

Studies) and 'Industrialisation and race in South Africa', *Race and racialism*, (London: Tavistock, 1970)

4. One can refer in particular to *South African Communists Speak, 1915-1980*, London: Inkukuleko Publications.
5. Wolpe, *Capitalism and cheap labour, op. cit.*
6. K. Marx, *Capital*, Part 111, Chapter X, pp 297-299, (New York: The Modern Library).
7. Doug Hindson and Marian Lacey, 'Influx control and Labour allocation—Policy and Practice since the Riekert Commission'. *South African Review*, No. 1, 1983.
See also on this question *South African Labour Bulletin* and the article in *Work in Progress* (October 1985) 'A black future for free enterprise—urban foundation strategies for change' by Paul Hendler. Also *Urbanisation and influx control*, Doug Hindson from *Work in Progress*, February 1986 and by the same author: 'Orderly urbanisation and influx control', (Roneo document).
8. K. Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*, Chapter 6, p.32, (New York: International Publishers, 1975.) For Marx 'free labour' signifies free labour-as-a-commodity and not labour as a liberty. The 'free worker' is not presented as a worker 'free to choose his/her exploiter'. S/he is, says Marx, free to leave it when s/he wishes. S/he 'sells her/himself on her/his own and by the 'piece' (hour)'. The idea of a 'free worker' under the capitalist system has nothing to do with the *democratic jurisdiction* of the labour market.
9. Craig Charney, 'Restructuring White Politics: the transformation of the National Party', *South Africa Review No. 1*
10. *Financial Mail*, 27 September 1985.
11. The South African Neville Alexander uses the term caste in the sense of 'colour caste', but he makes clear that it is only tenable if articulated with the fundamental class structure of a capitalist social formation which he considers pre-determinant. J. Barnes has perhaps been more inspired by Merle Lipton who writes '... its legalised nature had similarities with the medieval 'estates'—classes whose rights and privileges were entrenched in law'. Merle Lipton, *Capitalism and Apartheid*. (London: Wildwood House, 1985 p.15). But Lipton has an approach to this question which is undoubtedly influenced by his desire to relativise the class nature of democratic struggles to the extent he supports a clearly liberal option.

An 'estate' or a 'condition' forms a group united by a common situation on the *legal* or *juridical* level. But the 'Third Estate' of the French Revolution was itself a mixture of various social layers . . . The Third Estate was the juridical expression of the bloc of classes opposed to Absolute Monarchy and the aristocracy. Throughout history and with respect to the societies examined the

STEVE BLOOM

DEBATE

Four conceptions of the workers' and farmers' government

Since the revolutions in Nicaragua and Grenada in 1979 a discussion has been taking place within the Fourth International, and amongst its supporters around the world, concerning the theoretical implications and general applicability of the term 'workers' and farmers' government'. This discussion no doubt seems somewhat arcane and esoteric to the casual observer—of little practical consequence or importance. But such a superficial assessment could not be further from the truth. In fact, the differences within our movement over this concept touch on some of the most fundamental problems of revolutionary Marxist theory and strategy, as I will try to demonstrate.

The primary purpose of this article is not to advocate one or another position in the debate, nor to polemicize against those who have taken a different approach. I have strongly defended a specific viewpoint on this problem in a number of articles which have appeared in the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* in the United States¹. For now, my primary consideration will be to try and explain the evolution of the 'workers' and farmers' (or workers' and peasants') government' idea, and to fit the debate into its proper historical context.

One of the most confusing aspects of our discussion is the fact that the term 'workers' and farmers' government' has been used in a variety of different ways—by different individuals within the revolutionary movement or by the same individuals in different contexts. Some of these varied appreciations are complementary to one another, while others are contradictory. It is essential to be able to sort them out.

