



In Defence of Trotskyism No. 32



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The 1952 Revolution in Bolivia

How the Fourth International and the POR betrayed the revolution which could have carried Trotskyism to power. By José Villa. (Bases No.5 Autumn 1992). Mike Jones translated. He wrote this analysis when in Workers Power and their International, with their assistance. It is a Marxist classic in our humble opinion.

When the February revolution occurred in 1917, the Bolsheviks had been in existence for fifteen years. When the revolution of April 1952 happened the POR had been in existence for seventeen years. Both movements operated in countries with a peasant and petty bourgeois majority but with a modern, geographically concentrated, proletariat. Both parties had the benefit of working with the introducers of 'Marxism' into their respective countries (Plekhanov and Marof) and their cadres had taken part in forming the first working class organisations. While Bolshevism had been formed by its confrontation with other Marxist currents (economists, Mensheviks, etc.), petty bourgeois socialists (SRs) and bourgeois democrats (Cadets), the POR had had to fight against the 'Marxists' of Marof and Stalinism, the different wings of the MNR and 'socialism' of both bourgeois and military varieties. Introduction by José Villa.



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By José Villa

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When the February revolution occurred in 1917, the Bolsheviks had been in existence for fifteen years. When the revolution of April 1952 happened the POR had been in existence for seventeen years. Both movements operated in countries with a peasant and petty bourgeois majority but with a modern, geographically concentrated, proletariat. Both parties had the benefit of working with the introducers of 'Marxism' into their respective countries (Plekhanov and Marof) and their cadres had taken part in forming the first working class organisations. While Bolshevism had been formed by its confrontation with other Marxist currents (economists, Mensheviks, etc.), petty bourgeois socialists (SRs) and bourgeois democrats (Cadets), the POR had had to fight against the 'Marxists' of Marof and Stalinism, the different wings of the MNR and 'socialism' of both bourgeois and military varieties.

Bolshevism was tempered during the working class upsurge which culminated in the 1905 revolution, in the reactionary phase which followed it, in the new wave of strikes and the struggle against World War 1. The POR was born in the fight against the Chaco War and was forged during two great mass insurgencies, which brought down the governments in 1936 and 1946, in great strikes and massacres, in constant changes of government, coups and a short civil war. While the 'general rehearsal' of 1905 was smashed, both of the two rehearsals of revolutionary crises experienced by the POR ended with toppling the governments. Bolivian 'Trotskyism' had its programme endorsed by the university students and the miners and could pride itself on having had within its ranks the main leaders of the FSTMB and the CON. (1)

The role of the POR in the April events was such that even one of the founders of the Stalinist party recognised that of the five main leaders of the insurrection, one was of the MNR right, another was of the pro-POR wing of the MNR, and three were POR:

"This armed uprising was led and guided to victory by the leading personnel of the MNR, Hernán Siles Zuazo, Juan Lechín Oquendo, Edwin Moller, Alandia Pantojas, Villegas and others". (2) (Memorias del primer ministro obrero, Waldo Alvarez, La Paz, 1986 p.188).

In Lucha Obrera, the POR boasted that

"when top MNR leaders thought about flight, it was our comrades who lead the people and proletariat of Oruro to victory (...) our militants were the real leaders in the defence of Villa Pavon and Miraflores that in practice saved the difficult situation for the revolutionaries when the enemy already appeared to be triumphant within the city". (3) (LO 12.6.52, p.3).

Within the COB, the dominant power in the country, the POR was the most important and influential party. The historian Alexander states that: "The POR which had in large part been able to determine the ideological orientation and dynamism of the Workers Center", "For the first six months the COB was practically in the hands of the Trotskyists". (4)

Lora admits that

“Immediately after the 9th April 1952, the MNR operated as a inactive minority within the trade union organisations. It had little success because mass radicalisation had reached its highest point.” (5) (*Sindicatos y revolución*, G. Lora, La Paz 1960, p.31).

“The whole of the opening struggle for the formation of the Trade Union Centre was in the hands of POR militants and a large part of the full-time Staff and the whole orientation of the brand new COB was Trotskyist. Lechín did no more than operate under the powerful pressure of the masses and the POR. In the speeches of the workers’ leaders of this period and in the plans presented to the Paz Estenssoro Cabinet can be found the imprint of the POR”. (6) (*La Revolución boliviana: Análisis crítico*, Guillermo Lora, La Paz 1963, p.254).

While the MNR was weak for several months after the uprising of April, the POR CC continued boasting to itself about its majority in the COB. “Our unchallenged present majority is a clear proof of our slow but solid and sure work, undertaken by the party in this sense”. (7) (*Boletín Interno*, no 13, POR, 1953, p.11).

The COB was born brandishing the Theses of Pulacayo, and with a POR programme and orientation. When it was founded the POR displayed its total identification with its conduct. “The COB was born then with a clear conception of its independent class position, faithfully interpreting in its transitional programme the broad mass movement” (8) (*LO*, 18.4.52., p.2).

The historian Dunkerley maintains that “much of the preparatory work (of founding the COB) was undertaken by the POR representatives, Edwin Moller, Miguel Alandia and José Zegada”. (9) (*Rebelión en las venas*, James Dunkerley, Ed Quipus, 1982, La Paz, p.50, Verso edition p.45). “The POR allegedly controlled at least half the COB’s 13 man central committee”. (10) (*ibid.*, p.67, Verso Edition, p.64. The editor of the English text omitted ‘allegedly’ before ‘controlled’).

In October 1952 a journalist, claiming to be a Trotskyist critical of the POR, admitted that within the COB “the largest fraction is that of the POR; next comes the group of Lechín and Torres, that is the nationalist wing of the unions while the Stalinists are in third place with scarcely five votes”. (11)

It took the Russian Bolsheviks from February to October to obtain a majority in the Soviets and when they had got it they moved to insurrection. The POR however controlled the COB from its first moments. While the Bolsheviks were a minority within the Russian working class for these eight months the POR led the COB for the first crucial six months after the insurrection which dispersed the bourgeois army. The programme, the leadership and the press of the COB were the work of the POR. The main leader of the COB functioned by reading out speeches written by the POR.

However, there was a huge difference between the POR and Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks demanded of the Soviets that they should give no class support to the bourgeois-democratic, reformist coalition government and that instead they should break with the bourgeoisie and take all power in their own hands. The POR, in contrast, gave ‘critical support’ to the bourgeois government and asked to be given ministerial posts. While the Bolsheviks attacked the Mensheviks and the SRs without pity, seeking to remove them from leadership positions, the POR identified itself with the labour bureaucracy (for whom they drafted speeches and ministerial plans) and sought to transform the bour-

geois party and its government. The Bolshevik strategy was to make a new revolution while that of the POR was to reform the MNR and its government. In short, while Bolshevism was Leninist, the POR was Lechinist.

Chapter 2: The Menshevik positions of the POR and of Lora in April

Trying to explain the behaviour of the POR as objectively as possible, Dunkerley maintains that those from the section of the Fourth International “were from an early stage highly critical of the MNR regime, they made no call for an immediate workers government, demanding instead a radicalisation of proposed reforms, the defence of the regime against imperialism and the revolutionary education of the masses”. (12) (*Rebelión en las venas*, p.52 – Verso Edition, p.46).

Just before the April events the POR had published “an open letter to the government, demanding that power be handed over to the Nationalist MNR without a new election”. (13) The strategy of the POR was limited to pressurising the government periodically so as to change the leadership of the bourgeois state with the aim of allowing the MNR to take over the presidency by constitutional means. In that way, a legitimate government could be restored, which, through pressure, would be forced to adopt radical measures and would also have to appoint worker ministers.

During the April events Lora had been in France where he gave statements to *La Verité* which *The Militant* then reproduced. They were the main weeklies of the Fourth International. In his history of the POR, Lora says that “Up to now not enough importance has been given to the call for the Trotskyist programme made by Lora in Paris a few days after the arrival of the MNR in power”. With great cynicism he states that there he said that the working class “in order to triumph had no other way than by going over the political corpse of the MNR and also over that of Lechinism”. (14) (*Contribución ...*, G. Lora, Vol.2, pp.237-238). As far as we are concerned, we do not want to give ‘enough importance’ to such statements. Exactly the opposite was said. Let us see:

“The central slogans put forward by our party were:

- 1) Restore the constitution of the country through the formation of an MNR government which obtained a majority in the 1951 election.
- 2) The struggle for the improvement of wages and working conditions
- 3) Struggle for democratic rights
- 4) Mobilisation of the masses against imperialism, for the nationalisation of the mines, and for the abrogation of the UN agreement”. (15) (*The Militant* 12.5.52, Lora interview Part 1, SWP, New York.)

Of all these demands only the last one is really radical and even that did not go beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy, or what the anti-communist Paz would do a few months later. The first seeks a constitutional bourgeois state with a populist government. Instead of seeking to differentiate itself from the latter by raising anti-capitalist and class-based slogans, the whole of the POR platform was exactly the same as that raised by the bourgeois MNR. Lora did not put forward as his dominant idea any proletarian slogan (expropriation without compensation of the bourgeoisie, workers control, disarming the bourgeois armed forces and their replacement by worker and peasant militias, occupation mines, factories and land, etc.). Instead of wanting to make the COB into a soviet, break

with the bourgeoisie and take all power, Lora called for the MNR bourgeois government to change direction and limited himself to asking for some reforms which did not go beyond the framework of the capitalist state.

“The subversive movement of the ninth of April was no surprise for our party and occurred as we had foreseen in our theoretical analysis”. (16)

If a party was aware that it was approaching the main revolution of its history it ought to have done all it could to have kept its most important individual in the country, or at least, not far away. However, Lora stayed in Paris for more than half a year after the end of the 3rd World Congress of the Fourth International which was why he was in Europe. By boasting that his party had predicted what was going to happen and with his view that he should stay outside in the imperialist world, Lora was either blustering, or worse, he did not place much importance on his own endeavours to get rid of the MNR but instead agreed with trying to put pressure on it.

“The struggle which immediately began is a struggle of the masses to impose their demands on the April 9th government”. (17)

If the POR was in the forefront of the struggle its objective should have been to put itself forward as an alternative leadership which called on the COB to kick out Paz. However, Lora called for support of the bourgeois government and its ‘left-wing’ ministers. Instead of opposing the trap of inviting labour ministers into the capitalist cabinet, so attempting to improve the regime’s disguise preparatory to disarming and then counter-attacking the workers, Lora identified himself with the tactic. “The textile workers decided to impose their conditions on the right wing

of the MNR, they obliged it to accept the working class elements in the new cabinet who constitute its left faction”. (18) (The Militant, 12.5.52, Lora Interview Part 1).

“In this connection, the essential mission of the POR is to assume the role of the vigilant guide to prevent the aspirations of the workers from being diluted by vague promises or by manoeuvres of right wing elements”. (19)

For the POR, the enemy was not the bourgeois government but only the ministers who were to the right of the anti-communist Paz. As far as Paz was concerned, ‘the government was to be defended to the utmost’.

Lora wanted to uphold this reformist position by characterising the regime as petty bourgeois. The petty bourgeoisie is incapable of installing its own mode of production and regime. Small property engenders large property. A society of small owners is impossible and cannot avoid competition so forcing some to enrich themselves to accumulate while others become poor and are turned into proletarians. When the petty bourgeoisie is not allied to the proletariat it is marching behind the bourgeoisie aiming to reform its state.

A government that is not subordinate to the Soviets and workers militias is one that is against the proletariat. A petty bourgeois government which oscillates between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie cannot exist. By upholding such a possibility, Lora put forward the view that these ‘petty bourgeois’ governments, should have pressure put on them to try to fill them with extra labour ministers, with the aim of gradually achieving a workers and peasants government. This is a gradualist and reformist conception that led the POR to prop up the military socialist dictatorship, and it would later lead

them to ask for ministers in the cabinet of General Torres. Whenever you try to put 'red' ministers in the populist governments of the bourgeoisie and sow further illusions, the more the ruling class is helped make use of these demagogues so as to confuse and disorientate the masses and to prepare a reactionary coup.



Neither the MNR government nor the party were petty bourgeois.

The MNR, like every party with popular support, reflects the composition of the society in which it operates. A populist party, even though it has a majority of members from the most oppressed strata, just as elsewhere within capitalism, is run from the top down. Almost all the top leadership of the MNR were people who came from the oligarchic families, who had collaborated with German imperialism, propped up the bloody nationalist dictatorship of Villarroel and who were socially, ideologically and organically, an expression of a sector of the national bourgeoisie. The MNR, like Bolivian society, might have a majority of members and voters in the petty bourgeoisie, but it was led by politicians of and for the bourgeoisie.

Chapter 3: International repercussions of the interview with Lora

These scandalous declarations were published in the mouth-piece of those who called themselves bastions of 'anti-pabloism': the SWP (USA) and PCI (France). From 'Pabloists' to 'anti-Pabloists' all fully supported these positions. In all of the factional struggles which were to split the Fourth International in 1953, nobody ever objected to this criminal Menshevik policy which betrayed the Bolivian Revolution.

The only discordant voice known within the Fourth International at that time was that of a small tendency in California, headed by Vern and Ryan. This had the great merit of severely questioning the Menshevik declarations of Lora.

"The POR has been presented the opportunity of leading a revolution and thereby rendering a great service to our international movement."

"The MNR is a bourgeois party, which politically exploits the masses."

"... it is incontestable that the present Bolivian government is a bourgeois government, whose task and aim is to defend by all means available to it the interests of the bourgeoisie and of imperialism (...) This government is therefore the deadly enemy of the workers and peasants, and especially of the Marxist party."

"A united front with a bourgeois party with the aim of establishing a bourgeois constitution and placing the bourgeois party in power is not a united front but a people's front.

"The united front that the Marxists advocate aims to unite the workers and peasants on a minimum programme embodying a stage of the revolutionary transitional program. This united front, in a revolutionary situation, turns into workers' and peasants' soviets. And even in the soviets the struggle goes on. Far from accepting the conciliationist pro-

gramme which may be imposed on the soviets, the Marxists advocate their own programme, calling on the soviets to break with the bourgeoisie, their parties and their government, and take the complete power, establishing a workers' and peasants' government.

