct political or material assistance from the leadership of that revolution.

On the contrary, when the military dictatorship of Honduras resorted to the desperate expedient of fueling a chauvinist campaign directed against the Nicaraguan revolution in order to divert support from the growing revolutionary struggles in Honduras itself, then the FSLN leadership responded by seeking closer ties with the ‘progressive’ military dictatorship of El Salvador, which had been installed with the connivance of US imperialism as a last-ditch stand against the increasing power of the leftist guerrilla movement and its mass support.

This betrayal of the workers and peasants of El Salvador typifies the foreign policy of the FSLN leadership. Far from following a policy of proletarian internationalism, it has remained very firmly within the bounds of petty-bourgeois nationalism. Its foreign policy is the Siamese twin of its domestic policy.

Rather than build the surest defense of the Nicaraguan revolution against imperialist intervention—by winning the support of the revolutionary proletariat beyond the borders of Nicaragua through aid and leadership for its other struggles against agents of imperialism in Central America—the FSLN rejected the road towards a Socialist United States of Central America and turned instead to the imperialist powers themselves for their “aid.”

This project has received the enthusiastic backing of Castro. The Cuban Stalinists especially feared the emergence of an independent proletarian opposition to the petty-bourgeois nationalism of the FSLN leadership—a force which could have acted as a revolutionary pole of attraction counterposed to the political hegemony which the Havana bureaucracy seeks to impose on all the anti-imperialist struggles throughout the continent. Such a development would also have produced dangerous repercussions for the bureaucracy within Cuba itself, where Castro is clearly facing an upsurge of pressure from the proletariat and even from within the ranks of the Cuban Communist Party.

Relieved by the firm action which the FSLN leadership has taken to repress the independent strength of the working class, Castro has warmly welcomed its overtures to imperialism. But the tactics of the imperialists themselves are posing fresh problems for the Stalinists.

The imperialists have not yet resigned themselves to a Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, however conciliatory it may be. With the renewal of “cold war” aggression

and the real possibility of further revolutionary overthrows in Central America, it has even become more rather than less likely that US imperialism will attempt a military intervention in the region—with one of its aims being to isolate or even crush the FSLN regime.

Such considerations have played their part in the delay by the imperialists in “giving” aid to the Government of National Reconstruction. This, in turn, has increased the difficulties of the GNR itself, which inevitably faces a resurgence of militant pressure from the working class if the colossal economic crisis shows no sign of alleviation. So the imperialists are reviving the very specter of communism which they most want to crush, and in this dilemma it is Castro who comes to their rescue.

The Cuban bureaucracy played no positive role in the overthrow of Somoza; yet it has no desire whatsoever to see imperialism regain all its lost authority and more by a military intervention in the region. And it is as fearful as the imperialists of the consequences of starving the Government of National Reconstruction of the materials with which to reconstruct capitalism in Nicaragua.

For these reasons, the Cuban bureaucracy has been forced to step up its offers of assistance to the GNR. The FSLN leadership has responded cautiously to these initiatives, recognizing the very slippery rope it has chosen to step out on. When Havana offered 4,000 teachers, Managua accepted only 100, emphasizing how ready it was to accept similar offers from other Latin American states. Yet, at the same time, the Panamanian authorities have responded indignantly to what they claim is the swelling influx of Cuban officers and military experts by pulling out many of their military advisers.

The December 1979 cabinet reshuffle was part of this shift in the relations of the FSLN leadership to the imperialists on the one hand and to the Cuban Stalinists on the other. After the collective resignation of 4 December, the new Government of National Reconstruction emerged at the end of the month with fewer bourgeois members and now more evidently dominated numerically by the FSLN.

This move reflected the pressure from workers on the FSLN leadership to break its ties with the bourgeoisie, but the capitalist members still expressed the bourgeois political character of the government, which so far has shown no evidence of changing its established policies inside Nicaragua. The most recent resignations from the government—by Violetta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo—along with the hardening of relations with the US, take this process one step further—though they still do not mark a definitive qualitative change in the relations of the FSLN with the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie or with imperialism.