The four basic conceptions which we will be discussing in more detail

are: 1) Lenin and the Bolsheviks, after the October revolution, introduced the term 'workers' and peasants' government' to describe Soviet power in Russia. Here it was simply a synonym for the proletarian dictatorship. 2) The Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922 adopted the same terminology to discuss a different kind of government—a united front government of workers parties which might arise as a result of the extreme crisis of capitalism, but which would be dominated by petty-bourgeois leaderships and would therefore not yet constitute a proletarian dictatorship. 3) Joseph Hansen after the Second World War attempted to expand on the Third Comintern Congress meaning to explain the post-war transformations in Eastern Europe, China, and Cuba. He also suggested a new meaning of the term—as a description of the first phase of the anti-capitalist revolution, after the smashing of the old state power but before the expropriation of bourgeois economic interests. 4) Jack Barnes, in a 1982 report to the US Socialist Workers Party National Committee insisted on still a fourth conception—that of an *actual governmental alliance* between the working class and the peasantry following a successful insurrection against the bourgeoisie.

Our survey of these different conceptions will be necessarily brief, and cannot substitute for an independent investigation of original sources. I will leave aside for the present purpose any assessment of the way the 'workers' and peasants' government' formula was distorted by the Stalinized Comintern, which turned it into a cover for reformism and a tool for counter-revolution in the hands of the Soviet bureaucracy.

The Transitional Programme

Without doubt, the best-known discussion of the workers' and farmers' government in Marxist literature is presented by Trotsky in the *Transitional Program* and this is an excellent place to begin. That document explains the first two conceptions we want to consider and, what's most important, *clearly makes the necessary distinctions between them.*

Trotsky treats the first only briefly, in the initial paragraph of the section of the document devoted to this section. Here he writes: 'This formula, 'workers' and farmers' government', first appeared in the agitation of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and was definitely accepted after the October revolution. In the final instance it represented nothing more than the popular designation for the already established dictatorship of the proletariat.'²

This is clear enough. For Trotsky, the use of the term workers' and farmers' government to describe the Bolshevik power in 1917 had no particular scientific significance, was not in any way intended to make distinctions between different phases of the revolutionary process or between different kinds of transitional regimes, but was simply a means of explaining to the Russian masses in a popular and understandable way the meaning of Soviet power.

The rest of this portion of the *Transitional Program* is devoted to our second conception of the 'workers' and farmers' government'—as a call for a united front between the Bolshevik forces and reformist leaderships of the working class, as long as those reformist leaderships enjoy the allegiance of the masses. The example Trotsky cites is also from the Russian revolution, but from the period *before* the Bolsheviks won hegemony in the Soviets which enabled them to carry through the insurrection:

From April to September 1917, the Bolsheviks demanded that the SRs and Mensheviks break with the liberal bourgeoisie and take power into their own hands. Under this provision the Bolshevik Party promised the Mensheviks and the SRs, as the petty-bourgeois representatives of the workers and peasants, its revolutionary aid against the bourgeoisie . . . If the Mensheviks and the SRs had actually broken with the Cadets (liberals) and with foreign imperialism, then the 'workers' and peasants' government' created by them could only have hastened and facilitated the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But it was exactly because of this that the leadership of petty-bourgeois democracy resisted with all possible strength the establishment of its own government. . . Nevertheless, the demand of the Bolsheviks, addressed to the Mensheviks and SRs—'Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power into your own hands!'—had for the masses tremendous educational significance. The obstinate unwillingness of the Mensheviks and SRs to take power, so dramatically exposed during the July days, definitely doomed them before mass opinion and prepared the victory of the Bolsheviks.³

Note the key concept in the above paragraphs: The governmental united front, the 'workers' and farmers' government', is based on the same factors as any other united front—the dominance of the workers movement by the reformist leaderships and the need to either force them into united action as far as they will go in the interests of the workers and farmers, or else expose their unwillingness to take decisive steps against the bourgeoisie. In either case, the objectives and education of the masses are advanced.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks

Let us step back for a moment, before we pursue our investigation of this united front type workers' and farmers' government to the first idea of this concept as explained by Trotsky, a synonym for and popularization of the proletarian dictatorship. The first reference to this term (chronologically) in Lenin's *Collected Works* appears in Volume 26, in a resolution adopted by the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' deputies on October 25 (November 7), 1917. It is typical of the manner in which Lenin and the Bolsheviks used the term 'workers' and peasants' government' throughout the first few years of the revolution:

It is the unshakable conviction of the Soviet that the workers' and peasants' government which will be created by the revolution, as a Soviet government, and which will ensure the urban proletariat the support of the whole mass of the poor peasantry, will firmly advance towards socialism, the only means of saving the country from the untold miseries and horrors of war.