"But comrade Lora does not raise the question of a break with the bourgeois government. The workers' and peasants' government he advocates appears as some ultimate conclusion to a gradual reshuffling of the personnel of the bourgeois government, whereby the right wingers will be forced out and the cabinet take on a more and more left tinge". (20)

The Vern-Ryan tendency received no reply to its criticism against the Menshevik line in Bolivia. From then until today, all the currents which derive from the 'anti-Pabloist' International Committee continue to ignore these questionings of a policy which they, opportunistically, totally endorsed.

In spite of the progressive nature of its criticism this tendency soon dissolved itself. Its positions, although on the left of the deformed Fourth International, contained a series of ambiguities. The most important of them was its conception that a government directed by a Stalinist military apparatus would be enough (regardless of whether capitalist social relations had been expropriated or not) to recognise the creation of a new deformed workers state.

Chapter 4: Rebelión against the Permanent Revolution

The POR was proud that it edited the mouthpiece of the COB bureaucracy.

"Our points of view were imposed by a crushing majority and the newspaper Rebelión of the COB presented our own political position in the workers camp". (21) (Boletín Interno, No.13, POR, undated, p.10)

"The three first issues of Rebelión, the last of which was published on the occasion of the First Congress of the COB (31st October 1954), appeared under the direction of M. Alandia and wholly expressed the programme of the Centre at that time. The first issue contained a hearty greeting to the General Secretary of the POR". (22) (La revolución boliviana: Análisis crítico, G. Lora, La Paz 1963, p.254).

But what did this mouthpiece have to say? Did it put forward a revolutionary policy whose basic principles could only be a demand for the COB to break with Paz and call for the occupation of the mines, factories and the land, and to take power? On the contrary, Rebelión identified itself with the bourgeois regime. It stated that the MNR government was its own and that it had to be propped up. In its first issue under POR direction it said:

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“The defeat of the oligarchy and the birth of the MNR government is the work of the working masses; it is our creation (...) in order to survive the present government requires from the workers that the workers supporting it, being vigilant will be able to attain great achievements”. (23) (*Rebelión*, 1.5.52, pp.8-9)

They not only mortgaged themselves to the MNR but paid homage to the memory of a military man, Gualberto Villarroel, who was involved in the Catavi massacre of 1942, and who was a pro-imperialist dictator overthrown by a popular uprising. (24) “Our proletarian homage to the memory of the martyr president” (*ibid.*, p.9).

How could that be the position of a revolutionary? This was an orientation which could only help to disarm and demobilise the COB, asking it, in spite of having the real power, to continue helping a bourgeois government that was destined to line up behind imperialism and massacre the workers.

In June, Lucha Obrera maintained that the MNR should thank the POR for helping it achieve power and for its support. Its task would now be to put pressure on the MNR to carry out reforms which would benefit the working and middle classes.

“If the MNR has to give thanks to anyone, and greatly for our help, it is without doubt, to the POR (...) The POR will continue in carrying out its task of guiding the proletariat and of ensuring that the actions which deposed one government and raised up another, which enjoys the support of all the people, are carried out in a way beneficial to the proletariat and the oppressed sectors of the middle class”. (25) (*LO*, 12.6.52, p.3).

“Never before had a party like the MNR that can count on uniform backing from an armed people and proletariat, achieved power; and never, therefore, did anyone have the opportunity of adopting measures with a real revolutionary content. The government has closed its eyes, or has not wanted to see the magnificent opportunity, and has preferred to deceive the proletariat which supported it unconditionally”. (26) (*LO*, 29.6.52, p.4)

Never before had the party had such an opportunity to make a social revolution, but the MNR hesitated. The POR opposed the view that the deficiency was because of the bourgeois class character of the MNR, but said it was due to its lack of tactical ability. The task was to open its eyes and make it see the magnificent opportunity. The whole policy of the POR was completely Menshevik. Instead of calling on the workers to reject the MNR and to struggle to put the COB into power, the POR boasted of having served the MNR and of wanting it to mull over things and see reality – an orientation that was simply limited to seeking to serve as an adviser to the MNR in order to reform it.

Chapter 5: The POR supports the bourgeois government

Nine days after the uprising of 9th April, the mouthpiece of the POR declared that

“to the extent that it carries out the promised programme, it supports the Government which arose out of the popular insurrection of 9th April, (...) It had two worker ministers in the petty bourgeois cabinet, but was entirely controlled and tied to the decisions of the COB”. (27) (*LO*, 18.4.52, p.2).

Under no circumstances can the proletariat support the government of a section of its exploiters. On the contrary, the aim of a Marxist party should be to undermine it and to struggle for its revolutionary overthrow. Supporters of it would be compromised with a policy of maintaining backward and semi-colonial capitalism. In the case of an attempt



JUAN LECHÍN OQUENDO (1960 - 1964)

Vicepresidente de Bolivia

JUAN LECHÍN OQUENDO

(Corocoro (LP) 1914-La Paz 2001)

Vicepresidente del segundo gobierno de VICTOR PAZ

(6 de agosto de 1960-6 de agosto de 1964)

La presencia de **Juan Lechín** fue decisiva en la organización de la COB. **Lechín** nació en Corocoro (La Paz) el 18 de mayo de 1914, trabajó en Catavi como obrero y en Siglo XX como perforista. Fue subprefecto de Uncía (1944). Luchó en la Revolución de 1952. fue ministro de Minas y Petróleo del primer gobierno de **Paz**. Fundador y secretario ejecutivo de la Federación de Mineros (1946-1987, durante 41 años) y de la COB (1952-1987). Se opuso a la política de **Siles Zuazo** (1956-1960).

Fue Vicepresidente de Bolivia (1960-1964) acompañando a **Paz Estenssoro**, con quien rompió por diferencias ideológicas. El día de la transmisión del mando tras la reelección de **Paz**, sufrió vejámenes físicos que le impidieron asistir al acto congresal.

Fundó el PRIN en 1963, renunciando al MNR. Contribuyó al golpe de estado que derrocó al MNR en 1964. Exiliado en 1965, volvió al país en 1970. En 1971 fue elegido presidente de la Asamblea Popular y ratificado como secretario ejecutivo de la Federación Sindical de Mineros y la COB. En 1971 salió al exilio y retornó en 1978 nuevamente como máximo líder de la COB.

at a reactionary coup the Trotskyists should have followed the same policy as Russian Bolshevism in the face of the Kornilov revolt. Without giving an ounce of support to the Kerensky government the Leninists joined its supporters in the streets to fight with arms in order to crush ultra-reaction. At all times they called on the workers to have no confidence in, or to give support to, the government, and to prepare to depose it in a revolutionary way, once the monarchist coup attempt had been crushed.

However, in Bolivia at the time imperialism had no intention of carrying out a coup. It much preferred to help Paz and Siles, who knew how to use demagoguery together with reformists like Lechín and their agents in the POR, in order to exhaust the masses, so that they could free themselves from working class pressure and succeed in rebuilding the bourgeois armed forces and so maintaining semi-colonial capitalism. The rightist coups (such as the adventure of the MNR right-wing in January 1953) could not count on the patronage of the USA. The Yanks had no wish to provoke a popular counter-reaction. They knew that the MNR was led by bourgeois and they knew how to use such people against the workers.

The USA never armed a counter-revolutionary guerrilla force as it did later in Nicaragua, Angola or Afghanistan. Nor did it encourage bellicose sentiments among the reactionary governments of the region for an invasion. The imperialist trump card was Paz. They knew that the latter would be made to nationalise the larger mines and to carry out some social reforms. But they also knew that he did it under pressure of the armed masses and that he would try to moderate those reforms when he could. As soon as populist demagoguery had helped the rebuilding of the repressive bourgeois military machine and the workers activity had ebbed, that would be the time for a policy of destabilisation. The Eder and Triangular plans applied later by Paz, Siles or Lechín would seek to follow the designs of imperialism against the exploited of Bolivia.

To believe that ministers in a cabinet could have a policy contrary to that of the government was shown to be a reactionary illusion. Rather, those 'red' ministers were

obliged to implement the decisions of an anti-working class government. It was not the COB that controlled its ministers, but it was the government, through its trade unionist ministers, which controlled the COB.

During the April events, the “Central Committee issued a resolution in the form of adhering to the revolution, advancing a programme of immediate demands. The fundamental points demanded a struggle for (...) A Bolivian government that would obey the will of the Bolivians”. (28) (Boletín Interno, No.13, 1953, p.7). In May, Lucha Obrera called for a struggle to change the direction of the Víctor Paz government. It demanded “A Bolivian government which will obey the will of the Bolivians and not of the Yanks”. “The petty bourgeois government, owing to the force of political circumstances, has the possibility of being transformed and changed into a phase of the Workers and Peasants government”. (29) (LO, 25.5.52, p.3).

The Bolivians living in that country are from every class. A government ‘of the Bolivians’ can only be that of the ruling class of the said republic. The POR, instead of struggling to overthrow the bourgeois government in order to create one of the workers and peasants, suggested that the MNR should rather take up the aim of developing a sovereign national bourgeoisie and that it should stop conciliating the USA to such an extent. If it did the latter it would be able to turn itself into a workers’ and peasants’ government.

For Marxism, the proletariat can come into power only on the basis of the destruction of the existing state machinery and the removal of the bourgeoisie from power. For the POR, the workers could attain power by Bolivianising and improving the regime of the bourgeois MNR. The POR faithfully followed the teachings of Aguirre and Marof, of trying to serve nationalist governments with the aim of changing their direction.

Chapter 6: Co-Government

After the success of the April revolution a quarrel began between the different wings of the MNR about sharing out the quotas of power. When Lechín withdrew, protesting at the few posts given to him for his followers, the leader of the right-wing gave way. According to Lechín’s story, Siles followed him as far as the palace staircase: ‘Juan, come back and we will talk. Put your points of view, and so that they can be carried out, name four ministers’. Lechín went back, named four ministers almost at random, and thus co-government was born”. (30) (ibid. p.301).

“The top layer of the left-wing supported by some union leaders, were content to impose two worker ministers and three centrists in the cabinet and to challenging the right to posts and positions in the administrative bureaucracy”. (31) (Boletín Interno, No 13, of the POR, undated, p.8.) As far as the POR was concerned Lechín should have fought for more portfolios and perhaps some for the POR.

Supported by all the POR votes the newly born COB resolved “To grant comrades Juan Lechín and Germán Butrón the absolute confidence of the working class and to reaffirm its solidarity and support in the ministerial posts they hold at present”. (32) (Movimiento obrero y procesos políticos en Bolivia: Historia de la COB 1952-1987, Jorge Lazarte, EDOBOL, La Paz 1989, p.280).

The POR, after identifying itself with the Lechínist ministers, did ask them to resign in protest about the delay in nationalising the mines. But, on other occasions, later, the POR was once more to demand the capture of ministries on behalf of Lechínism.

In July, the POR said: “When the COB was organised the situation of the worker ministers in the cabinet was defined as spokesmen of the working class in the government and agents of the government in the workers’ camp. The action of the workers ministers, as a minority, is difficult. Faced with that fact, there was undoubtedly no other alternative but to resign”. (33) (LO, 15.7.52, p.1).

In November, the POR issued a ‘self-criticism’: “In spite of all their bold statements, these workers representatives, instead of proletarianising the cabinet as had been proposed, only succeeded in ministerialising the Central Obrera Boliviana”. (34) (LO, 29.11.52, p.2)

Towards the end of 1953, the POR leadership presented a Report in which it stated that: “The new upsurge comes from the demand to Lechín to leave the cabinet put forward by the mining unions, backed by the COB and curbed by Lechín. Our union fraction then took up a neutral and vacillating position”. “We have no doubt that this new period of upsurge will culminate with the adoption of our political theses”. (35) (Boletín Interno, No.13, POR, p.11).

The POR admitted that its trade unionists adapted to the pressures from Lechín. The policy of demanding the resignation of the labour ministers was an opportunist manoeuvre. It did not accompany the call for the COB to take power. Some weeks later, during the key events which frustrated the rightist January coup, the POR was to demand that ‘the comrade President’ Bolivianise his government and allow them to join it. For those reasons, the ‘new period of upsurge’ did not end with the victory of the POR theses but in the victory of the MNR, which was to succeed by absorbing most of the membership and periphery of the POR.

Chapter 7: The POR seeks to enter the bourgeois government

During the 1952 revolution it was vitally important that any party, in the slightest way Marxist, had to have a policy of total independence from and opposition to the new bourgeois government of the MNR. The POR not only did the opposite, supported this new regime and identified itself fully with its ‘Leftist’ ministers, but even tried to enter it. At its 3rd World Congress in 1951, the Fourth International, unanimously adopted a line favouring the POR joining a future MNR government, and the POR had already previously joined the military ‘socialist’ government.

A journalist, claiming to be Trotskyist, related how “*One of the old militants of the POR told us likewise with pride, that the MNR offered two ministries to the POR.*” (36)

“The Executive Power invited the revolutionary painter Alandia to take up the post of Minister of Culture (...) The POR authorised its member to accept the invitation”. (37) (LO, 1.6.52, p.2).

Alandia, who until the end of his life was a well-known leader of Lora’s POR, succeeded in being the Editor of the trade union organ of the MNR bureaucracy, and he joined the government in the capacity of Minister of Culture.