Externally, the FSLN leadership is now making a futile attempt to use the threat of Cuban involvement as a gun to hold at the heads of the imperialists when it demands the speeding up of financial aid. In August, FSLN leader Tomas Borge publicly rebuked his deputy for talk of buying arms from the Soviet Union and the deformed workers’ states, declaring that approaches would be made to Belgium and the USA. But on 17

November the same Borge defiantly cried that, “Nicaragua did not stand alone; it had excellent friends, such as Cuba” (*Latin American Newsletter*).

These threats can mean little to the imperialists. The FSLN leadership is already begging them to take on the mortgage of the Nicaraguan revolution lock, stock, and barrel. If the imperialists continue to hold back, then the Stalinists will have little option but to move towards giving Nicaragua a new status as the Angola of Latin America: a zone whose wealth imperialism may plunder and whose labor imperialism may exploit within limits that can guarantee the economic interests of the Stalinist bureaucracies, yet where imperialism has no direct political or military power but depends for access on the Stalinists and their continued repression of the proletariat symbol of counterrevolutionary Stalinism and its policies of “detente” with imperialism.

But imperialists, Stalinists, and FSLN leaders alike are treading a very dangerous path in unpredictable conditions. Further developments in the “new cold war” and within Latin America could close the “Angola” option for good and all. They could even create conditions that would force the Kremlin and Havana bureaucracies to move for a complete social overturn in Nicaragua, with the transformation of sections of the FSLN leadership into a new Stalinist leadership and so to effect by bureaucratic—and perhaps even military—means the structural assimilation of Nicaragua into a deformed workers’ state. While such a possibility seems remote at present, the rapid tempo of international developments could bring it swiftly to the fore.

What is clear at present, despite the distortions of the American SWP, is that—through the Government of National Reconstruction, the reconstruction of the state apparatus, and the bureaucratization of the revolution—the FSLN leadership has been attempting to lay a firm basis for developing friendly relations with either imperialism or the ruling Stalinist bureaucracies—or indeed both—and that this activity has been undertaken at the expense of the independent class interests of the proletariat in Nicaragua.

12. For the Independent Program of the Revolutionary Proletariat

The task of Trotskyists is to give an independent leadership to the proletariat by the fight for a revolutionary program that can unite the peasantry behind the vanguard of the working class in the struggle for *socialist* revolution in Nicaragua. That program must direct itself centrally and at all times to the independent class interests, independent class organization, and independent class strength of the proletariat.

It is not impossible that even now elements in the FSLN leadership may break from the Government of National Reconstruction and rally to the call for the dictatorship of the proletariat; but no strategy can be based in any way on such possibilities. Any compromise or collaboration with the proven petty-bourgeois nationalism of the FSLN leadership can only betray the workers and peasants of Nicaragua and all Central America. Without the building of an independent Trotskyist party, committed to the

reconstruction of the Fourth International and fighting consistently among the workers and peasants for a revolutionary program, the gains made in the great struggles against Somoza will be rolled back by imperialist reaction or chained in bureaucratization by the FSLN leaders and their Stalinist accomplices.

Such a party, which does not yet exist in Nicaragua, would now have vast potential to lead Nicaraguan workers towards an extension of the revolutionary gains which are now threatened by the policy of the FSLN. As workers and peasants so recently mobilized in mass struggles against the imperialist-backed dictator, come in practice into conflict with their new rulers, they will be disposed to align themselves with a party which offers an independent solution to the material and political problems they face.

The program which must be put forward by Trotskyists is one which is directed towards completing the revolution which began with the successful struggle against Somoza and which, therefore, expresses the strategy of permanent revolution. It should include a set of demands placed upon the FSLN, the bureaucratized workers' states, and the labor movement in the imperialist countries, to defend against imperialist attack—by military means if necessary—all the gains so far made. It must embody the existing political need of the oppressed masses for the right to have their voices heard and for the building of organs through which this could be achieved.

As long as the bourgeois-democratic aspects of the FSLN's own program remain unfulfilled and the FSLN itself increasingly violates democratic rights, it is incumbent upon the Trotskyists to bring democratic demands to the forefront of the struggle. They must demand the end of all censorship against workers' publications, the release of all imprisoned worker and peasant militants, an end to bureaucratic measures against independent trade unions, and no disarming of the masses.