Readers are urged to look up the entirety of this resolution and to find

additional references to the workers' and farmers' government from Lenin during this period. (The subject index to the *Collected Works* makes it easy. Look under 'Soviet socialist state—workers' and peasants' government. ') A clear and consistent pattern will emerge from any such investigation, which fully bears out Trotsky's summary in the *Transitional Programme*.

The 'workers' and peasants' government' is seen by Lenin as a popular way of explaining the proletarian dictatorship, and as interchangeable with many other terms which also have the same content. In the above quote we see it identified with 'a Soviet government'. In other places it is used along with such formulas as the dictatorship of the proletariat (dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasants, dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry, etc), Bolshevik power, workers' state, and a number of other similar ideas. For Lenin and the Bolsheviks, as for Trotsky in the *Transitional Programme*, there was absolutely no scientific distinction made between any of these terms at this time.

The Fourth Comintern Congress

The use of the term 'workers' and farmers' government' to refer to a possible united-front type coalition was first codified in 1922, at the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern. Here a document, 'Theses on Tactics' was adopted which had a section titled 'the workers' government' explaining this concept—which later came to be generally referred to as the 'workers' and farmers' government'. This resolution is a key link in our understanding of the evolution and development of the workers' and farmers' government idea:

The call for a workers' government (eventually a government of the peasants as well) should be raised everywhere as a *general propaganda slogan*. But as a slogan of present-day political activity, the call for a workers' government takes on its greatest importance in countries where the situation of bourgeois society is particularly unstable, where the relationship of forces between the workers parties and the bourgeoisie puts on the agenda, as a political necessity, the solution to the question of a workers' government.

In these countries, the slogan of a 'workers' government' is an inevitable consequence of the entire united-front tactic.

Further on, the resolution explains more precisely what is meant, and some of the necessary distinctions:

Despite its great advantages, the slogan of a workers' government also has its dangers, just as any united-front tactic has. As a precaution against these dangers, the Communist parties should not lose sight of the fact that, although every bourgeois government is at the time a capitalist government, it is not true that every workers' government is actually proletarian, that is, a revolutionary instrument of proletarian power.

The Communist International should anticipate the following possibilities:

- 1) A liberal workers' government. There is already a government of this sort in Australia; there may also be one before very long in England.
- 2) A Social-Democratic workers' government (Germany).
- 3) A workers' and peasants' government. This is possible in the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, etc.

4) A workers' government in which Communists participate.

5) A genuine proletarian workers' government which, in its purest form, can only be represented by a Communist Party.

The first two types of workers' government are not revolutionary workers' governments, but rather governments that camouflage a coalition between the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary leaders of the working class.⁴

The resolution then discusses how Communists cannot participate in or support any such government which is actually a bourgeois government, but must ruthlessly expose it. Then it continues with the discussion we are primarily concerned with:

Communists are prepared to march with workers . . . who have not yet recognized the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Under certain circumstances and with certain guarantees, the Communists are equally prepared to support a non-Communist workers' government. But the communists must at all costs explain to the working class that its liberation can only be assured by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The other two types of workers' government (Nos 3 and 4 in above list—SB) are types that the Communists can participate in, although they still do not represent the dictatorship of the proletariat; they do not represent a necessary form of transition towards the dictatorship but they can serve as a point of departure for attaining this dictatorship. The full dictatorship of the proletariat can only be accomplished by a workers' government composed of Communists.⁵

What are the main features outlined here? There are two. First, a profound crisis of capitalist society which leads to the undermining of the old bourgeois state and the posing of the possibility of governmental power being taken by the workers as an immediate practical problem. Second, the possible formation of a government of petty-bourgeois workers parties which, on account of that objective situation, could be independent of the bourgeoisie in a genuine sense. This was precisely the situation in Russia from April to September 1917, which Trotsky discusses in the *Transitional Program*.