The Californian Trotskyist Ryan sent a letter to the leadership of the SWP and the Fourth International, demanding that it give an answer with information on the details of POR participation in the government. Up until now we are not aware of any explanation or denial of such facts, just as we are unaware of any source which can ascertain their reliability or otherwise. “*According to these reports received from non-Trotskyist sources, the POR is accepting posts in the government machinery: Guillermo Lora, former secretary of the party, has been appointed [to] the Stabilization office; Comrade Moller, present Secretary of the POR, is director of the Workers Savings Bank, which is controlled by Juan Lechín, a member of the Cabinet; Ayala Mercado, another POR leader, is a member of the Agrarian Commission.*” (38)

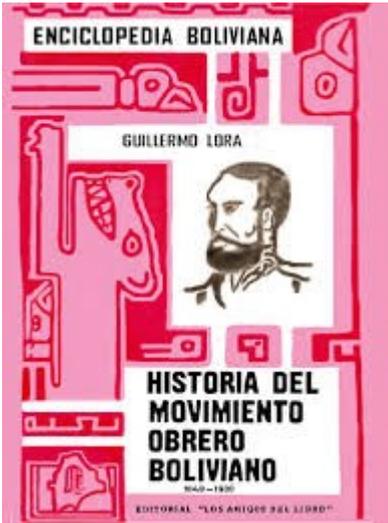
Bolshevism emerged in the struggle against ministerialism. The followers of Lenin were opposed to socialists entering bourgeois-democratic governments in Western Europe and equally that of Kerensky in the Russia of 1917. The only governments in which the Bolsheviks would have participated critically, would be those based on workers militias and councils which could attack and disarm the capitalist class. The Fourth International was founded in the struggle against the POUM of Nin which joined the anti-fascist bourgeois government of Barcelona in 1937. Taking part in a non-working class government only serves the enemies of the proletariat by confusing it and preparing the conditions for a later offensive against it.

In 1952, the POR had a ministerialist attitude. If it did not succeed in getting portfolios in the government but only managed secretarial posts in ministries or departments, it is because the MNR did not consider it to have any weight independent of the Lechínist faction, and it could point to its presence as a way of calming the masses. It preferred to keep the POR outside the cabinet but subordinate to it through the union bureaucracy.

Chapter 8: The collaborationist programme of the POR

In every issue of *Lucha Obrera* after April 1952, a new version of **The Programme of the Exploited**, was reproduced, which we reprint in its entirety:

- “1. To prevent the revolution that begun on 9th April being strangled within the bourgeois and democratic framework.
2. The Strengthening of the working class, and consolidating the COB.
3. The mobilisation of the peasants behind the slogan of nationalisation of land and expropriation of the large estates without compensation, in order to allow the revolutionary process to end in victory.
4. The gaining of democratic guarantees for the exploited. The development of union democracy within the unions. Freedom of propaganda for revolutionary parties. The cancelling of all privileges for the *rosca* (39) counter-revolution.
5. Armed workers militias as a substitute for the regular army.
6. Better conditions of living and work. A basic living wage and sliding scale of wages. Collective contracts.
7. Nationalisation of mines and railways without compensation and under workers control.
8. The expulsion of imperialism. The cancelling of the international treaties which bind the country to imperialism. The rejection of the agreement on technical aid with the UN”. (40) (LO, 25.5.52).



We are not questioning those slogans, but the absence of key and essential slogans. That programme is limited and is adapted to the tastes of the Lechín wing of the MNR. The union bureaucracy could accommodate itself to all these slogans.

The central demands which were completely ignored in the POR press during those months were those of the occupation of the Mines, factories and large estates; no support for the new bourgeois government nor for the Lechín union bureaucracy; no to Co-government; that workers ministers should resign from the capitalist cabinet; All Power to the COB.

The POR talked about *“preventing the revolution being strangled”* when they themselves were strangling it with ‘critical’ support to the capitalist

government. They demanded the *“consolidation of the COB”* but they opposed struggling for the most elementary tasks of achieving such an aim: an open struggle against the bureaucracy of Lechín and the MNR for the election and recall of all leaders by rank-and-file mass meetings and for an immediate conference of the COB in order to equip it with a soviet-type structure and for it to take complete power. The POR did not struggle to transform the COB into a Supreme Soviet in order to seize power, but wanted to put pressure on its summit so that it would recite its speeches and improve governmental decrees.

It called for the nationalisation of the land, mines and railways but did not demand its imposition by the workers and peasants with their own hands through occupations. Its position was limited to requesting and putting pressure on the government to carry out such measures, which created dangerous illusions in the masses, helping to demobilise them and keeping them in a state of dependency (instead of calling on them to do things themselves). At no time did it call for the bourgeoisie to be expropriated. Workers’ control was only demanded for state enterprises. The factories (Said, Soligno, etc.), shopping chains (Casa Grace, etc.) and other private companies continued operating as before. There was no demand for their nationalisation (not even with compensation), for workers, control, or the payment of higher taxes.

They wanted *“freedom of propaganda for revolutionary parties”*. By this the POR acknowledged that, apart from itself, other ‘revolutionaries’ existed, among them the MNR and Stalinism. What was correct was to call for the broadest democratic liberties. At the same time there had to be a struggle for the expropriation of the mass media and its handing over to organisations of workers and ordinary people. *“The cancellation of all privileges of the rosca counter-revolution”* was demanded. But what does the cancellation of privileges mean? What was needed was the demand for its total expropriation along with the creation of people’s courts to try the executioners and butchers of the oligarchic regime.

The slogan about expelling imperialism was very vague. It was not tied to demands to expropriate all its enterprises or to repudiate the foreign debt. Anyway, the POR itself said repeatedly that, if it got into power, it would try to force the USA to recognise it and establish diplomatic relations.

Neither did the POR raise the main slogan for a thorough-going bourgeois democracy: the sovereign Constituent Assembly, where all those over the age of 18 (or 16) would have the right to vote and to be elected. New elections on as democratic and as broad a basis as possible, and the creation of a new Constituent Assembly where the main national problems could be debated, would have let the revolutionary party more easily unmask the nature of the MNR and of parliamentarianism. The POR envisaged something else which flung dust in the workers' eyes: to restore the reactionary constitution which put Paz into the Presidential Palace.

This programme lacked the slightest internationalist slogans. It did not call for solidarity with the other workers of the world and with anti-imperialist struggles, the defence of the workers' states against imperialism, support for revolutions against the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracies, the internationalisation of the revolution; and for the building of the United Socialist States of Latin America and of the world, not to mention the struggle for the worker-peasant government or for the socialist republic. The POR merely wanted to pressurise the bourgeois government behind whose 'left' wing it was always searching for a compromise to carry out the programme further.

The POR action programme was that of a party which had repudiated the strategy of permanent revolution and which only wanted a bourgeois-democratic transformation within the segregated framework of one, isolated, landlocked and backward country.

Chapter 9: The POR did not struggle for the occupation of the Enterprises

After the April events, the bourgeois armed forces were virtually destroyed. All power was in the hands of the peoples' and workers' militias and the COB. In those circumstances the next step on the agenda was to call on the COB to cease to support a non-working class government and to take all power in its own hands.

According to Lora: *"From the 9th of April on, the unions of the most important districts simply took over the solution of the vital problems, and the authorities, thus replaced, had no other course than to accept their decisions. It was these unions which operated as organs of workers power and raised the issue of the duality of local and national authority. Controlling the daily life of the masses, they took on legislative and executive attributes (they had the power of compulsion to execute their decisions), and even succeeded in administering justice. The union assembly was turned into the ultimate arbiter and the supreme authority. This phenomenon was almost general in the mines and, on occasion, could be seen in the factories.*

Unfortunately, this reality was not fully understood by the vanguard of the proletariat and a favourable moment for carrying out the demand for the immediate occupation of the mines, which would have made the proletariat fight a battle to determine the question of dual power in its favour, was thrown away. In this first period the union leadership and assembly operated as organs of workers' power".

(41) (**ibid.**, p.277).

“One of the POR slogans which most gripped the workers was that of the occupation of the mines (...) Why was this demand not carried through by workers action, at the time of their greatest mobilisation and radicalisation? If the mines had been occupied, and it was possible that this could have occurred, it is clear that the course of the revolution would have undergone a radical change (..) The occupation of the mines would have raised, sooner or later, the question of power, and created the basis for the rapid supersession of the nationalist positions adopted by the working class; at the same time, the POR would have been able, quite quickly, to recover its control”. (42) (*Contribución ...*, G. Lora, Vol 2, p.231-232).

If the issues of **Lucha Obrera** and the POR programme for 1952 are examined, the slogan of immediate occupation of the mines, factories and land will be found. The only time an enterprise was taken over was to prevent the closure of the Corocoro mine.

The reason the POR did not raise that slogan is connected to its refusal to call for workers’ control for the private businesses, to nationalise the factories and to formulate anti-capitalist demands. The POR was tailing Lechín and pressuring the Paz government.

Chapter 10: All power to the COB!

“Through the COB, the working class left-wing was a government within the government and, in a certain sense, more powerful than the government itself. The COB had a basis of support greater than that of the party of which it officially formed a part. It proposed that the MNR assume the power and responsibility of government and of governing the state officially, but the COB set itself up as a centre without rival capable of initiative and veto in relation to the central power. That is to say it had the power of government but not the responsibility”. (43) (*Bolivia: la revolución inconclusa*, James M. Malloy, Ceres, La Paz 1989, p.243).

“In reality, the COB was the real government of the Bolivian workers and, hence, of the national economy. In fact, it possessed the symbolic and functional characteristics of a sovereign entity, including executive, deliberative and judicial organs, a defined area of authority, electors and, what is more important, armed forces”. (44) (*ibid*, p.243-244).

“The COB was the master of the country, and indeed for a certain period it was the only centre of power worthy of the name”. (45) (*A History ...*, Lora, p.281). “For the majority of the masses, the COB was their only leader and their only government.” (46) (*ibid.*, p.284).

The situation in Bolivia after 9-11th April 1952, was similar to that in Russia after the February 1917 revolution. Two powers existed in the country, but the strongest, the one with mass character, was that of the peoples’ and workers’ organisations, which, owing to their conciliatory leaderships, handed over power to a weak bourgeois government. The governments of Kerensky and Paz had to flirt with the upsurge and demands of the masses at the same time as they tried to spin out time to exhaust them, and then, by rebuilding the armed forces and their authority, to open the way to a situation of bourgeois stabilisation.

In order to face up to such a situation, the Bolsheviks demanded that the Soviets break with the leftist provisional government of the bourgeoisie and take all power themselves. In the Bolivian case, the demand should have been to struggle for all power to the COB. The COB, just as with the Russian Soviets, had the arms and the power but, because of its conciliatory leadership, gave away the latter to the bourgeoisie. The seizure of power by the Soviets and the COB could have been done peacefully. The old military apparatus had already collapsed through a violent revolution. The road was open for workers power, which had its own arms and the people behind it, and could have had total power. The only obstacle to the COB and the Russian Soviets carrying out that task was that their leadership was so insistent on rescuing the bourgeoisie.

In spite of the COB being the real power in the country and the POR being its main directing force, the section of the Fourth International opposed the slogan of All Power to the COB. On the contrary, it called on the COB to join the bourgeois government, thus weakening its alternative power and so becoming a body more and more subordinate to the bourgeois government. The slogan of the POR was that of shifting the Paz administration leftwards via ministerial changes. With that treacherous line it helped Paz and Lechín to dilute the power of the COB and go on to reconstitute the bourgeois state and the army.

In his 'self-criticism' Lora recognised that: "The POR brigade used these events to launch the slogan of 'total control of the cabinet by the left' (...) The slogan, however, contained the signs of an enormous ideological error: to believe that the workers could attain power via Lechín – behind the slogan of 'All Power to the COB'". (47) (*La revolución boliviana: Análisis crítico*, Lora, La Paz 1963, p.267).

"The watch-word of 'All Power to the COB' could have led to the victory of the workers on two exceptionally favourable occasions. The first was when the agitation around the immediate nationalisation of the mines without compensation and under workers' control reached its high point (first half of 1952). The second arose with the defeat of the coup d'etat on 6th January 1953. Not taking due advantage of these opportunities and adapting to marching behind and mouthing the slogans of the MNR left, were the greatest errors of the POR". (48) (*ibid.*, p.270).

As we have seen, on the first occasion the POR did not call for the seizure of the enterprises but for support to the MNR government. On the second occasion, the POR insisted on the treacherous line of support for, and pushing for a change of policy by, Paz.

"On the morning of the 6th January 1953, the Minister of Peasant Affairs was kidnapped, as a preliminary to a coup d'etat (...) But towards evening the failure of



the coup attempt was already evident (...) The COB called the workers and peasants militias to a mass mobilisation on a national scale. On the morning of 7th January, a massive demonstration, sponsored by the COB, took place. The demonstrators demanded immediate and unrestricted agrarian reform (...) Paz took measures against the rightists but in a moderate way (...) The government dissolved the Grupos de Honor and demoted and exiled many of the key conspirators. There was no bloodletting (...) Among the measures included were wage increases, vouchers, protection against dismissal, rent control, price control, subsidies to food stores and a series of measures on social security and other aspects of 'consumption' (...) sacked workers were re-employed". (49) (ibid., p.298-299).

In the massive demonstration of 7th January, Edwin Moller, secretary of the POR at the time, spoke for the COB in the Plaza San Francisco. In his speech, instead of calling on the workers to have no confidence in the bourgeois government of Paz and to make its own Trade Union Centre take power, he ended his intervention saying "We want, comrade Paz Estenssoro, a government of Bolivians for the Bolivians". (50) (LO, 23.1.53).

On that occasion, when Lora himself recognised that it would have been enough to have agitated around the slogan 'All Power to the COB', in order to have gained victory for the proletarian revolution, the POR put forward exactly the opposite. The POR called upon its 'comrade' president to set up a bourgeois nationalist government. In the crucial moments of the revolution, the POR showed that its strategy was limited to correcting the bourgeois government and not to overthrow it with a workers uprising.

"The counter-revolutionary forced obliged the MNR to base itself more and more firmly upon the left. In an attempt literally to frighten the opposition in order to obtain its agreement, the centrist tendency of the MNR and the leftist axis of the COB called demonstration after demonstration of their armed might. Militias of miners and peasants were brought permanently to the city in lorries and marched there in front of the population, crazily discharging their rifles".

In spite of those extraordinary conditions, the POR delayed almost a year before launching the slogan for a COB government. In March 1953, Lucha Obrera argued: "That the culmination of the Altiplano Revolution cannot be anything else or occur in any other way than by a government formed by the COB embodied as the organ of power". (51) (LO, March 1953, p.1).

However, it must be said that there are distinct ways and methods of launching such a slogan. The position of 'All Power to the COB', which was launched too late by the POR, was a variant of its idea of 'all power to the left of the MNR'. For the POR, the launching of that slogan was not in order to unmask the Lechín leadership, but was more bothered to govern jointly with it. Instead of trying to oppose the COB to the MNR government, the position of the POR consisted in continually replacing the Paz cabinet with ministers from the COB until finally there would be a government of the COB bureaucracy of the MNR. The slogan of 'All Power to the COB' should have gone hand in hand with the raising of anti-capitalist slogans with an impeccable denunciation of the 'left' of the MNR.