In addition to these demands against FSLN repression, the demand for a sovereign constituent assembly elected by universal franchise remains valid and can be sharply counterposed to the bureaucratic Council of State established by the FSLN.

But it is fundamental that, alongside these demands for bourgeois forms of democracy and democratic rights, the Trotskyists fight simultaneously for the building of independent political organs of workers' power—popular assemblies (soviets) in which workers' and peasants' organizations will be represented and which can become the political basis of the establishment of a workers' state. Revolutionaries will also fight for the establishment of armed workers' militias responsible to the popular assemblies—as opposed to the FSLN's attempt to rebuild a standing army.

But before such organs are built, the Trotskyists must at all times advance a governmental slogan which is appropriate to the moment. Today the most important element of this continues to be the call for the expulsion of the bourgeois ministers from the government. Such a call is not a formal one: in fact, it may take place formally by the voluntary departure of the bourgeois ministers. As a political slogan the call for expulsion

must be accompanied by demands on the FSLN, which still dominates the mass movement and gains ever more control of the government, to implement a program designed to meet the material needs of the masses.

These demands would focus on the need to expropriate all capitalist property under workers' management and without compensation—in contrast to the FSLN's policy of restricting nationalizations to punitive ones against *Somocistas*; the need for a program of useful public works to resolve the massive unemployment problem; the need for adequate wages protected against inflation and the rationing of essential goods; the need for the expropriation of the remaining large landholdings and their redistribution to democratically elected peasant cooperatives and collectives; the need to disavow all the international debts entered into by the Somoza regime; the need for the nationalized banking system to be placed under workers' management; the need for the banks to initiate cheap credit schemes for the peasant cooperatives.

Viewed in isolation, of course, such a program, in a country which is as backward and beset with economic crisis as Nicaragua, can easily be laughed out of court as idealistic. Trotskyists, however, see such a program to meet the basic economic needs of the masses as inseparably tied to the political conditions for its fulfillment. The economic program, therefore, must be linked to demands on the bureaucratized workers' states to supply unconditional economic assistance to a government carrying out such a program—especially assistance which neutralizes any economic sanctions imposed by the imperialists. Demands on the workers' movement in imperialist countries to mobilize in concrete solidarity against any economic and other sanctions are also important.

In addition, the economic development of Nicaragua in the long run is tied to the rest of the area and to the development of an international socialist planned economy. It is also necessary, therefore, to raise in this context the slogan of the United Socialist States of Central America and the Caribbean. This again is today not an abstract slogan, since political developments with revolutionary potential are taking place throughout the region. In concrete terms, the implementation of the slogan requires maximum possible political and material support to the struggles in neighboring countries—in sharp contrast to the FSLN's treacherous diplomatic neutrality towards the mass struggle in other countries.

The revolutionary program is not a sectarian method of merely denouncing the FSLN. In the course of a struggle for this program, tens of thousands of supporters of the FSLN and even some of its existing leadership can be won to a revolutionary perspective—and the enemies of the masses within its ranks can be finally exposed and the road to socialism opened.

¹ [The militant neighborhood organizations spontaneously set up before the July revolution were generally known as "Civil Defense Committees" (CDCs). The network of neighborhood organizations set up after the July revolution by the Sandinista regime, which bureaucratically incorporated the CDCs, was called the "Sandinista Defense Committees" (CDSs). The TILC resolution describes correctly the two phases in the development of neighborhood organizations but uses the later name for both phases. -ITR]

² [That is, these Brigade members were deported to Panama and detained and beaten by Panamanian security forces in *Panama*. -ITR]

RESOLUTION ON NICARAGUA

**International Executive Committee of the
International Trotskyist Committee
31 December 1984**

1. Nicaragua is today the victim of major, large-scale aggression at the hands of American imperialism. This pattern of aggression has taken both the direct form of actual acts of war, as in the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, and the form of provocations, as in the threats surrounding the sending of war materials to Nicaragua by the Soviet Union (in particular the false claims made by the US government last November that Soviet MIGs were being unloaded at Nicaraguan docks). Most importantly, the imperialist attack on Nicaragua has taken the indirect, intermediary form of the guerrilla warfare conducted by the imperialists' counterrevolutionary mercenaries (the "contras") along Nicaragua's borders with both Honduras and Costa Rica. In 1984 alone this dirty imperialist war has taken the lives of some 3,000 Sandinista soldiers and some 600 Nicaraguan civilians.