Such a petty-bourgeois workers' and farmers' government 'is (not) actually proletarian, that is, a revolutionary instrument of proletarian power,' nor is it a simple class collaborationist government 'that camouflage(s) a coalition between the bourgeoisie and the counterrevolutionary leaders of the working class.' It is something in between. In order to keep the necessary distinctions straight, it will be useful to divide the Comintern resolution's list of five kinds of 'workers' governments' into three basic categories: first, the bourgeois variety (Nos 1 and 2), second the petty-bourgeois type (Nos 3 and 4), and finally, the proletarian or Bolshevik type (No 5). We will have cause to refer to these types again—in particular the petty-bourgeois type—as we investigate the further evolution of thinking about the workers' and farmers' government by revolutionary Marxists.

Only an outside chance

The possibility that a petty-bourgeois workers' and farmers' government

might actually come into existence is left open both in the Comintern resolution and, to a lesser extent, in the *Transitional Program*. The attitude of revolutionary Marxists toward such a government in power is spelled out in both documents: 'The communists must at all costs explain to the working class that its liberation can only be assured by the dictatorship of the proletariat,' explains the Comintern resolution. Trotsky formulated things this way: 'Of all the parties and organizations which base themselves on the workers and peasants and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' and farmers' government. On this road we promise them full support against capitalist reaction. At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should, in our opinion, form the program of the workers' and farmers' government.'

But the Comintern in 1922 did not consider it likely that the revolutionary Marxist movement would be faced with many, if any, actual examples of governmental formations which would meet the criteria of petty-bourgeois workers' and farmers' governments. Trotsky considered it even more unlikely in 1938, after the intervening years of experience with the prostration of Stalinist and social democratic leaders in the face of the crisis of bourgeois society. Still, he refused to rule out the possibility: 'Is the creation of such a government by the traditional workers' organizations possible? Past experience shows that this is, to say the least, highly improbable.'

Since there had never been any example of such a government, and since neither the Comintern in 1922 nor Trotsky in 1938 considered it likely that there would be, why was such attention paid by them to this problem? It is essential to keep in mind that the Comintern and Trotsky in the *Transitional Program* were not primarily concerned with the dynamics of an actual workers' and farmers' government of the petty-bourgeois type. Their main purpose was to discuss the power of *the call for such a government* on the development of proletarian consciousness.

The object, Trotsky explained, was to '(free) the proletariat from the old leadership' which stood then, and still does today, as the chief obstacle in the path of the socialist revolution: 'The demand of the Bolsheviks, addressed to the Mensheviks and the SRs—'Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power into your own hands'—had for the masses tremendous educational significance.' Whatever variant took place—whether an actual government independent of the bourgeoisie came to power or the old leadership stood exposed as a result of its refusal to organize a government—the interests of the masses and of building a revolutionary Marxist vanguard party would be advanced. This is the classic characteristic of the united front.

The post-war social transformations

Up until Trotsky's death and the beginning of the Second World War, the

revolutionary Marxist movement had used the term 'workers' and farmers' government' only in the two ways outlined in the *Transitional Program*: as a synonym for and popularization of the proletariat, and as a call for a united-front government with reformist, petty-bourgeois, currents in the workers' movement.

But the Second World War had a number of unexpected results, which raised new theoretical problems. Bureaucratic rule was extended militarily into Eastern Europe. Genuine revolutions resulted in the creation of workers' states with similar bureaucratic regimes in Yugoslavia, China, and later Vietnam. A vast uprising of the colonial revolution took place. This resulted in the formation of a large number of formally independent neo-colonial regimes which, nevertheless, could not break away from the economic domination of imperialism. In Cuba in 1959, however, a different sort of leadership arose which proved capable of leading the transformation to a genuine proletarian state power.

In the wake of these events, an effort was made by Joseph Hansen to fit the somewhat disparate revolutionary experiences of the post-war years into the established framework of revolutionary Marxism. He proposed that this could be done through a development of the concept of the petty-bourgeois workers' and farmers' government advanced by the Fourth Comintern Congress.

Hansen on Cuba and Algeria

Here is how Hansen discussed his approach to the Cuban revolution: 'The concept 'Workers' and Farmers' Government' is not at all a new one. At the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922, it was discussed at some length. . . The possibility was not considered great that a petty-bourgeois government in opposition to the bourgeoisie would actually appear. But it was considered a possibility and some of its characteristics were delineated. These offer us criteria by which to measure the new Cuban government. . . ' ⁶ Hansen goes on to show how the tasks of a workers' government projected in the Comintern Theses (disarming bourgeois counterrevolution, introducing economic planning, transferring the burden of taxation to the rich, etc) were indeed carried out by the July 26 movement once it had gained governmental power.