Lechín has often said that his great mistake was not taking power in April 1952. (52) (see interview in Facetas, 5.7.87.) If Lechín had been anointed president based on the COB, it would not have created a revolutionary workers' government. Villarroel's ex-prefect would have done everything possible to maintain capitalism and to co-exist with the national and world bourgeoisie. A revolutionary party would only have been able to participate critically in that government if it had broken with the bourgeois MNR, based itself directly on the working class organisations and their militias and attacked and disarmed the bourgeoisie. Such an eventuality was highly unlikely. A Lechín government would have been a government of the Kerensky type or a bourgeois labour government. In the exceptional circumstances of the revolutionaries participating in a COB government as a minority, it would necessarily have required conditions of a considerable differentiation with Lechínism and the unmasking its counter-revolutionary character. They would have had to have persisted in brandishing the Trotskyist programme in opposition to its waverings and would have to seek to displace it from power so that it could give way to a Trotskyist dictatorship. (53)

(Nahuel Moreno always claimed that he called for 'All Power to the COB', as opposed to the POR policy of adaptation to the MNR left-wing. But Moreno's slogan was only a variant of the popular-frontist resolutions of the 3rd congress of the Fourth International and the 'government of the MNR left-wing' position. In May, his paper put forward the "Demand that the worker ministers elected and controlled by the Miners Federation and the new Workers Centre are taken into the Paz Estenssoro government". (Frente Proletario, 29.5.52. Quoted in Prensa Obrera 131, 3.5.86 – presumably PO Argentine – eds).

Moreno's position was akin to Lora's. In reality, co-government was a cabinet of all the wings of the MNR. The worker ministers constantly reported back in detail to the COB, but that, instead of modifying the government and changing it into a proletarian one (an impossibility) simply confused the class. Moreno's paper said that "the two wings which now exist within the MNR express the interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie". (ibid.). Presumably Lechín represented the proletariat. But a sector that stays within a bourgeois party cannot represent the interests of the proletariat. By 1953 Moreno was proposing the "development, support and strengthening of a left wing inside the MNR". (Estrategia, April 1966, quoted in ibid.). One proposed a government of Lechín's faction of the MNR, while the other preferred a government of Lechín's bureaucracy of the COB – the same jam but in different jars. Anyway the slogan 'All Power to the COB is invalid once a dual power situation no longer exists (that is since 1952.) It only generates illusions in its bureaucracy.)

Chapter 11: Turn the COB into a Soviet!

For Lenin and Trotsky, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat could be based only on bodies like the Russian Soviets of 1917. In every revolution it is vital to struggle to give Soviet features to the mass organs and organs of power created by the exploited. A Soviet is an organ of struggle of the proletariat whose delegates are directly elected and revocable in rank-and-file assemblies, which include all workers, small- holders, peasants, soldiers, housewives, unemployed and other oppressed sectors of the area. While the unions are bodies which unite workers in an enterprise or branch of produc-

tion, Soviets are territorial organisms which encompass the broadest masses, both non-unionised and unionised.

In the eyes of the POR, the COB, like a mass meeting or an open town council meeting, was a Soviet. Not every Soviet has dual or alternative power, Not every dual power is a Soviet. A parallel power could be a parliament, an army or another institution which possesses an armed force and governmental authority over a significant part of a country.

The COB, although it had Soviet tendencies, was an organism with trade union, vertical and bureaucratic features. “One of the gravest errors in the organisation of the COB consisted in its originating from the top summit leaders, who would soon end up completely tied to the petty bourgeois government, and it crystallised through the middle layers of leadership (...) The correct thing would have been to proceed in the opposite way, that is to say, from the bottom up. The workers adhered to the COB through their trade union leaders (...) The founders of the COB called upon the old leaders and not on the democratically elected rank-and-file delegates. This organisational defect already contained the cause of its infirmity, which eased its bureaucratisation, its isolation from the masses and the skilful control of it by the government”. (54) (*La Revolución Boliviana*, G. Lora, p.262-263).

The COB delegates were neither elected nor controlled and subject to recall through rank-and-file mass meetings. The first congress of the COB took place two and a half years after its foundation. The bureaucracy did everything possible to run the union with boss’ type bureaucratic criteria. A revolutionary party should have struggled for the immediate organisation of a congress a few days or weeks after it was founded. Only in this way could the COB have been democratised and have acquired soviet-type features. However, the POR was in the top leadership of the COB and did not object to a bureaucratic structure which allowed it to get along better with Lechín, in order accommodate to him.

The COB was founded at a meeting called by the Miners’ Federation on 17th April 1952. The leaderships of the confederations of factory workers, railway workers and peasants, the federation of bank employees and allied branches, commercial and industrial employees, and graphical, construction, bricklayers and bakers unions took part in that assembly. (55) (*Movimiento obrero y procesos políticos en Bolivia*, Jorge Lazarte, p.6). Note that fact that the squatters, the unemployed and rank-and-file soldiers were not organised within it. The COB aimed to be a union centre based on leaderships elected at labour congresses every ‘X’ years. A Soviet should be based on all the oppressed sectors and directly elected at rank and file assemblies. In this way, the organisation can grow and be de-bureaucratised. This meeting elected an executive committee which held office until the congress in October 1954. It was headed by Lechín (Executive Secretary), Germán Butrón (General Secretary) and Mario Torres (Secretary of Relations). As the two key figures in the COB had to be ministers, the job of day-to-day leadership at the centre fell on PORists like Edwin Moller (Organisation Secretary), José Zegada (Minutes Secretary) or Miguel Alandía Pantoja (Director of the Press). “This first Management Committee was declared provisional until the election of a proper committee by a national congress which would meet shortly.” (56) (*ibid.*, p.7).

However, that congress took place with extreme delay, after the COB had ceased to be an alternative dual power and had surrendered to the official bourgeois power.

The COB developed in the same way like all organs of ‘popular power’ that bourgeois nationalists governments create. The ‘Committees in Defence of the Revolution’ in Nicaragua, the ‘Shoras’ in Iran or the ‘Popular Assemblies’ in various nationalist processes are organisations which unite union leaders and those of mass bodies, to ensure that they support nationalist regimes or projects. Instead of structuring themselves as alternative workers’ power which fight to overthrow the bourgeoisie and to consolidate all power, these organisms are committed to building a popular basis for nationalism. They use ‘anti-imperialism’ in order to discipline the masses and to maintain themselves against their enemies.

Dual power cannot last for long. One power must rule over the other. If a workers’ power does not crush that of the bourgeoisie then the latter will be imposed (whether via bloody liquidation or by regimentation and domestication). (57)

(As Stuart King so rightly says:

“Is not Workers Power absolutely right when it describes the COB as an ‘embryo’ or ‘proto-Soviet’ which could have developed into a full Soviet only through political struggle against the bonapartist project of the MNR? This would have involved concentrating on building Soviets both in and outside La Paz, drawing in and organising peasant syndicates in the localities, calling for the construction of rank and file soldiers committees in the army, drawing their delegates into the Soviets, strengthening and placing under Soviet discipline the militias, and ensuring that all delegates were elected by rank and file factory and workplace committees subject to immediate recall”. Permanent Revolution, No.2, p.36).

The POR did not fight to make the COB soviet. To do so required a constant daily battle against the MNR and the Lechínist bureaucracy. On the contrary, the POR, was one of the main causes of the COB being limited, bureaucratized and tied to officialdom.

Chapter 12: The MNR-POR government

At its 1952 congress, the Fourth International, with no votes against, adopted the slogan of an MNR-POR government. After April 1952, the POR tried to apply this recipe with a small difference. It demanded the removal of the MNR right wing.

“The worker-peasant government is not the dictatorship of the proletariat: it is in transition toward it, an inevitable period in the sense that, as a political party of the working class, we do not yet constitute a majority of it (...) The Worker-Peasant government will surely emerge before the dictatorship of the proletariat in Bolivia, on the fundamental basis of two important political forces: the POR and the MNR left-wing, to which we should try to give the essential organisational consciousness, security and firmness, so that the way to political power is opened to us, which the militant working masses will offer us in the future”. (58) (Boletín Interno, No.13, POR, p.12).

This worker-peasant government notion is more like that of Stalinism than of Leninist Trotskyism. In its earlier period, Stalinism also spoke of the worker-peasant government, but in a stageist sense. It proposed a dictatorship together with class collabora-

tion in which the proletariat had to give up its own objectives and subordinate itself to the bourgeois-democratic programme of the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie. For that same reason, Trotsky objected to using the slogan for a time, and only did so after explaining that his strategy was that of a government of workers and poor peasants led by the proletariat and aiming to apply a socialist programme.

The idea of the centrist Fourth International and the POR was that of a joint government where the so-called workers party was led by a party of another class. But the MNR did not represent the peasantry (and even less the poor or landless sectors), and neither did the MNR bother to organise this class or to place in its top leadership some leader from the national majority. The MNR was an unmistakably bourgeois party. Its members came from various capitalist and cacique parties that had presided over anti-working class government. Paz had been the governor of the Central Bank and Finance Minister in two bosses governments. The MNR had sympathised with the German Führer who massacred the biggest labour movement of the world. When they were in the government they repressed the left and put in power a pro-imperialist dictatorship which was thrown out by a popular insurrection.

“For the solution of the basic national tasks, not only the big bourgeoisie but also the petty bourgeoisie was incapable of producing a political force, a party, or a faction, in conjunction with which the party of the proletariat might be able to solve the tasks of the democratic bourgeois revolution”. (59) *The Third International After Lenin*, Trotsky, Pathfinder, New York, 1970, p.181. Stalin, *el gran organizador de derrotas*, La III Internacional despues de Lenin, Trotski, El Yunque, Bs As. 1974, p.241).

The proletariat should not dilute its programme and accept the democratic one of the bourgeoisie, whether petty, medium or big. Under this programme it is impossible to break with imperialism and backwardness. The only manner of resolving the outstanding bourgeois democratic tasks is through a Socialist revolution which, in passing, completes the unfinished democratic tasks within a framework of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, of a socialised and planned economy established by popular and workers councils, and by the internationalisation of the revolution.

In its more than 55 years of existence the POR has never put forward the strategy of the internationalist socialist revolution. It was born calling for an anti-imperialist and agrarian revolution in order to establish a multi-class and capitalist government which could be achieved by a military coup or the metamorphosis of a bourgeois government. Later, in the *Theses of Pulacayo*, it put forward the idea of a bourgeois democratic revolution led by the proletariat. That position held similarities with that of Parvus, which meant, according to Trotsky's argument “the conquest of power by the proletariat was seen as the path towards democracy and not to socialism”. (60) Through the strategy of opposing a socialist revolution in order to limit itself to a bourgeois-democratic and national one, the POR was subservient to strategic blocks with and behind Lechínism, and then with the whole MNR and Stalinism.

An MNR-POR government would be a bourgeois one with ‘Trotskyist’ ministers, good at helping Paz and Lechín to confuse the workers and at compromising themselves by defending the capitalist regime.

In the Fourth Congress of the Communist International Lenin and Trotsky clearly differentiated five types of workers' government. Liberal and Social Democratic workers governments can never be supported by communist ministers. In certain circumstances a workers' government or worker-peasant government could emerge in which the communists would be able to join the cabinet as a minority.

“The two types (of workers government) in which the communists may take part, do not represent the dictatorship of the proletariat, they are not even a historically inevitable transition stage towards the dictatorship. But where they are formed they may become an important starting point for the fight for the dictatorship. The complete dictatorship is represented only by the real workers' government which consists of communists”. (61) (The Communist International 1919-43: Documents, Ed. Jane Degras, Vol.1, Cass, 1971, p.427.)

The author is wrong, Zinoviev drafted the theses which represented a compromise between the lefts and the right. In Dialogue with Heinrich Brandler (Marxism, Wars and Revolutions, Deutscher, Verso, 1985) the latter says “Radek was accused by Moscow of being the author of my definition of the five forms of workers government. In reality he tried to prevent this definition from being adopted; not because he thought it incorrect but, as I learned years later, because it irritated Zinoviev, and Radek found this inconvenient for his factional struggle in Moscow.” pp.158-159. Brandler advanced it at the 8th Congress of the KPD in January 1923 just after the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in Nov-Dec 1922.) See Revolutionary History Vol.2 no.3 pp.1-20.)

The conditions advanced by the CI were very clear. “The overriding tasks of the workers' government must be to arm the proletariat, to disarm bourgeois and counter-revolutionary organisations, to introduce the control of production, to transfer the main burden of taxation to the rich, and to break the resistance of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie”. (62) (ibid., p.426).

“In certain circumstances communists must declare themselves ready to form a workers' government with non-communist workers' parties and workers organisations. But they can do so only if there are guarantees that the workers government will really conduct a struggle against the bourgeoisie in the sense mentioned above”. (63) (ibid., p.426).

However, whichever wing of the MNR was in government it would not have fulfilled these conditions. The MNR was a party representing an emerging bourgeoisie. Far from wishing to disarm and expropriate itself, that is to say, to commit suicide as a class, the MNR bourgeoisie aspired to



strengthen the state through reforms which would extend the internal market. A government of one or more wings of the MNR would have been a government for the defence of the bourgeois state.

To sum up: an MNR-POR government of whatever variant would have been the opposite of a worker-peasant government. It would have been a bourgeois government with a decoration of workers.

Chapter 13: All Power to the MNR Left Wing!

“When the struggle within the cabinet between the right and left tendencies of the MNR broke out (within the latter tendency were numbered the “worker” ministers who were the base of Lechínism), the POR launched the slogan of more workers’ ministers and, thereby, the expulsion from the government of the right, a demand which turned out to be far too ambitious for Lechín and Co.”. (64)

(Contribución a la historia política de Boliviana, Lora, Vol.2, La Paz 1978, p.253).