The International Trotskyist Committee (ITC) defends the gains of the Nicaraguan revolution against attacks by the imperialists or their mercenaries, against their provocations, and against the attacks of domestic Nicaraguan reactionary forces. We pledge ourselves—all our members and sympathizers—to the work of building the anti-imperialist mobilization for the defense of Nicaragua in the workers' movement and the mass movement in general in all countries. We also defend the right of the Sandinista government to arm itself with whatever weapons it finds necessary. And we call for unconditional and greatly increased military and economic aid to Nicaragua from the degenerated and deformed workers' states and also from the various semicolonial petty-bourgeois radical regimes, whose political character is essentially the same as that of the Sandinista regime and whose anti-imperialist rhetoric must be put to the test of the defense of the Nicaraguan revolution against American imperialism.

2. Our unconditional defense of the Nicaraguan revolution against imperialism and against internal forces of reaction does not imply any political support to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) or its policy in Nicaragua or internationally. The International Trotskyist Committee regards it as essential to indicate our overall evaluation of the nature and the development of the Nicaraguan revolution, including necessarily the open expression of our criticisms of the Sandinista regime.

In the first place, we reaffirm, as a starting point for the development of our positions, the views expressed in the period immediately following the victory of the revolution in the resolution, "The Nicaraguan Revolution," adopted by the April 1980 meeting of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC - predecessor organization to the International Trotskyist Committee).

3. The Nicaraguan revolution of July 1979 had the character of a genuine popular insurrection of the masses against the Somoza dictatorship. All the social forces of the exploited and the oppressed participated, both in the cities and in the countryside.

Through the entire period of revolutionary crisis from January 1978 to July 1979, the urban proletariat and the semiproletarian plebeian masses of the cities gave life to the wave of rebellion against Somoza, in some cases in direct connection with the actions of the FSLN, in other cases in completely spontaneous uprisings (as, for example, in Masaya and in Leon in February 1978 and in Managua on 10 June 1979). Frequently in the course of these struggles workers organized themselves into local mass formations, the Civil Defense Committees (CDCs), with a potential for becoming soviet-type bodies, and formed their own “people’s militias.”

The poor peasants—organized by the tens of thousands in the Association of Rural Laborers (ACT)—and the agricultural proletariat formed peasant militias during the final phase of the civil war. Both women wage laborers and housewives, led and organized by the Association of Women Concerned with the Problems of the Nation (AMPRONAC), participated in large numbers both in the armed clashes with Somoza’s forces and in organizing logistical support for the military struggle in neighborhoods. Student youth mobilized themselves in strikes and demonstrations. And the youth in general, who in Nicaragua constitute a large majority of the population, formed the essential forces of the insurrectionary movement.

The events which led to the Sandinista military victory of 19 July 1979 constituted, then, a genuine, profound popular revolution.

This popular revolution destroyed the very roots of the Somoza dictatorship. But it thereby also destroyed the fundamental structure of the Nicaraguan bourgeois state itself, which had been strictly identified with the regime of the Somoza family for decades.

4. In place of the old bourgeois state apparatus, the Sandinista revolution created a new state structure, the basis of a new regime with a petty-bourgeois radical character.

All the formal structures of government (the Junta of the Government of National Reconstruction, the Council of State, and so forth) were in fact completely subordinated to the Sandinista leadership, which constructed a state apparatus independent of the bourgeoisie and completely dominated by the FSLN through its establishing complete control over the armed forces reorganized after the revolution (the Sandinista People’s Army: EPS). Real power was concentrated in the hands of nine *Comandantes de la Revolucion*—that is, in the hands of the National Directorate of the FSLN. This was a body composed of three members from each of the three tendencies which had split the Sandinistas over the course of the 1970’s (the Proletarian Tendency [TP], the Protracted People’s War tendency [GPP], and the majority *Tercerista* [“third- force”] tendency),

which had formed a joint command in December 1978 and achieved complete organizational reunification in March 1979.