He also believed that this approach could help explain some of the contradictions in the experience of the Ben-Bella government in Algeria. At first, this was accepted by the reunified Fourth International as a whole, but later some sentiment was expressed that the characterization of this regime as a workers' and peasants' government had been a mistake. A proposal was made to substitute the characterization 'Jacobin team' for 'workers' and peasants' government' in this case. In 1969 Hansen wrote a letter objecting to such a change, and his argument reveals how he view-

ed the relationship between the Fourth Comintern concept of the petty-bourgeois workers' and farmers' government and the Algerian experience:

Did this 'Jacobin team' function as a government? The answer, of course, is that it did. What was the class nature of this 'Jacobin team' government? The answer is 'petty bourgeois'. Did it rest on a capitalist state structure? The answer is 'yes'. Did it nevertheless undertake measures which if pursued to their logical conclusion would have ended in the establishment of a workers' state in Algeria? The answer is 'yes'.

Four questions, along with their necessary answers are sufficient to establish that so far as *content* is concerned the label 'Jacobin team' as applied to the Ben Bella regime, designates precisely the same phenomenon as the label 'workers' and peasants' government'.

The final resolution on the matter, adopted by the International Executive Committee in December 1969, kept the workers' and peasants' government characterization, while inserting a note of clarification: 'The Fourth International never used the category of workers' and peasants' government in the Algerian context as a synonym for a dictatorship of the proletariat. The state structure was always correctly analyzed as bourgeois. But although the International correctly applied the designation of workers' and peasants' government to the Ben Bella regime, it did not sufficiently stress the imperious necessity of establishing independent organs of political power by the urban and rural proletariat.'

The criteria raised by Hansen in Cuba and Algeria (and also China and Yugoslavia, though we will not take the time to illustrate this here) fit precisely the terms laid out in the Comintern resolution for the petty-bourgeois type of workers' and farmers' government: a thoroughgoing revolutionary crisis and decomposition of the old regime which poses the question of power, allowing that power to be taken by petty-bourgeois representatives of the masses who then exercise it with some significant degree of genuine independence from the bourgeoisie but without moving definitively, at least in the initial stages, toward a proletarian solution to their contradictory position.

There were, and continue to be, those who disagree that the actual facts of the post-war revolutions fit the theoretical framework Hansen proposed. We will not take up an argument on this aspect of the problem here, but it cannot be disputed that up to this point in his theoretical work Hansen had not presented any new conception of the workers' and farmers' government. He had simply asserted that what had been considered as an abstract possibility by the Comintern, or an 'extremely improbably variant' by Trotsky, had actually come to pass in a number of cases.

He did, of course, *extend* the theory by asserting that such governments had gone further in Cuba, China, and Yugoslavia than either Trotsky or the Comintern had considered possible—to the point of expropriating the bourgeoisie and establishing workers' states. All that this meant from a theoretical point of view, however, is that the actual experience in life with this type of government revealed more possibilities than had been anticipated based simply on theoretical speculation. This is not an unusual experience for Marxists, and doesn't entail anything new on the level of the *definition*

or *description* of what a workers' and farmers' government is.

Third conception

But Hansen also *did* suggest a new usage. And this has caused considerable controversy, as well as some confusion within the Fourth International.

He began by stating that the qualitative turning point which marked the transformation of the workers' and farmers' governments of the petty-bourgeois type into proletarian states in Cuba, China, and Yugoslavia was the decisive expropriation of the economic power of the bourgeoisie. At that point a proletarian solution to the contradiction inherent in any such government was assured. From this he extrapolated somewhat, and began to generalize about the distinction between two phases of the socialist revolution—before and after the decisive expropriation of the means of production. The first phase he characterized generally as the 'workers' and farmers' government', the second as the 'workers' state'.

Hansen never, in fact, formally codified this specific terminology. It is undeniable, however, that he and the rest of the leadership of the US Socialist Workers Party, began to apply 'workers' and farmers' government' and 'workers' state' in the sense of scientific descriptive terms to characterize two different phases of the socialist revolution.