At its 9th national conference, the POR ratified the line of identifying with the national-reformist wing of Lechín and Ñuflo Chavez. “The national political report fixed the position of the POR before the government in the following points: 1) Support to the government in face of the attacks by imperialism and the rosca, (2) Support for all the progressive measures it enacts, always indicating their scope and limitations (...) 3) In the struggle of the MNR wings, the POR supports the left (...) The POR will support the MNR left in its struggle against the right of the party, in all its activity that tends to destroy the structures on which the feudal bourgeoisie and imperialist exploitation rest, every attempt to deepen the revolution and to carry out the workers programme, such as the complete control of the government so replacing the right wing”. (65) (LO, 11.11.52, p.3).

In that same newspaper it also says: “The working class must actively intervene in the formation of the new Cabinet. It is the workers who must run the state with a revolutionary programme that will start to destroy the capitalist structure. The COB, representing the worker-peasant forces, must join in the new cabinet with a majority of ministers who come from it, representing the different sectors of workers”. (66) (LO, 11.11.52, p.2).

The MNR is clearly a bourgeois party. Within every populist bourgeois party which tries to discipline the unions there is always a workerist wing that tries to mediate between the pressures of the workers and the needs of following a bourgeois policy. A party of various classes cannot be. The one which commands is the one that owns the capital. A horse and its rider are not in an equal alliance. One rides the other. The union bureaucracy and the reformist wings are like a saddle. They lie on the proletariat to relieve the weight and rule of the capitalist boss in order to help him to continue giving orders.

The ‘left’ wing of the MNR is not a proletarian or revolutionary wing. The fact is that it claims the bourgeois programme as its own and its insertion in such a conglomerate of capital makes it a counter-revolutionary sector. It is always possible that youth and worker sections in the nationalist movement will shift to the left towards centrism, and, if so, everything possibly must be done to conquer their prejudices and win them

to Trotskyist politics. However, known bureaucrats, with a long career of betrayals, who have served a dictatorship such as Villarroel's and have brought forth an anti-communist party that did not at first disguise its flirtation with racism and nazi-fascism, cannot evolve in a revolutionary direction.

The Lechín and Chavez 'left' wing defended capitalism and so only wanted to reform it. The MNR needed them in order to be able to control the masses. With the right hand it initiated the reorganisation of the armed forces, set up the para-military commandoes and the secret-police (the 'Commando Politico'), stirred up anti-communist hysteria to mobilise the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian 'excesses' and pressed for approaches to imperialism. With its left hand it tried to flirt with working class radicalism while aiming to tame it. MNR trade unionists, while they uttered the most incendiary speeches, did everything possible to use that authority hold back the COB's mobilisation and demands, tried to empty it of its dual power content and turn it into a force that would be subordinated to, and would collaborate with, the bourgeois regime.

Faced with a struggle between two wings of a bourgeois party, the proletariat should try to assert its own class independence and its opposition to both wings. Of course we must undertake very limited practical actions of a mass direct action character with the MNR 'left' when it undertakes the defence of popular and working class demands. But preferably, we should take the initiative and try to unmask those 'leftists' with a policy that constantly asks them to fight and break with the bourgeois party.

However, the POR did more than serve Lechínism. They edited its union paper, they wrote its speeches and totally supported it. While Paz wanted to line up behind imperialism, Lechín lined up behind Paz and the POR behind Lechín.

From the first weeks of the 1952 revolution until at least the end of 1953, the POR "works so that the masses and the left-wing sector of the governing party will proceed to their logical conclusion, that is to say, evolve towards a worker-peasant government". "The evolution towards the left of the government and its consequent transformation will be determined by the exploited. Owing to the pressure to political circumstances, the petty bourgeois government may possibly be superseded and be turned into a stage of worker-peasant government. It is the most probable tendency of that unstable moment and only in this sense do we speak of the only outcome. The aforementioned involves the political defeat of the right and the active participation in the state of the proletariat and the peasants". (67) (LO, 25.5.52, p.3).

According to the POR, a month after the creation of the COB, it was probable that the exploited would put pressure on the MNR to the point that it had to shift leftwards and be transformed into a worker-peasant government. Paz and the MNR were not 'neutral' forces or 'wild-cards' flitting between the various classes. The MNR was an unswervingly bourgeois force and incapable of changing its class content. However much a monkey wants to learn to fly it is impossible. Paz's MNR had absolutely no possibility of evolving into a worker-peasant government. The only ones who could evolve were the PORists ... but towards a greater conciliation with the bourgeois MNR. Revolutionaries do not call upon the workers to have a more 'active participation' within the state but to overturn it.

In the second half of 1953, they still persisted. The 10th POR conference stated that: “The total predominance of this sector (MNR ‘left’) would profoundly modify the nature of the MNR and would enable it to come significantly closer to the POR (...) Only in such conditions could one speak of a possible coalition government of the POR and the MNR, which would be a form of creating the formula of the ‘worker-peasant government’, which, in its turn, would constitute the transitory stage towards the dictatorship of the proletariat”. The Political Bureau of the POR, on 23rd of June, 1953, raised the call, “The whole of this struggle must revolve around the slogan: Total Control of the State by the Left Wing of the MNR.”

Liborio Justo correctly made the following observation: “The POR would support the left in its struggle against the right, it would help it to position itself ideologically, it would push it forward towards the most advanced positions and simultaneously it would mobilise the MNR rank-and-file so that it called on the leftist leadership to adopt the programme of proletarian revolution. That is to say, that the revolution would be carried out by the MNR left wing, which the POR ‘instructed’ to cease being petty bourgeois and an agent of the reaction and this would help its rank-and-file push it to adopt the programme of the proletarian revolution”. (68) (Bolivia: la revolución derrotada, Liborio Justo, Cochabamba 1967, p.224). This was just a utopia to disarm the class.

In August, after a ministerial crisis had occurred, Lucha Obrera opined: “The only political outcome of the present situation: the displacement of the MNR right-wing from power by the left-wing.

“All power to the left”! is a suitable slogan in the case of a cabinet crisis. Such a new kind of MNR government would carry out the new tasks of the revolution. Total control of the state by the left (...) the POR will help the left in this job, it will guide it politically and support it critically”. (69) (LO 2.8.53, p.1)

Instead of fighting to unmask and politically destroy the ‘left-wing’, the POR offered itself as a prop and adviser to the left of the official bourgeois party. Instead of struggling for a worker-peasant government it asked for a ‘new kind of MNR government’. Instead of wanting to overthrow a social class, the POR was limited to asking for a new cabinet to which it would lend itself and offer its services. Instead of calling for the overthrow of the bourgeois state, the POR called for its regeneration under the control of the left of bourgeois officialdom.

Even though the ‘left’ wing of the MNR would have had the majority and even every ministry, the state that they would have controlled and defended would be bourgeois.

When the Bolsheviks agitated for ‘All Power to the Soviets’ they knew that the government could end up falling into the hands of the reformists. Lenin thought that a collaborationist government without capitalist ministers was preferable. But he always said that even if an entirely Menshevik-Socialist Revolutionary government emerged, the Bolsheviks would not support or enter it. The only compromise that he would adopt was that of struggling together with them against any reactionary coup and of renouncing any attempt to take power as they had not won a majority among the workers and in the soviets.

The MNR 'left' wing was in no way a reformist workers party (as was Menshevism) with a certain degree of independence with respect to other capitalist parties. It was part of the same bourgeois MNR party. While Lechín did break with the MNR some 11 or 12 years after 1952 (and with quite a pro-United States orientation) other 'leftists' carried on working with the MNR longer.

When an independent and mass organisation of workers exists, it is feasible for Communists to call for a critical vote for it or to help it get into power "as a noose supports a hanging man" said Lenin, with the aim of better unmasking its leaders. However that policy cannot be applied to a section of a party that includes a sector of the bourgeoisie from which it has not broken, that does not represent a step towards class independence, even in embryonic form. Stalinism, ignoring Leninism, always put forward the line of tailing this or that "progressive" sector of the bourgeoisie. To follow the MNR 'left', or that of APRA or Peronism, is only helping to reinforce bourgeois nationalism and prevents the workers from breaking with it.

Calling on the labour leaders to break with the bourgeoisie and to struggle for an independent workers' party is a very different tactic. In this case it encourages the class struggle and helps to unmask collaborators. Choosing which of the bosses executioners it is better or worse to follow, is an old Stalinist strategy that has always meant the disarmament of the exploited to benefit reaction. In any case it is a vicious circle that cannot be broken. Within the left there will always be another left, and within the latter yet another one. At the end of this pursuit of left wings of the bourgeois parties the route to the proletarian revolution is lost and we are changed into vulgar followers of the bourgeois nationalists.

Not one leader of the MNR 'left' wing evolved towards forming a reformist workers party or even centrism let alone Marxism. In 1963 when Lechín split the MNR in order to form his own 'leftist' party, the POR characterised it as reactionary and anti-working class. If the POR made a grave error in capitulating to Lechín in 1952, it adopted a sectarian policy when Lechín split from the MNR in 1963. It had then been necessary to attack Lechín implacably for having been Paz's Vice-President and for having gone to China to abase himself before the Guomintang but at the same time, by putting forward the demand an independent working class candidate, the tactic of the workers United Front should have been used.

Ryan was correct when he maintained that "The POR occupies, on all the major questions, the positions occupied by Menshevism in the Russian Revolution, and by Stalinism in the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-27." (71) In China Stalinism would first support the Guomintang and then its 'left-wing'. Both ended up using the Chinese Communists to get more power and once they felt secure the Communists were massacred. It is worth pointing out that the Guomintang was, both in its origins and programme, more radical than the MNR. So while the MNR was born with a declaration of principles influenced by racism and Nazi ideas the Guomintang was at first a sympathising section of the Communist International.

Chapter 14: The POR adapts itself to the MNR left

The least that a party which called itself revolutionary should have done was to have constantly denounced the counter revolutionary and turncoat role of Lechín, the dicta-

torship's ex-prefect and now the appointed union leader. But the POR went on tail-ending the corrupt old bureaucrat.

“There can be no doubt that with the creation of a political organisation of a left-wing, independent of the right that controls the MNR and government, the imminent split will ensure the vanquishing of all vacillating and centrist positions, ensuring that, faced with this situation, all the leftists in the MNR will turn to the Party initially with no other aim than to win positions from the right and so deepen the revolutionary process. (72)



According to the POR Lechín had to be helped to create an independent faction and this would guarantee the defeat of the “vacillators and centrists” and would “deepen the revolutionary process”. The POR believed that the revolutionary party would be Lechín's with which it could then unite.

“A group of intellectuals within the leading layer of the POR had got the COB started with the full agreement of the Executive Secretary of the FSTMB with whom they were old friends through bonds forged in old struggles going back to the Theses of Pulacayo. The relationship was so close that they believed that they could control the Labour movement through him while he used them for his own aims.

“The POR could not hide its servile attitude to the Executive Secretary on every question which came up in the COB. For example all the members of the POR voted with the majority to reject the credentials of the delegates of the university students; but when their leader asked them to reconsider the matter they all changed their minds without hesitation.

“Many cases could be cited but the most serious, which is almost a betrayal of the proletariat, was to give way to the requests of the top leaders about the launching of a manifesto to nationalise the mines. On this the workers demanded workers control because they thought workers point of view to be absolutely revolutionary. But when the Executive Secretary intervened asking for the amendment to be withdrawn in accordance with government policy only one POR member stood firm and supported the workers, the rest softened their position and, docilely attacked the government directive, and in order to disguise things asked for the amendment to be sent to the government in a separate note.

“So on a number of occasions, the POR's slavish attitude to the main COB leader, led it to making concessions prejudicial to the real revolutionary mood of the working class”. (73) (*Memorias del primer ministro obrero*, Waldo Alvarez, La Paz, 1986, pp.283-84.)

According to Catoira, when Lechín was “put in charge of the COB by the government, as soon as he became Minister of HydroCarbons and Mining, he shed the Trotskyist clothing in which the POR had clad him and put himself forward as simply a loyal MNR supporter.” (74) (*El Sindicalismo Boliviano*, Ricardo Catoira Marín, La Paz, p.43.)

Whereas according to Lora, “Lechín who went back to Trotskyist posturing immediately after 9th April could be found at Paz’s side, but not in advance of him and thus accommodated himself to the radicalisation of the masses. He surrounded himself with POR members and, where he could, recited speeches written by the latter. (75) (Contribución ..., Vol 2 Lora, La Paz 1978, p.228)

Notice that Lora recognises that the COB’s great traitor had the same ideology in 1952. Some people thought Lechín had evolved from the MNR to the POR in 1952 whereas others thought the opposite. What is certain is that nobody knew for whom that crafty individual was working. Lechín made use of everyone. The MNR let him have a certain independence and verbal radicalism so that he could consolidate his position in the labour movement and tame it. The POR thought that by writing his theses, speeches and programmes it was using him to reach out to the class. But it was the clever bureaucrat who used the POR to gain authority over the most militant workers and thus negotiate for a share of power within his party and his government. In exchange for mouthing the POR’s incendiary slogans Lechín got mild criticism and even support from the POR.

During the revolutionary euphoria of the 1950’s Lechín lived in the Hotel Crillon, the most luxurious hotel in La Paz. In contrast the workers who had made him their irreplaceable leader have always lived in the most degraded conditions of squalor, a situation which remains the same today”. (76) (El Sindicalismo Boliviano ..., p.48.) This was never denounced by his POR hacks who made such efforts serving as his secretaries.

The POR went as far as to claim the line of the Lechínist newspaper Vanguardia as its own: “Its orientation is defined and determined by the route that the proletariat boldly opened up during the April events (...) Take care! The people are not the servants of the government. The government are the servants of the people’. A revolutionary fluency can be seen incarnated in its editors, interpreters of the majority views of the rank and file of its party formed by proletarians, peasants and office workers (...) if Vanguardia maintains its line, the path on which it is set will bring these bold lads the object of their desires when the working masses judge that feudal exploitation in the countryside must be liquidated. With them we will be firm in principles and consistent in revolutionary practice”. (77) (LO. 3.5.52, p.3.)

The POR identified itself with the Lechínist slogan of making the government the servant of the people. Within the capitalist state it is impossible to imagine that any government can defend the proletariat’s aims. The POR bet on the MNR left being able to enlighten the popular and working class majority in the MNR so as to reorient it and enable it to put the MNR government “at the service of the people”. (78) (LO. 25.5.52, p.1.)