The relationship of this petty-bourgeois radical leadership with the masses was formally mediated through organizations such as the ATC in the countryside and the Sandinista Federation of Laborers (CST) among workers. But more important in the development of the Sandinista leadership's relations with the masses were the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDSs), mass popular formations with a voluntary membership, which had formed primarily in the cities and were organized essentially at the neighborhood level. The CDSs took on some administrative tasks, but their activity consisted mostly of political and military mobilization, ideological education, and generally giving support to Sandinista policy.

The Sandinista Defense Committees had incorporated the Civil Defense Committees of the original revolutionary period, with their clear potential for development into soviet-type bodies. The Sandinista Defense Committees had no real political power and were, therefore, not soviet-type formations. Rather, they were mass popular structures used by the FSLN both to reinforce its support among the masses and to control any possible development in the direction of actual workers' power, such as that which had been expressed to some degree both in the original Civil Defense Committees and the original revolutionary people's militias, now themselves incorporated in the Sandinista People's Army.

Although they were presented as organs of "people's power," the CDSs' actual role was to provide complete support to the regime and to function as the connection between the petty-bourgeois radical leadership and the masses. This role was essentially the same as that of analogous mass organizations established in previous situations fundamentally similar to that of the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979—for example, the Angolan Revolution of 1974-1976, which saw the development of "neighborhood committees" as "organs of people's power" in words but in actuality as organs denied any real power and dominated by the petty-bourgeois regime of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

5. The majority of the industrial and agricultural bourgeoisie in Nicaragua found itself in political opposition to Somoza and his entire oligarchic gang. Its opposition had a definite material basis: for decades the Somoza gang, using the state as its personal machine, reinforced its domination of all sectors of the Nicaraguan economy with a policy of acts of piracy at the expense of the non-Somozist bourgeoisie. A substantial portion of the non-Somozist bourgeoisie was organized politically, from 1974, in the Union for Democratic Liberation (UDEL), with the aim of achieving a change of regime completely compatible with the defense of the interests of Nicaraguan capital and imperialist domination.

The assassination on 10 January 1978 of the major UDEL leader, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, by agents of Somoza—the spark which set off the revolutionary situation—and

the subsequent development of the mass mobilization pushed these bourgeois forces' backs to the wall and drove them into alliance with the FSLN. At first this was a formally indirect alliance, in effect mediated through the "special relationship" of the *Terceristas* with one of the components of the Broad Front of the Opposition (FAO), a bourgeois front including pro-Moscow Stalinist forces, established in July 1978. Later, after the failure of all attempts at compromise with the dictatorship, the alliance became direct, in the National Patriotic Front (FPN), formed on 1 February 1979 and dominated by the FSLN.

The hope—and the illusion—of this anti-Somoquist bourgeoisie was that it could control the FSLN and limit the revolutionary process to the overthrow of Somoza. This illusory hope was shared by international social democracy and by those actually bourgeois governmental parties in a number of Latin American countries which are members of the "Socialist International."

The reality was very different from this hope. The very *Tercerista* tendency on which these "moderate" forces had placed their hopes—in fact, the right wing of the Sandinistas and the tendency on the basis of whose political positions the reunification of the FSLN had taken place—quickly revealed itself as the orthodox Castroite tendency it was. As for the *Terceristas*' "links" with international social democracy—they had simply made use of these to strengthen their hand in dealing with the bourgeois forces.

It soon became clear that the FSLN was not even minimally disposed to reconstruct a conventional bourgeois state apparatus; that, with the organization of the armed forces as the Sandinista People's Army, the Sandinistas' control over the Nicaraguan military was complete; that the FSLN had no intention of developing an alliance on *equal terms* with the bourgeois forces; and that, even on the terrain of economic policy, the FSLN, while defending a "mixed economy," intended to decide the measures to be adopted *itself*. In short, it became clear that the FSLN did not intend to accept even the slightest limitation on its political hegemony over the state apparatus and government.