In a letter to Bob Chester, a fellow member of the US SWP who had raised some questions about Hansen's approach, he referred to the Russian revolution in the following way:

If a revolutionary-Marxist party exists, and gains governmental power under the impulsion of a revolution, there is no question as to the subsequent dynamics. The party assures it through its program, through the cadres imbued with that program, and through the experience gained in the living class struggle that finally puts it in power. The course of the Russian revolution is a classic example. Note well, however, that the Bolsheviks held power for a period on the basis of the capitalist state structure and the capitalist economy. Time was required to carry out their program. If anything, they had to carry through these changes *prematurely*. (This had to be paid for later, as Trotsky explained, by the New Economic Policy.) Thus the Russian revolution provided the world with the first example of a 'Workers and Peasants Government' in power with the task still before it of actually establishing a workers' state.

It is obvious if we compare this paragraph to Hansen's descriptions of events in Cuba and Algeria, that although he was prepared to talk of workers' and farmers' governments in all of these cases, he was certainly not making a theoretical identity between them. Rather, he is using the broad kind of descriptive category that the Comintern resolution did with its list of five possible variants of 'workers' governments'. In this case, 'workers' and farmers' government' does not define the *class nature* of the regime as either petty-bourgeois or proletarian, but includes both possible types. Hansen cannot, therefore, be legitimately interpreted as implying any necessary *class* distinction between the two phases of the revolutionary process which he described as the 'workers' and peasants' government' and the 'workers'

state'. It is possible—even desirable—for both to have a proletarian content.

The present dispute

The current dispute over the 'workers' and farmers' government' within the Fourth International began with the introduction of a fourth conception of the term in a report by SWP National Secretary Jack Barnes, *The Workers' and Farmers' Government in the United States*, which was approved by a plenum of the SWP National Committee in March 1982. In his report Barnes insisted that the most important aspect of this idea is that it signifies *an actual governmental alliance* between the proletariat and the peasantry:

'We are fighting for a government of the workers *and* the farmers, just as the slogan says. We're fighting for a government in which the workers—(exploited wage labour)—and working farmers—(exploited rural commodity producers)—govern together.'

And further on:

'The governmental slogan in our transitional program is not a trick. Communists are not trying to trick the farmers into a workers government by giving it another name. We're fighting for a government of the workers *and* exploited farmers, who together will use that governmental power to transform the economic foundations of society. We say to the farmers, as Trotsky advised us more than 40 years ago, 'it will also be your government' and we say so truthfully.'⁷

In none of the other literature that we have examined up to the time of Barnes's report is there any mention of the forging of such an alliance on the *governmental level* as a major objective of the proletarian vanguard—or even as a task at all. In fact, we will find this idea specifically rejected throughout the post-October 1917 writings of Lenin, Trotsky, and other authoritative spokespersons of Bolshevism.

The *alliance with the farmers* is, of course, a primary requirement for the proletarian revolution. This has long been recognized. But after the test of Russia in 1917 the revolutionary Marxist movement considered it definitively established that this alliance would be forged by the actions of a *proletarian* government. Such a government would sanction the actions taken by the poor farmers in their own interests (land seizures, etc) and would provide additional measures—technological aid, cheap credit—to aid them. It is in this sense that the proletarian dictatorship is also a 'government of the farmers', which we can explain and popularize through the slogan of the 'workers' and farmers' government'. The idea of a necessary independent political role for the farmers in the government itself is newly introduced by Barnes in his report.

I will cite just one example from Trotsky in 1938 to illustrate how he addressed this problem:

By and by we must give this understanding to the agricultural workers and to the semi-proletarian farmers—that their own government cannot be conducted by La Follette and other bourgeois, only by revolutionary workers . . . (The peasants) can have no guiding role in politics. They can decide only through the cities; better, they can be guided only by the workers. But it is necessary to pose this slogan (of the workers' and peasants' government) before the peasants themselves. We say you must not choose as your alliance the bourgeoisie, but the workers, who are your brothers. And this government would be your government of workers and poor farmers.⁸

It is no accident that the questioning of this basic feature of the revolutionary Marxist program by Barnes in 1982 proved to be only the prelude to a much broader attack which centred on the concept of permanent revolution itself. Permanent revolution deals *precisely* with the *class character* of the transitional government necessary to carry through the objectives of the workers and peasants. In essence, Barnes rejects the desirability—indeed the possibility—of the fifth kind of workers' government listed in the Fourth Comintern Congress resolution, ie a Bolshevik government, a proletarian government. Despite his claims of continuing the tradition of Hansen, Barnes's thesis represents a sharp break with Hansen who, as we have seen, fully recognized the distinction between the proletariat and the petty-bourgeoisie in power, and always saw his appreciation of the workers' and farmers' government to be a verification of and complement to the theory of permanent revolution.