Chapter 15: The POR believed that Paz would be able to create an anti-capitalist government

The nationalisation of the mines was the main demand which the working class talked about. Paz did everything possible to delay and moderate the measure but finally he carried it out in August 1952. When the government delayed carrying out the measure

the POR said, “We cannot understand how a government that has the proletariat on a war-footing and prepared to defend it against any counter-revolutionary, retreats after taking a step forward. (79) (LO, 12.6.52, p.1)

A Marxist on the other hand could clearly explain why the government oscillated. It was a bourgeois government under pressure from the masses trying to do everything possible to hold back the latter and, though making concessions, at the same sought time to maintain semi-colonial capitalism. The POR could not explain the tremendous shifts of the regime because of the tremendous illusions that it had.

Like gullible petit-bourgeois the POR believed that the government was a product of the ‘revolutionary will of the masses’ and therefore they should be subordinated to it. “With arms in hand, the working class will know how to consolidate and carry forward any step in this sense made by the present government thrown up by the revolutionary will of the masses.” (80) (LO, 12.6.52, p.2.) Instead of seeing the MNR government as its own, which only needed a push, the party of the proletariat should have denounced it as a usurper which had to be deposed.

The illusions of the POR went to the extreme of believing that Paz himself could initiate a turn to revolution. “It is possible that the President could have made some good proposals for achieving a real economic transformation of the country. But the reactionary element in the cabinet and its brigade of technicians are all openly right wing and therefore make it impossible to improve conditions for the proletariat (..) The left wing will not be able to stand up to the crushing majority which constitutes the MNR right wing unless it is based on the mobilisation of the masses. Meanwhile the present President of the Republic has his hands tied in front of his party comrades and, faced with creating a government of the people or staying President, seems to have chosen the latter”. (81) (LO 12.6.52, p.3.)

The job of a revolutionary party should have been to do everything possible to make the workers distrust Paz and to propose his removal by a new insurrection. For the POR on the other hand he had to be convinced to create a ‘government for the people’. In order to help the President ‘achieve a true economic transformation’ his most right wing ministers had to be removed.

While the POR’s aim was attempting to build up and influence the left of the bourgeois MNR, the latter in its turn was to influence the President to shift his position. The POR abandoned the promotion of class struggle. It replaced it by class persuasion. All revolutionary politics were replaced by a series of pressures on the leadership with the aim of reforming the official bourgeois bureaucracy and thus the President himself.

Every time that President started a speech to ingratiate himself with the radicalised masses, a Marxist should have denounced it as a trick to disorient the masses and an attempt to dress the wolf in sheep’s clothing.

“The bourgeoisie will make you any promises you want! It will even send its delegates to Moscow, enter the Peasants’ International, adhere as a ‘sympathising’ party to the Comintern, peek into the Red International of Red Trade Unions. In short, it will promise anything that will give it the opportunity (with our assistance) to dupe the workers and peasants, more efficiently, more easily, and the more completely to throw

sand in their eyes – until the first opportunity, such as was offered in Shanghai”(82) (The Third International after Lenin, L.D. Trotsky, Pathfinder, New York, p.169-170.)

However the POR always ended up saluting every demagogic outburst by Paz. “His speech of the 21st July (1952) is quite clear. He not only offered to ‘nationalise the mines and carry the revolution to the countryside regardless of the consequences’ but promised ‘to arm the miners and factory workers’ so that they could defend the revolution in their own way.” (83) (LO, 3.8.52, p.3.)

This policy of sowing illusions in the revolutionary and even anti-bourgeois potential of Paz was to continue until after the first year of the revolution: “The President, revising the whole of his past political attitude, points to anti-capitalist and not merely anti-imperialist and anti-feudal aims for the revolution. This speech can very easily be regarded as Trotskyist (...) With these words Victor Paz has gone further than all his leftist collaborators who are so determined to hold back and obstruct the liquidation of the latifundia (...) in order that the left turns its victory into effective governmental influence (...) its only solution to the situation created was for the left to impose the total domination of the left in the cabinet”. (84) (LO, 5.8.53, p.1.)

Its complete adaptation to Paz was such that it believed that he was capable of breaking with and expropriating his own social class!

The origins of this individual whom the POR believed would open the road to an anti-capitalist government must be remembered. Víctor Paz came from a family of aristocrats and generals from Tarija. He had been a lawyer for the Patiño concern. He made his debut in politics supporting the bonapartist dictatorships which tried to imitate certain features of fascism (Toro, Busch and Villarroel). He was the President of the Central Bank and Finance Minister in the anti-working class governments of Peñaranda and Villarroel. He founded the MNR with a clearly anti-semitic, racist, ferociously anti-communist platform inspired by nazism and sympathetic to the imperialist axis of Hitler, Mussolini and the Mikado. When his party was in power from 1943 to 1946 it did not touch even one big mining concern or ranch.

On the contrary the MNR aimed its repression at union leaders and at peasants who occupied land. Its symbol was a dictator who was lynched,(85) it massacred the oppressed and took part in the butchery at Catavi. In 1947 it supported Hertzog for the Presidency. Then it spent the whole six years of reactionary rule conspiring with whatever butcher and rosca minister it could. In power it became the best weapon that imperialism had for holding back and reversing the revolution. Once he reorganised and revived the bourgeois state and armed forces Paz accentuated the turn to the right. Víctor Paz was directly responsible for the carnage at Sora-Sora (1964) as well as the atrocities during the period of Banzer’s dictatorship. When he returned to the government in 1985 he was the author of the worst attack on the social gains of the Bolivian workers in history. In just one month he raised prices by fifteen times and then sacked three-quarters of the mining proletariat.

It was a serious crime for a party claiming to be working class to disseminate even the faintest illusion that it was possible that such a reactionary could have ever installed an anti- capitalist government. All wings and sections of the post-Trotsky Fourth Inter-

national are besmirched with that significant historical betrayal since they always supported this policy and never questioned it.

Chapter 16: The nationalisation of the Mines

In order to make sure that the President carried out the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship, a cabinet of the union bureaucracy had to be imposed. In a manifesto aimed at the February 1953 Convention of the MNR, the POR suggested to Paz that he alter his cabinet to achieve “the overcoming of the present bonapartist government by another anti-imperialist and anti-feudal one which would be sustained by a front of revolutionaries and workers” (86) (LO. 6.2.53, p.1.)

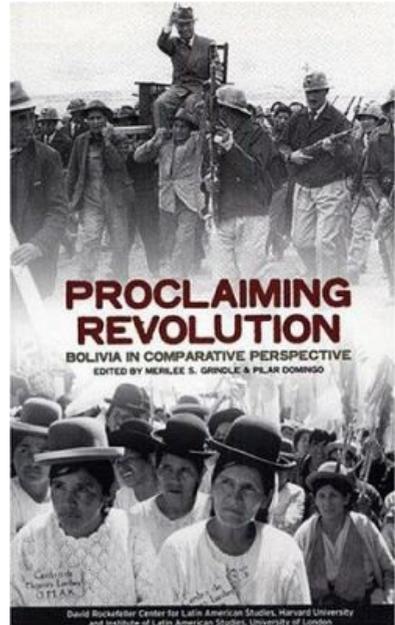
While Paz, supported by Lechín, did everything possible to ensure that the workers did not occupy the mines and instead waited for a solution from above, the POR, far from denouncing these manoeuvres, took pains to idealise Lechín:

“The Minister of Mines and Petroleum, supported by those round him, quite clearly advocated expropriation without compensation”. (87)(LO, 29.6.52, p.4.).

A revolutionary party should have done the opposite. It should have drawn attention to the fact that while Lechín spouted radical phrases he was, as events showed, preparing nationalisation with compensation for enterprises in a poor state. “We agree with comrade Lechín when he states that the decree nationalising the mines is just the start of the economic and social transformation of the country.” (88) (LO, 11.11.52, p.1.)

Just prior to the nationalisation of the mines the POR said: “The balance of forces favours the interests of the workers, who, with certainty and firmness, have been winning ground inch by inch in spite of the vacillations of the MNR left-wing which has yet to put itself at the head of events (...) the nationalisation of the mines which will be announced shortly will be the starting point that will make the continuation of the capitalist system on the basis of the classical forms of exploitation impossible.” (89) (Boletín Interno, No.13. POR, p.9.)

Nationalisation is not an anti-capitalist measure in itself. It can just as well be a mechanism used by the bourgeoisie to help its development. The nationalisation of large scale mining allowed the state to obtain more resources to invest within the country, the small and medium mining sectors of the bourgeoisie could grow without having to face the competition of the big private monopolies while the other bourgeois sectors could develop by commerce and the production of goods, tied to, or derived from, large scale mining.



The nationalisation of large scale mining was not the start of the open destruction of capitalism, it strengthened it. The POR helped that process by limiting itself to raising the bourgeois democratic programme and by tailing the MNR and its 'left'.

The MNR adopted the demand for nationalisation without compensation under workers control. However it ended by paying up so as to keep in with imperialism. 'Workers Control' was applied in the following way: the directorate of the Corporación Minera de Bolivia (COMIBOL) was run by Carbajal (the first General Secretary of the FSTMB) and two of its seven directors were nominated by the FSTMB. The latter were not elected with a mandate and they were not recallable by rank and file assemblies. In actual fact this sort of 'workers control' was getting the participation of the workers in the business in order to stop them striking and so get them to break their backs for 'their' company. Workers control means the workers supervising the administration of the business with the aim of creating a dual power there that will gradually be extended. Of necessity it should culminate in workers control of every enterprise with a national committee of workers control and a struggle for power.

But when exercised by bureaucrats, with no control by the rank and file, it turns into the integration of a layer of workers, who had sold out, into the directorate of the business. "The worker leader Torres admitted that he earned 90,000 bolivianos per month for running COMIBOL (...) when a skilled worker earned 4,000 bs per month." (90) (Revolution Bolivienne 1952-1954, Pierre Scali, La Verité, sup.333, 22.4.54, p.20.)

The POR limited itself to asking for workers control only in state enterprises while it did not question the prevailing regime in the private sector. It adapted to the bureaucracy controlling COMIBOL. Later on it raised the reformist alternative of getting a majority on the COMIBOL board. Faced with this position it should have tried to ask for the opening of the accounts of all enterprises and of the government so that they could be controlled and inspected by the workers through rank and file meetings and by delegates supervised by them with the aim eventually the forming soviets and struggling to seize power.

At the international level the POR said: "We demand a free market for tin". (91) (LO, May 1953, p.2). What was really required was a producers' cartel instead.

Chapter 17: The disintegration and reorganisation of the armed forces

After the April events in the armed forces "All the units had to face a serious problem: the troops recruited a few weeks previously had very little combat training and instruction. A large part of their working hours in the previous weeks had been used for practice drills for the military parade planned to coincide with the repatriation of the remains of Eduardo Avaroa. The soldiers were able to parade very well but they did not know how to fight". (92) (Poder y Fuerzas Armadas 1949-1982, General Gary Prado Salmón, Cochabamba 1984, p.33.)

"In the first months of the revolution, only the COB possessed an armed force, the armed worker and peasant militias. The arming of the workers began with union militias when conditions did not exist for the formation of a similar force linked to the MNR. The meetings were impressive parades of armed workers and peasants (...) The COB

assembly and the rank and file organisations, unlike the Executive Committee, were serious about the task of consolidating these militias, improving their armament, disciplining them and creating a unified command. Paz Estenssoro and Lechín instructed their followers to obstruct



the efforts being made to strengthen the armed workers nuclei as they represented the greatest threat to the government. Taking advantage of the resources available because of their monopoly of power they began to organise militias in the zonal commands of the MNR, independent of the trade union militias and gave them the job of overseeing the main centres; the movimiento leaders, closely helped by Stalinism were given the means to sabotage the consolidation of the COB militias.” (93) (*La revolución boliviana*, G. Lora, p.271.)

A key problem in every revolution is the armed forces. A revolutionary party should have opposed the reorganisation of the bourgeois army in any form and put forward the demand to replace it by the armed people organised in militias. As the revolution deepens the repulse of any external or internal aggression should be based on the latter so as to move towards an internationalist and proletarian Red Army.

But this was not the policy of Lechín and his followers in the POR. While the MNR did everything possible to reorganise the traditional armed forces, Lechín tricked the workers with the fable that he only wanted a peaceful, technical and construction brigade type of bourgeois army. An armed force like that does not stop being guard dogs of capital, and its benign postures tend to give it popular support in order to justify its armed defence of the capitalist state. Costa Rica does not possess an army but a national guard that serves capital very well in terms of making the exploited work. Yankee imperialism has now sought to dismantle the Panamanian army in order to replace it by Civil Guards.

In July the POR identified with Lechín: “The position of the miners’ leader is well known as it has been put forward many times on workers demonstrations locally and elsewhere: he opposes the army which existed before the insurrection of the 9th April and favours instead the creation of a new technical army with industrial and farming functions.” (94) (LO, 15.7.52, p.1.)

Immediately after the April insurrection, the Bolivian armed forces were disintegrating. The well-known anti-communist general Gary Prado tells us what it was like at that time:

“In the barracks the situation was tense as the officers were split between those who supported and those who condemned the revolution. Nobody did anything except

stand guard so that as much military equipment was preserved from the revolutionary host. A sense of defeat however was made worse when we learned the details of what had occurred in the three days of fighting confirming that the army had been beaten on every hand. The flight of the High Command made the officers feel even more abandoned. A number, fearing repression, deserted their units without delay and sought asylum in foreign embassies or voluntarily went into exile. Others, forgetting their duty, went home to await developments. A few stayed in the barracks trying to regroup their units, control the soldiers and keep an appearance of order and discipline.” (95) (Poder y Fuerzas Armadas 1949-1982, p.40.)

While this was happening (the 17th June 1952) the COB adopted (...) the draft presented by the mining representatives that said:

“The National Corps of Armed Militias of the Central Obrera de Bolivia will be organised in the following way 1. The National Command 2. Departmental and Special Commands. The National Command will consist (of) the National Leader, Comrade Víctor Paz Estenssoro. Commander-in-Chief, Comrade Juan Lechín Oquendo (...) The commanders of the cells will be elected by the departmental militiamen, by the Departmental Centres and the National Command of the COB.”