The departure from the Junta of the Government of National Reconstruction on 22 April 1980 of Alfonso Robelo, leader of the bourgeois Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN), signaled the moment of the decisive breakup of the political alliance between the bourgeoisie and the FSLN. From this point, whatever the role of bourgeois political forces—for example, the participation in political alliances or in government of such forces as the Independent Liberal Party (PLI)—all bourgeois political forces in fact found themselves deprived of even minimal real political power.

6. However, this complete political subordination of the bourgeois political forces by the FSLN was not combined with actions aimed at destroying the economic power of the bourgeoisie itself.

Immediately after the revolutionary victory, the Sandinista government proceeded to expropriate the property of Somoza and the Somozist sectors of the bourgeoisie, which led to state control of about 20 percent of the industrial sector of the economy and about 25 percent of the land. The new government also nationalized the banks (with some compensation to owners, except for the Somozist banks) and foreign trade in some of the most important products (sugar, coffee, cotton, fish).

Subsequently insurance and mining were expropriated. In the context of the struggle against counterrevolution, expropriations were also carried out against certain industrial capitalists who were found to be “decapitalizing” (secretly sending profits abroad instead of investing them in Nicaragua) or otherwise sabotaging the economy. Similarly the government expropriated the lands held by large landowners found to be counterrevolutionary or who were failing to develop their land for cultivation.

This process created a public sector holding about 40 percent of industry. With regard to agriculture, the declared objective of the Sandinistas was to reach a situation, in a relatively short period of time, in which 25 percent of the land would be state-owned, 50 percent owned by poor peasants, and 25 percent owned by capitalist landowners (latifundists and rich peasants). The maximum size of a landholding has stabilized at 350 hectares on the Pacific coast and 700 hectares on the Atlantic coast.

As important as these nationalizations have obviously been, they have been confined within definite limits. In fact, they have been less radical than the nationalizations carried out after other revolutions essentially similar to the Nicaraguan Revolution by leaderships with essentially similar political characteristics as the Sandinistas—for example, in Angola and Mozambique—and even less radical than the nationalizations carried out by petty-bourgeois bonapartist regimes such as the Syrian Baathists and the Derg in Ethiopia. Specifically with regard to the central question of agrarian reform, the Sandinistas’ measures have been considerably more moderate than those of such petty-bourgeois radical and bonapartist regimes as these and even more moderate than the agrarian reform carried out by such a “progressive” bourgeois nationalist regime as the Peruvian military junta in the 1970’s.

None of the measures taken indicates a will on the part of the Sandinista regime to advance—even at a snail’s pace—toward a socialist economy. Most of the expropriations have been acts directed against the Somozists or other counterrevolutionaries—the result more of political than economic decisions. Further, the Sandinista government has solidly resisted the pressures by workers in the cities for workers’ control and nationalization of private industries and the pressures by peasants for the extension of the expropriation of the large plantations (latifundias)—pressures inevitably arising from many situations, especially in the period immediately following the revolution.

Repeating over and over their “strategic” decision in favor of a “mixed” economy, the Sandinistas have clearly expressed in words and actions that they intend to keep the revolution confined within its present radical-democratic framework for an indefinite period of time, preventing any further advancement toward a transition to socialism.

The Sandinista regime has been supported and encouraged in this anti-revolutionary decision by the Cuban bureaucracy, with which it maintains strong ties. It was no accident that, only a few months after the revolutionary victory in Nicaragua, Fidel Castro declared his view—and that of the Stalinist Kremlin bureaucracy whose faithful agent he is—that the FSLN had been correct in not moving to expropriate the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie and that, if he could turn back the clock, he would limit the development of the Cuban revolution in the same way.

7. The election in Nicaragua of a constituent assembly in November 1984 did not represent, in reality, any significant change in the political situation in Nicaragua. The decision to hold the election was made by the FSLN essentially in order to underline, both for internal and external purposes, the fact that it enjoyed the support of the masses. This fact was clearly expressed in the vote of an absolute majority of the population of Nicaragua for the Sandinista candidates for the assembly and for President and Vice President. No real change was indicated in the political situation, in which state power is solidly identified with the FSLN and the actual leadership of the government consists of the Sandinista *Comandantes de la Revolucion*.