Conclusion

Far from being some esoteric and irrelevant distraction, the present debate over the workers' and farmers' government takes up one of the most crucial aspects of revolutionary strategy in the world today—the *class nature* of the government necessary to carry through the transition from capitalism to socialism. The theoretical differences over this have led to very real practical disagreements about the approach of revolutionary Marxists to events in countries like Iran and South Africa.

In answer to Barnes, many in our world movement have expressed the view that the work of Hansen must be rejected, and the idea of the workers' and farmers' government has little or no valid concrete application.⁹ Another current, to which the author of this article belongs, believes that Hansen grasped a valid essence in his analysis, that Barnes has taken advantage of the unfinished nature of Hansen's ideas to distort their meaning, and that our task is to sort out in a critical way what was correct in Hansen's approach from what might have been false starts or more dubious theoretical aspects which inevitably arise in any theoretical work.

There are still other approaches to the problem as well among those who disagree with the US SWP leadership and continue to defend the program of Trotskyism and permanent revolution. Some of the differences in approach to the workers' and farmers' government simply involve nuances

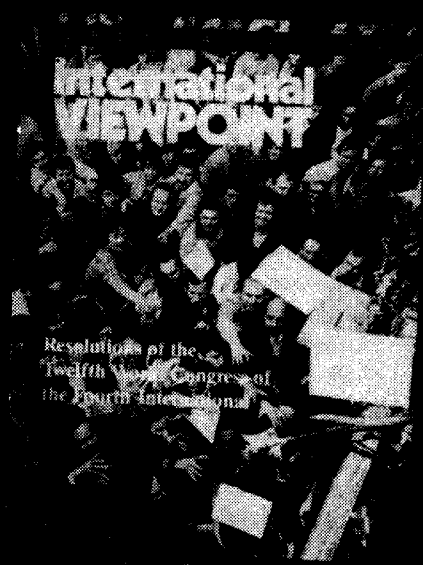
of definition or distinction. Others, however, represent broadly divergent interpretations of theory or major disagreement over what actually happened in one revolution or another. These disagreements are mixed and matched in a variety of ways by different tendencies and individuals within the Fourth Internationalist movements.

All of this is more than natural in a living revolutionary organization which is trying to grapple with real and complex problems of the class struggle. Without doubt, as the discussion and the test of experience continue, we will find a way to satisfactorily resolve the problem. It is my hope that, armed with the background in this article—and with additional information from independent research into the rich source material which is available—the reader will be better prepared to consider the important theoretical issues involved, make an informed judgement, and contribute to the discussion and clarification of the issues.

Notes

1. Steve Bloom is a member of the editorial board of the *Bulletin in Defence of Marxism* in the United States, and National Administrative Secretary of the Fourth International Tendency.
2. Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution*, (New York: Pathfinder, 1977), p.133.
3. *ibid.*, pp.133-134.
4. Joseph Hansen, *The Workers' and Farmers' Government*, (New York: SWP, Education for Socialists, 1974), Appendix p.39-40.
5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*, p.4.
7. *International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 18. no.5, pp.25-26.
8. Trotsky, *op. cit.*

RESOLUTIONS of the TWELTH WORLD CONGRESS of the FOURTH INTERNATIONAL



The Twelfth World Congress of the Fourth International took place in January 1985. It brought together delegates representing over forty organisations supporting the world movement.

Six major political items were on the agenda:

- the world political situation,
- the lessons and perspectives of the Central American revolution,
- the political revolution in Poland and the role of the Polish revolution,
- the present and future of permanent revolution and the workers' and farmers' government,
- the role of the Fourth International and socialist democracy,
- the role of the Fourth International today.

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