Gary Prado continues with his analysis.

“The analysis of the military commands is different. They thought that resolution was an attack on the institution of the Armed Forces and furthermore it was humiliating. However, faced with the impossibility of putting forward arguments at the time good enough to prevent the formation of militias in the prevailing political situation and by the precarious balance occurring then and in order to enable the army to survive it was decided to try to maintain some degree of control over the militias in some way.”

“With that aim by means of deceit, the Chief of the General Staff Germán Armando Fortún, offered to supply the COB with all the advice needed to improve the organisation of the Armed Militias such as the appointment of enough instructors to instil into the militiamen disciplined attitudes, basic military training and responsibility on the understanding that the militias will be, in the final analysis, the reserve of the Armed Forces of the Nation”.

“The General Staff offer was warmly accepted by the COB (...) In this way it succeeded to a certain extent in dealing with the problem of the militias, at least inasmuch as it prevented them from becoming a structure that would turn them into a parallel army. The National Command of the militias never functioned properly”. (96) Poder y Fuerzas Armadas 1949-1982, pp.52-54.)

Instead of struggling to make the workers militias independent and opposed to the previous bourgeois armed forces which carried out the massacres of Uncia, Catavi, Villa Victoria and others, the COB leadership of Lechín and the POR “warmly accepted” the proposal of the high command of the defeated genocidal army which had as its aim the castration of the militias to make sure that they did not transcend the boundaries of the bourgeois state and to subordinate them to the control of the armed spinal column of the class dictatorship of capital. They also accepted, as the national leader of the militias, a class enemy, Víctor Paz.

Lechín tried to avoid the construction of an independent force of armed workers the whole time. He wanted to transform them into the MNR's armed guards or the militia reserves of the regular bourgeois army.

In his memoirs Lechín always boasts of having defended the 'fatherland' and 'army' in the slaughter of the Chaco War. He also boasts that in April 1952 he handed over to the police the arms thrown down by the soldiers. "I calculate that there were about 3,000 deaths. In Corioco Street many women and children and men died. Eventually we were able to take the Caiconi arsenal and all the arms captured we handed over to the Carabineros." (97) (*Historia de una leyenda: Vida y palabra de Juan Lechín Oquendo, Lupe Cajias, La Paz 1989, p.148.*) However Lechín does not want to say that he was one of the authors of the military reorganisation and that he failed to establish people's courts to punish the perpetrators of the massacres.

In mid-1952 there was a drunken brawl between militiamen and soldiers. This was used as a pretext for weakening the militias and encouraging the further re-establishment of the armed forces. The POR dealt with Lechín in a very fawning manner,

"The immediate re-organisation and 'goose-stepping' of the army that the said gentlemen tried to carry out, taking advantage of a bloody incident between drunks in the 'Ciros' night-club, instigated by falangists in the pay of the rosca, was soon stopped with singular energy by Minister Lechín. The above mentioned incident led to a triumph of the MNR left wing over the rightist, conciliatory and opportunist bureaucracy.

"We revolutionary workers see this with sympathy and, relying on our own forces, we fraternally salute all the triumphs of the MNR left-wing, represented by Lechín and the newspaper Vanguardia." (98) (LO, 3.8.52, p.3.)

Chapter 18: The desire to transform the MNR

The huge adaptation of the POR to the MNR is seen not only in its attempts to shift the cabinet leftwards but in wanting to transform the bourgeois MNR so that it would be turned into an anti-capitalist revolutionary party. The POR went so far as to write an open letter to the MNR convention where it put forward the position that, if the MNR moved leftward, it could absorb the POR.

"The convention should be worker-peasant and not bureaucratic (...) The left wing should impose revolutionary demands without fear of reaction and imperialism". (99) (LO, supplement, 3.2.53, p.4.)

The POR held the suicidal belief that Lechínism could declare and impose a revolutionary programme to turn the MNR in a revolutionary direction.

"The MNR is certainly a party in transition from traditional or reformist politics to the new politics of the revolutionary transformation of the proletariat as the leader of the whole oppressed society." (100) (LO 11.11.52, p.3.)

"The main essential doctrinal foundation required to play a decisive role in the present period can only be obtained by modifying, in its turn, the social composition of the party. Its uniform social nature could be achieved around the main social force of anti-imperialist struggle. The most powerful and decisive social force is made up of exploited

workers and peasants. It is around these social forces that the unity of the party must be attained.”

According to the POR a struggle had to continue so that “the workers and peasants of the MNR impose a programme that reflects their own interests, and likewise impose a leadership that reflects the interests of the exploited. The present task is to ensure that the MNR must be controlled by the exploited masses”. The exploited will never be able to control a party created by and for the bourgeoisie.

“Only on condition that it takes the consistent progressive step of adopting a programme of principles in accord with the upsurge of the masses then carrying it out, will the MNR be able to play the role imposed on it by circumstances.”

“Solid worker cadres in the MNR, elimination of counter-revolutionary tendencies, a political programme which represents the interests of the exploited classes, in brief the absolute pre-eminence of the working class within the MNR ranks is the only thing that can give the MNR an important role in the revolutionary course towards the Worker-Peasant government.” (101) (LO, 11.11.52, p.3.)

The POR distinguishes counter revolutionary wings from another, or others, supposedly revolutionary ones. The one certain thing is that all wings of the MNR were and are counter-revolutionary.

“If the MNR wants to maintain its status as a mass party it will have to be more sensitive to their aspirations; it will have to integrate the demands for which they fought and which they will never renounce, into its programme. That will not be done unless the representatives of caciquism and imperialism are expelled from the party (...) This is the only possibility of survival remaining open to the MNR: to stop keeping the workers and peasants out of its ranks but, on the contrary, to give them the greatest influence over the party leadership.” (102) (LO, 29.11.52, p.2.)

“If the MNR does not organically change itself, expelling the rightists, freemasons, adventurers, businessmen and carpetbaggers from its ranks, it will become the gravedigger of the revolution (...) If the left wing succeeds in taking charge and having a working class face, the POR is ready to work with it and even to fuse with it. This new party form ought to be reflected in the forms of government which can only be a worker-peasant government.” (103)(LO, Supplement, 3.2.53, p.3.)

No matter how many workers a bourgeois party has it does not change its class character. While the POR struggled to get more workers into the MNR Trotskyists should have struggled for more workers to leave it. The POR’s line had been much more serious than simply seeking to reform the government and so advance towards a worker-peasant government. The POR based its whole strategy on trying to reform the solidly bourgeois MNR. This demanded greater participation of the labour bureaucrats in the leadership, greater ‘sensitivity’ from the top chiefs and more verbiage. All the problems of Bolivia could have been dealt with if more workers had been in the MNR and they had strengthened the left wing which would have been the most demagogic of them.

It proposed that the same party which only four years before it had labelled ‘nazi-fascist’ should now turn itself in the party of the social revolution. Furthermore if the

rightist elements had been purged and the Chávez and Lechín left wing had taken charge the POR would have agreed to fuse with the MNR. A revolutionary party can never fuse with a counter-revolutionary one, even less so when it is leading the class enemy.

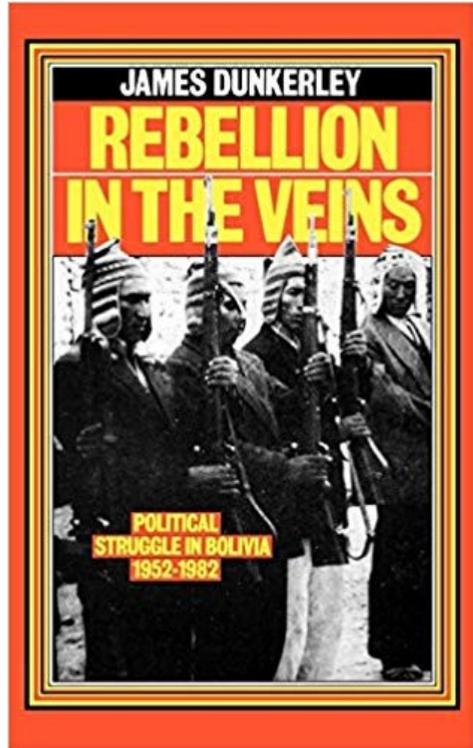
The positions of the POR were worse than those of Stalinism when it betrayed the Chinese revolution in 1927. In the latter, thanks to the policy of the Chinese CP which wanted to support and transform the Guomintang, bourgeois nationalism, once it had used the Communists to gain power, massacred them in the slaughter of Shanghai. Trotsky attacked the Stalinist Comintern for “consider(ing) the Kuomintang not as a bourgeois party, but as a neutral area of struggle for the masses (...) to assist the (summit) to convert ever broader masses into ‘cattle’, and under conditions most favourable to it to prepare the Shanghai coup d’etat (...) they imagined that by means of ordinary elections at Kuomintang Congresses power would pass from the hands of the bourgeoisie to the proletariat.” (104) (The Third International After Lenin, Pathfinder, New York, 1970, p.218.)

The left wing was no more than a demagogic tribune used by that bourgeois party in order to distract the masses and to get them to accept a solution of complete capitulation to imperialism. Chávez ended up as vice president to the leader of the MNR right-wing. Lechín ended up supporting all the imperialists’ plans totally, such as the triangular one and by visiting Nationalist China with the object of getting US endorsement for his management of their semi-colony.

As a consequence of that line, in 1954, the whole of the POR old guard (Warqui, Ayala etc) all the POR leaders of the COB, (Moller, Zegada) and the great majority of Lora’s Leninist Workers Faction dissolved themselves and went into the MNR.

Chapter 19: The peasant uprising

The insurrections of 1936, 1946 and 1952 as well as the civil war and the great struggles undertaken between the end of the Chaco War and 1952, had the cities and mines of Bolivia as their arena. At that time at least 70% of the population lived in the country. The peasants lived on the margins of the national economy, did not vote and had little direct part in politics.



The peasant masses spoke Amerindian languages and the great majority were illiterate. Their main relations of production were still based on serfdom. The Indians had to pay the cacique in labour, products or money.

Villarroel had been demagogic in his calling of the congress of the indigenous peoples. The peasant masses were gradually awakening. When the army of the rosca collapsed the Indian tenants organised themselves and a few months after April 1952, a strong movement of land occupations broke out – mainly in the valleys of Cochabamba and Titicaca which had trading links with the cities. These movements were not guided by Marxist ideology. The MNR immediately took them over.

“The only substantial incident of ‘communist’ influence involved the POR, which under the direction of its erstwhile leader Warqui had established something of a presence among the peasants of Ucureña. This was soon to prove ephemeral and had only been made possible by supporting a faction in conflict with the leader of the regional confederation over financial questions.” (106) (*Rebellion in the Veins*, Dunkerley, Verso, pp.70-71.)

Once the peasant mobilisations for land began to get under way the POR succeeded in attaining great influence in the convulsed valley of Cochabamba. In 1953 it correctly launched the slogan of occupation of the land and expropriation of the latifundiae. However its agrarian programme did not go beyond the limits of the bourgeois democratic revolution.

When a peasant receives a plot of land he becomes a petit- bourgeois. Competition and the operation of the market results in some small proprietors becoming rich and turning into bourgeois farmers, buying lorries or tractors, acquiring new land and hiring labourers while others lose their plots and sink into the proletariat. Land does not deal with all the peasantry’s problems and neither does it mean that there will be a great increase in the supply of farming produce to the country. There must be electricity, mechanisation and modernisation of the agricultural sector as well as an improvement in communications and means of exchange.

In order to achieve the latter industry and the banks must be expropriated and placed under the control of the workers and small peasants. Thereby the peasants can more easily get credit and urban products. The expropriation of the rich and the nationalisation of large scale transport will mean investment in agriculture, lower transport costs and lower prices for goods traded between town and country. By eliminating the private distributors and middlemen and being in direct contact with their markets, the peasants will get better terms for their trade. The state monopoly of foreign trade will allow the agricultural sector to be protected and provided with goods at subsidised prices.

In order to do this it is vital that the revolution spreads internationally and it must try to control the main cities, banks and factories in the region. A workers state should try to encourage the peasants to develop associated forms of large scale production voluntarily. But such collective farms will inevitably fail if the revolution remains isolated in one country and a backward one at that.

Three more important problems for the peasant are education, culture and political democracy. Plans for literacy campaigns and education could only be carried out on the

basis of substantial sums obtained by confiscation from the rich and by a general mobilisation of educational volunteers (something that the MNR did not want to do.)

Even now in Bolivia the majority of the population not only still live in the countryside but still speak Quechua, Aymara and other Amerindian languages. In order to try to integrate them into modern society and the struggle for socialism, the proletariat must unconditionally defend the right to national self-determination for these nationalities before the bourgeoisie. That should entail a struggle for the official recognition of the Amerindian languages so that the great majority of Bolivians can develop their own culture or be educated or examined in their own mother tongue. If a strong feeling for autonomy or separation emerges, the proletariat should struggle for the right of these nationalities to opt for that course but also to persuade them that the best course is that of a soviet region or republic in the framework of a socialist federation. The POR did not raise any slogan favouring self-determination of the Indian nationalities. When, decades later, it did so, it clothed itself in populism and idealised the obscurantist pre-Columbian religion.

The MNR introduced adult suffrage. The illiterate Bolivian peasants were able to vote for the first time. The POR did not make either that demand or the one for an Constituent Assembly. Later it demanded that illiterates be eligible for election and that the proletariat have a preferential vote.

The POR did not demand the expropriation of industry and credit in order to put them under workers control. Its programme was limited to a bourgeois and national framework. The way to realise it was to put pressure on the 'comrade President', Paz.

"While we all waited for the government to make its position clear on the problem of the latifundia while taking up the hopes of the exploited masses, President Paz Estenssoro answered our worries with the needs of the Indian, of labour and sacrifice." (107) (LO, 29.6.52, p.4.)

Once more the POR pinned its hopes on Paz. What was needed was to alert the masses constantly that the entire MNR was not interested in carrying out an agrarian revolution.