We do not oppose—in and of itself—the holding of the elections for the Constituent Assembly as a means for indicating the mass support for the revolution, even if only in formal democratic terms. But, at the same time, we must clearly declare that this Constituent Assembly does not represent a gain for the Nicaraguan Revolution.

What we seek is not in fact a radical nationalist regime which eventually comes to permit—contrary to every other similar situation in history—a “democratic” expression of all the different political forces, including Trotskyists. On the contrary, what we seek is a genuinely democratic power structure in the hands of the proletariat, the poor peasants, and the semiproletarian urban masses.

8. The strategic perspective of revolutionary Marxists for Nicaragua today must be the consistent and permanent development of the revolution from its current radical-democratic phase—in which the Sandinistas intend to keep it—to a proletarian and socialist outcome.

Our objective is the dictatorship of the proletariat—as expressed in the power of councils of workers, peasants, and the popular masses—which, through the permanent development and completion of the revolutionary process initiated in Nicaragua in January 1978, passes over to the realization of socialist tasks.

The program of the dictatorship of the proletariat calls for the completion of the agrarian reform through the expropriation of the lands still in the hands of the large plantation owners (the latifundists) and the rural capitalists, with the distribution of these lands to the poor peasants or their transformation into state farms, as the situation

requires. Our program must also call for the establishment of workers' control in industry, commerce, and the service sector. And it must call for the state monopoly of all foreign trade and the progressive development of nationalizations aimed at achieving the complete collectivization of the means of production and exchange.

9. To realize these tasks Trotskyists must struggle to build a genuine revolutionary party of the proletariat.

Whatever steps might be necessary in the process of building this party (including the possibility of partial or complete entry into the FSLN), it must counterpose its own perspective to the power of the FSLN, which means that it must, over the long run, present itself as the alternative leadership to the leadership of the Sandinistas.

In short, our perspective is a second Nicaraguan Revolution.

In fact, the FSLN, by its very political and social nature, would necessarily resist the perspective of the dictatorship of the proletariat with the armed force of the state which it controls.

In particular in the period immediately following the revolution of July 1979, the Sandinistas took relatively limited but significant repressive measures against both trade union and political forces to their left, including arrests of members and attempts at suppressing the press of the Revolutionary Marxist League (LMR; originally the Nicaraguan section of the USFI, now of the Morenist International Workers League) and the Workers Front (*Frente Obrero*: FO; a left ex-Maoist grouping) and the deportation of forces of the Morenist-organized Simon Bolivar Brigade. The Sandinistas have also taken repressive action against workers on strike and reversed seizures of land whose capitalist ownership the government was committed to preserving.

This history indicates that the Sandinista regime is prepared to defend its own power by all means at its disposal not only against imperialism and reaction but also against the proletarian revolution.

At the same time, the political history and character of the Sandinistas indicate that, in the process of development of the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, it might be possible to win to a proletarian perspective not only the great majority of the FSLN's mass base but even a part of its actual membership and leadership.

The more clear and sharp the action of revolutionary Marxists in the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the greater the possibility of splitting the Sandinistas and weakening the forces within the FSLN which will oppose the proletarian revolution to the very end—and with armed force.

10. The International Trotskyist Committee regards it as obligatory to express our revolutionary solidarity with the Nicaraguan Trotskyist organization, the Revolutionary Marxist League (LMR).

The ITC has important political differences with the LMR and the international organization to which it adheres, the Morenist International Workers League (IWL), including differences with some of the LMR's and IWL's positions on the Nicaraguan Revolution.

However, the commitment and the capacity of the LMR to maintain its political independence over against the Sandinista regime and its struggle for genuine proletarian power deserve the respect and support of all Trotskyists around the world.

THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN NICARAGUA

1. Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution

Under capitalism in Nicaragua, as elsewhere, women do double duty as unpaid laborers in the family and, in many cases, as underpaid wage earners. Almost half of Nicaraguan women work outside the home. Among these women workers, 83 percent are the sole support of their households. Half of these are single mothers caring for children under 14. In the country as a whole, 40 percent of all households are headed by such women.