One of the personalities most supported by the POR was Ñuflo Chavez, one of the leaders of the MNR left wing, who had worked very closely with the POR and, in spite of being a rancher's son, had been put in charge of peasant matters by the COB and was peasant' minister. "The Minister of Peasant Affairs has forbidden the Federation to collect dues. Is this the way to encourage organisation in the countryside?" (108) (LO, 6.2.53, p.1) Once more the POR was surprised that its friend was inconsistent and pleaded with him to be consistent. The minister should have been denounced for wanting to disorganise the peasantry in order to moderate and regiment it.

Eventually the MNR adopted an agrarian reform that failed to pull the agricultural sector out of its backwardness. "between 1954 and 1968 only about eight million of some 36 million hectares of cultivated land changed hands. After two years 51% of the latifundia in La Paz, 49% in Chuquisaca and 76% in Oruro had been affected, but in Tarija the figure was 33% in Santa Cruz 36% and in Cochabamba only 16%, the national total being 28.5%." (109) (Dunkerley, Verso, p.73.)

Chapter 20: The opportunist international orientation of the POR

The Bolivian revolution could never have overcome its impoverished capitalist semi-colonial condition by remaining isolated in a backward and landlocked country. The internationalisation of the revolution was vital in order to ward off counter-revolution and to establish the material basis for socialist construction.

The MNR did everything possible to isolate the revolution within its own boundaries. It did not even dare to organise or encourage insurgent movements in other countries of the continent however moderate the programmes of these insurgents were. Víctor Paz took great pains to be imperialism's trump card. Lechín and his POR scribes took great pains to promote him.

If the POR press and its programme of action is examined no serious fight for the international expansion of the revolution will be found. It did not even call for a struggle for the Socialist United States of Latin America. Even the most pro-nationalist wing of the Latin American 'Trotskyist movement', the Ramos current criticised the section of the Fourth International for its provincialism. "the POR, far from basing its policy on the development of the struggle in Latin America, limits itself only to Bolivia. This is a suicidal but neither a working class nor revolutionary policy (...) A Workers Government is only conceivable on the plane of a revolutionary struggle in all Latin America, not in one of its isolated 'provinces'." (110) (Trotsky ante la revolución Latinoamericana, Juan Ramon Peñaloza, Bs As 1953, pp.152-154)

The POR has never been renowned for regarding international politics as important. However in the few articles written by the POR about other countries a line of colossal capitulation to counter-revolution can be seen.

A report from the POR CC said: "First Peron and Vargas in Argentina and Brazil, then Paz Estenssoro in Bolivia and later Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador and finally Ibañez in Chile, unifying the revolutionary and anti-imperialist aspirations of their own peoples, express in their broad electoral victories, not only the discontent of the working masses for the system of capitalist exploitation, but the fundamental defeat of imperialism's subjection of our semi-colonial countries through the traditional methods of economic slavery. Such mass movements fully identify themselves with the revolutionary actions that are liberating China, Korea, Indonesia and Indo-China and which enable these markets to escape the influence and exploitation of imperialism (...)" (111) (Boletín Interno, no.13, POR, p.3)

The POR maintained that the bourgeois governments of Peron Vargas, Paz and Ibañez had defeated imperialism and "fully identified themselves" with the revolutions that were overthrowing the bourgeoisie in Asia. In Indonesia the bourgeoisie was never deposed and, furthermore, thanks to the popular frontist policy of the CP, it demobilised the workers and paved the way for a coup that would assassinate a million opponents. The nationalist Latin American governments did not question the backward capitalist semi-colonial nature of the countries that they ran. They simply sought to generate better conditions for the development of a national bourgeoisie. The aim of their social reforms was to widen the internal market and control the organisations of labour. All these regimes were anti-communist and ended up supporting imperialism and repressing the workers.

The POR openly showed its sympathy for the PSP of Chile. Instead of denouncing its reformist politics of entering a capitalist government, the POR promoted it and presented it as an anti- Stalinist party derived from Trotskyism and with a semi- Trotskyist orientation.

“The Partido Socialista Popular is a centrist party which recently shifted to the left and, for some time, gave the Ibañez government a socialist tinge. As to be expected, the policy of the PSP could not be achieved by the cabinet and its leadership, energetically pressured by its rank and file, had no other remedy than of giving expression to the popular discontent by the ministerial crisis (...) it should be noted that the PSP is anti- Stalinist and it is derived from the Left Opposition.” (112) (LO, 27.9.53, p.4.)

The POR’s most scandalous position was its open support for Zionism. In an article called *Israel gives a lesson to imperialism* the POR called for support to the main bastion of imperialism in the Middle East against Jordan. It is the duty of any Marxist to defend any Arab semi-colony (no matter how reactionary its regime) in face of the racist aircraft-carrier of imperialism.

“The tiny republic of Israel, also apparently received ‘free aid from the USA’. The conflict with Jordan had the virtue of showing the game played by imperialism. The Yankee chancellery told Israel to stop engineering works on the river Jordan under threat of a suspension of US aid to this tiny state. The reply of this young country with a population of less than two million was a hard lesson for Yankee imperialism. The Israeli Chancellor Moshe Sherrett declared that ‘Israel does not sell its sovereignty or independence for any type of help.’

“This lesson of not compromising national sovereignty to imperialism for a few tons of food should be learnt by every ruler.” (113)(LO, 3.11.53, p.1.)

By that time Israel had destroyed the Palestinian state and had expelled hundreds of thousands of Arabs from its territory. The USA did not want its ‘guard-dog’ to continue carrying out further ‘excesses’. The POR saw in this even more reactionary attitude of Israel a dignified gesture for the MNR government to imitate. It is as if anyone today could be proud of a South African government which defied the USA by refusing to repeal racist laws.

Chapter 21: The leadership of the Fourth International identifies itself with this Menshevik policy

The whole of the treacherous policy of the POR was given total support by the Fourth International. Furthermore the latter admitted to being its guide. The resolution adopted by the IEC of the Fourth International at its 12th Plenum (November 1952) said:

“The way in which the POR has operated so far is, in general



correct, and corresponds both to the objective reality and to the real strength of the party.

“Ideologically preparing since before the events of 9th April, the POR was not surprised by them and, above, all it did not fail to correctly interpret them and to adequately adjust its policy (...) This double support was concretised in the critical support given to the MNR government” (114) (Contribución ..., p.241)

Early in 1953 the journal Fourth International asserted: “The POR began by justifying granting critical support to the MNR government (...) it gave the government critical support against attacks of imperialism and reaction and it supported all progressive measures.” (115)(Fourth International, January- February 1953, p.16.)

“Ideologically prepared in advance for the events of April 9, the POR was not surprised by them and above all did not fail to interpret them correctly and to adequately adjust its own policy.” (116) (International Information Bulletin, January 1953, SWP, New York, p.24.)

In 1953 the factional break-up of the Fourth International began between the International Secretariat of Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel and Posadas and the International Committee of the SWP (USA), the French PCI of Bleibtreu-Favre and Lambert and the groups of Gerry Healy and Nahuel Moreno. The split was the result of the latter grouping’s rejection of the tactic of deep entrism within Stalinism. Nevertheless the IC carried out, or would later, deep entrism into social democracy or bourgeois nationalism.

During the split the Bolivian revolution was not discussed. All had supported the POR line. The split was not between ‘orthodox’ and revisionist’ forces but between two wings which had already supported the centrist orientation of seeking to reform dissident Stalinists (such as Tito) or nationalists (such as the MNR).

Much later in the search to find arguments for their factional battles, the anti-Pabloists discovered the betrayal of 1952 which they had endorsed at the time.

The International Committee of Healy published a vast collection of seven books entitled Trotskyism versus Revisionism which contained hundreds of letters and documents which were supposed to show its struggle against revisionism. However in none of those volumes is the 1952 revolution mentioned. The extensive first volume is dedicated to the split with Pabloism. More than fifty texts of that polemic are reproduced. Nevertheless in all those documents Bolivia is only mentioned in two brief and passing references of a purely administrative nature. The Vern and Ryan texts are totally ignored. All this merely confirms that the ‘anti-Pabloists’ never questioned the Menshevik strategy at all which was unanimously adopted by the Fourth International and that the latter had already shifted towards centrism between 1948 and 1951.

At the beginning of the 70s the Healy current was to develop a particular interest in Bolivia arising from its wish to engage in a factional manoeuvre against the PCI of Lambert, at that time linked to Lora and because it had begun to form its first very active South American section in Peru. In 1971-72 it launched a massive political offensive against the POR, accusing it, correctly, of having conciliated the nationalist Torres government. But these criticisms were made from a sectarian angle as it denounced Lora for having dared to engage in joint anti-gorilla actions with Torres and for not having

dared to agitate for the slogan 'Down With Torres!' which would have been a blunder at the time as only reaction would have replaced him. Later the journal *Clave*, in its first number, published an analysis of the crisis of the Trotskyist movement in which many of the criticisms made at the time by the anti-defencists Shachtman and Robles were repeated.

However all these criticism were made under pressure. Healyism supported the pro-nationalist line of the POR in 1952. Its sectarian orientation in the Andes ran counter to its total capitulation to the bourgeois movements of Khomeini, Arafat, Qaddafi and Ortega at the same time. Healyism went so far as to justify the massacres by the theocratic dictatorship of Iran of the Kurds, women refusing to wear the oppressive veil and 'Trotskyists'.

In 1980 the currents of Moreno and Lambert fused to give birth to the Parity Committee and then the Fourth International – International Committee. In the programme that it adopted it said:

“The synthesis of Pabloist betrayal occurred in Bolivia. In this country the POR (Partido Obrero Revolucionario), Bolivian section of the international, led by the hand of Pablo, committed one of the greatest betrayals against the revolution so far this century, equal to, or greater than, that of the Mensheviks during the Russian revolution, than that of the social democrats during and after the First World War, than that of the Stalinists in China, in Germany, in Spain etc. In Bolivia the working class, educated by Trotskyism, carried out – at the start of 1952 – one of the most perfect working class revolutions known: it destroyed the bourgeois army, built up workers and peasants militias as the only real power in the country, and organised the Central Obrera Boliviana in order to centralise the workers movement and the militias. The bureaucracy that led the COB handed over power – which it had in its hands – to the bourgeois nationalist party the MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario). Bolivian Trotskyism was a power, it had great influence in the labour and mass movement, it had participated as co-leadership of the working class and popular insurrection that destroyed the army. The International Secretariat (IS), led by Pablo, laid down the treacherous and reformist line of critically supporting the bourgeois government. The present crisis of Bolivian Trotskyism, the present crisis of the whole of the Fourth International, the strengthening of Stalinism in Bolivia and of all the petty bourgeois nationalist movements in Latin America, derives from that criminal policy of class collaboration which Pablo obliged



the whole of the International to carry out in Bolivia. The Pabloite revisionist principle was always the same; the MNR pressured by the mass movement would see itself obliged to make a socialist revolution". (117) (Actualización del programa de transición, Nahuel Moreno, Caracteres Ed, Bogota, 1990, pp.40-41.)

What this demonstrated was the greatest cynicism. Lambertism had worked very closely with Lora before subscribing to that position. It was the international current that showed the greatest eagerness to demonstrate that Lora's POR had always advanced a revolutionary orientation. Pierre Broué, its great historian, wrote a small book in which he defended the official line of the POR in 1952.

The Moreno current never questioned the right-centrist policy of the POR in 1952. In fact it made it its own. While the POR capitulated to the MNR, Moreno was engaged in total adaptation to Peronism. For a decade he was to be dissolved inside it giving allegiance to the leadership and economic programme of the bourgeois Peron. When the POR began to break up in the mid-1950s, the SLATO (American Secretariat of Orthodox Trotskyism), headed by Moreno and Vitale, had a greater affinity with the majority of the Fracción Obrera Leninista of Moller which was dissolved into the MNR. In his major work Moreno admits that Vitale took great pains to win the Moller group to SLATO. Those who went over to the MNR did so under the powerful influence of the pro-Peronist PSRN, within which Moreno, Ramos and pro-Peronist social democrats worked together.

Another current that has just 'discovered' that Lora committed serious errors in 1952, is the Partido Obrero of Argentina. This current was one which had unconditionally defended the whole pro-nationalist line of the POR. Its historian Coggiola based the whole of his analysis of the history of Trotskyism in his country and continent, on the basis of total adherence to the conceptions and actions of the POR-MASAS. In its daily practice it has struggled to impose worker ministers onto Peronism and for a front with bourgeois sectors behind a bourgeois democratic programme and a joint presidential candidate. Now it has decided to break with Lora because he supported a dissident faction. Without drawing up any balance sheet of its co-habitation with Lora, Pablo Riez-nik published a brief and deficient article in which he belatedly initiates an attack on Lora in 1952.

All the currents that claim to come from the Fourth International since 1951-52 are compromised with the historic betrayal of the Bolivian revolution. The lack of a radical balance sheet of the lessons of that crime has meant that all those currents continue to practice different varieties of adaptation to forces foreign to the proletarian revolution. The heirs of Pablo's IS capitulated before the FLN in Algeria, to Mao, Castro and Ho Chi Minh's Stalinism, to Sandinism, to Khomeini, to Euro-Communism and bourgeois pacifism and ecology. The Latin American Bureau would end up following Posadas until its transformation into a puppet of the conservative Stalinists. The different variants of the IC would capitulate to the MNA in Algeria, Peronism & Belaundism in the 50s, where its sections ensconced themselves) Social Democracy and Sandinism. Healy would die converted into an emulator of Arafat, Gaddafi, Khomeini and Gorbachev. The SWP(USA) has ended up openly reneging on Trotskyism and unconditionally hailing Castro, the FSLN and the FMLN. Lambertism survives wishing to form a new in-

ternational and reformist parties like that of Lula in Brazil and based on the strategy of forming bourgeois democratic governments. Morenoism was always characterised by its embrace of whatever was in fashion among left currents (at different times it was Peronist, Castroist, Maoist, standard bearers of the formation of sections of the Socialist-Democrat Socialist International, apologists of Walesa's 'Solidarity' and for the immediate capitalist unification of Germany.)

See this text online at the Socialist Fight website:

<https://socialistfight.com/2016/01/18/the-1952-revolution-in-bolivia/>

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