Over 30 percent of the fighters in the civil war were women. In addition to participating in the mass demonstrations and strikes and battling the US-armed National Guard in the streets, women provided crucial house-to-house logistical support for the fighters.

The overthrow of Somoza and the seizure of power by the Sandinistas led to real improvements in the quality of life for Nicaraguan women. Government expenditures on health care rose from 5.1 percent in 1977 to 16 percent in 1983. Today 80 percent of the population has some access to medical care.

The infant death rate has fallen by over a third to 80 per 1000 live births. Mass immunization against polio, measles, tetanus, and other infectious diseases reached over 85 percent of the population. Polio has been eliminated, and the number of cases of malaria has been cut in half.

Many of these gains have been made by women. The campaigns for vaccinations, health education, and improved cleanliness were run by some 75,000 health brigadistas, 75 percent of whom were women.

The revolution also brought improvements in the wages and job conditions for women in certain sectors. Laws have been passed which establish a separate pay packet for every worker over 14 years old. Under Somoza, men were often paid the wages earned by women and children. An eight-hour day has been established for cooks, who are mostly women. The legalization of unions has helped the few women who work in union jobs to win better wages and working conditions.

The Association of Nicaraguan Women/Luisa Amanda Espinosa (AMNLAE) has won some important victories for women. AMNLAE led the drive to reform some of the laws concerning the family. The most important reform was the abolition of a law which gave men sole rights over children. AMNLAE opposed the FSLN's exclusion of women from the military draft and eventually won the right for women to volunteer for military service. AMNLAE has also successfully organized a domestic workers' union, which won a 100 percent wage increase and a shorter workweek for its members.

2. Women's Liberation and Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua

In spite of the gains made since the revolution, Nicaraguan women cannot win what they need so long as capitalism continues in Nicaragua. In order to maintain its policy of compromise with US imperialism and Nicaraguan capitalism, the FSLN must impose austerity measures on the workers and peasants. Unions are kept weak, especially in the sectors where women work.

On the issues of sexism and women's oppression in the family, there has been very little reform.

Only a very limited number of child-care centers have been established. Usually staffed by women, these centers care for only some 3000 children.

There have been no moves by the Sandinistas to legalize abortion, and advertising of birth control is banned. There has been a limited amount of sex education, but even this has a very heavy emphasis on heterosexual couples and fidelity in married life. The rights and concerns of lesbians and gay men are completely ignored.

In addition, escalation of the war against the US-backed contras has decreased the resources available for health care, child care, and programs to assist women and children. The list of goods in short supply is endless, and women and children spend a lot of time waiting in long lines for scarce products. Many of the people who could be active in health and education campaigns are now instead fighting the contras.

This, of course, is the fault of US imperialism, not the Sandinistas. But the length of time it has taken to wipe out the corrupt and demoralized "contras" is partly due to the FSLN policy of compromise. If the revolution were carried through to its conclusion with both full expropriation of the capitalists and landowners and real workers' democracy and spread throughout Central America, it would destroy the contras' base not only in Nicaragua but in neighboring Honduras and Costa Rica as well.

Capitalism must be overthrown in Nicaragua in order to lay the basis for women's liberation. Women's oppression is an integral part of capitalist society.

The right to decent jobs, housing, and education; free quality health care; accessible quality child care; free abortion on demand; full reproductive rights; full legal and social equality; the right to live and work openly as lesbians; freedom from sexual assault and harassment, and freedom from racism, sexism, and anti-lesbian/gay bigotry—these are key demands in the fight for women's liberation in Nicaragua.

The FSLN will not and cannot lead the fight for socialism or for women's liberation, because its petty-bourgeois leadership fundamentally wants to make a deal with US imperialism by maintaining capitalism in Nicaragua.

Politically conscious workers and peasants in Nicaragua, including women, must organize a revolutionary party in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party to lead the overthrow of capitalism. This party must have the full participation and leadership of women.

With women's full participation and leadership in the revolutionary struggle, women's issues will be fought for, and the planned economies and democratic rule of workers, peasants, and all the oppressed will lay the basis for an end to women's oppression.

