

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKERS' AND FARMERS' GOVERNMENT

[One feature of the Bulletin In Defense of Marxism has been the printing of documents, suppressed by the SWP leadership, which were written and submitted by minority members of the National Committee before their expulsion. Those suppressed documents which we have published up to now were all distributed to NC members, but not to the party rank and file. The members were denied any first-hand account of the opposition's real views, while a caricature of those views was presented by the leadership in the name of "information."

The Theses on the Workers' and Farmers' Government and the accompanying article by Steve Bloom, "The Workers' and Farmers' Government and the Socialist Revolution," printed below have received an even narrower distribution than other suppressed documents. They were written in response to a report by Jack Barnes, approved at the February-March 1982 plenum of the SWP National Committee, and published in the International Internal Discussion Bulletin in June of the same year.

The Barnes report was ostensibly given to motivate a change in the governmental slogan of the SWP in the United States--a return to the call "for a workers' and farmers' government" which had been the official party position until 1967. (In that year, the party convention voted to change the slogan to "for a workers' government.") But the political content of the Barnes report went far beyond this relatively minor question of what governmental slogan to use in this country.

Barnes presented a broad historical and theoretical analysis of the period of transition from capitalism to socialism. In the process of this he introduced a series of theoretical revisions in the Trotskyist movement's traditional views on this subject. As the Bloom article explains, these theoretical changes parallel the historical revisions which were introduced earlier by Doug Jenness in his November 1981 International Socialist Review article, "How Lenin Saw the Russian Revolution," and which would be continued in his later effort, "Our Political Continuity with Bolshevism" (ISR, June 1982).

The Fourth Internationalist Caucus in the SWP National Committee (a predecessor to the present-day Fourth Internationalist Tendency which publishes the Bulletin IDOM) asked that the vote on the Barnes report be postponed until it could be printed for members of the NC to read and study. No objection was raised by the FIC to the proposed change of slogan, since either the call "for a workers' government" or "for a workers' and farmers' government" could be reasonably raised in this country provided that the correct political content was put into that call. But the Barnes leadership rejected voting simply on the change of slogan, and insisted on approval of the entire oral report--containing a complex theoretical analysis--after less than a day's consideration. The members of the FIC abstained on this vote at the plenum, since it was impossible to express a considered opinion under these conditions.

When the Barnes report appeared in print, however, the theoretical revisions it contained became unmistakable, and the FIC prepared a written response. On November 4, 1982 the Theses and the Bloom article were submitted together, by the Caucus, as a contribution to the IIDB. In line with the required procedure for submitting such articles, a request was made for the SWP Political Bureau to recommend the publication of this material.

After the Barnes report was approved by the National Committee, the leadership of the party had declared that this question--of the workers' and farmers' government--was the central one facing the Fourth International at its coming World Congress. Despite

this, and despite the fact that the "Theses" and the Bloom article were the first, and for many months the only, response to Barnes's theoretical innovations, the party leadership blocked their publication by refusing to act to recommend it. A letter from Steve Clark to Steve Bloom, dated December 1, 1982, stated that a decision would be made before the next United Secretariat meeting, but this pledge was not fulfilled. And many subsequent renewals of the request for action on this both by Steve Bloom and by Frank Lovell --during the time he was a member of the Political Bureau--were also ignored. In addition to asking that this material be printed in the IIDB, proposals were made by Bloom and Lovell to print it internally, in the SWP's own bulletins, for the information of the party membership. This was specifically denied. The Political Bureau even rejected making it available to the members of the National Committee.

The result is that these documents have not yet been published, either by the Fourth International or by the SWP. They have been restricted to a very narrow circle. But their importance for the current dispute will be obvious to readers of the Bulletin IDOM, and the political questions they deal with remain on the agenda for the coming World Congress of the Fourth International. A new IIDB has now been published in English containing a response by Ernest Mandel to Barnes's theories.

A great deal has happened in the evolution of the SWP leadership since November 1982 when the "Theses" and the Bloom article were submitted. At that time, for example, the SWP leadership had not yet openly repudiated Trotskyism and permanent revolution, and these are assumed in the article to be a common theoretical framework. A discussion piece written today on this subject would necessarily have a somewhat different character. Nevertheless, the substance of the dispute remains the same, and the original articles retain all of their relevance.]

THESES ON THE WORKERS' AND FARMERS' GOVERNMENT

(Note: The following Theses represent the views of the Fourth Internationalist Caucus, a political tendency in the SWP National Committee)

1) The concept of the "workers' and farmers' government" has been used in different ways at various times:

a) Lenin and the Bolsheviks, after October 1917, used it interchangeably with the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and the "workers' state" when describing the Soviet power in Russia. All three concepts were intended to indicate a clearly pro-socialist government with a decisive proletarian majority. No terminological distinctions were made between the period before and after definitive measures were taken to nationalize the economy. Other terms were also used, such as "the dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry," a "worker and peasant republic," etc.

b) The Fourth Comintern Congress (in 1922) codified a different use of the "workers' government" idea (later consistently referred to as the "workers' and peasants' government"). This was an

extension of the tactic of the united front between the parties of the Comintern and reformist forces in the workers' movement. In this type of workers' and peasants' government reformist forces would predominate, and the Bolshevik forces would be in a minority, if they were participants at all. Although such a government would be incapable of leading the transition to socialist economic forms, it would provide a bridge to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat. The Fourth Congress considered it possible for such a workers' and farmers' government to actually come to power in exceptional circumstances, but the most likely course was still recognized to be the assumption of power by communist forces. Even if this type of petty-bourgeois workers' and farmers' government never actually came into existence, however, the concept was considered a useful propaganda tool to reach the broad masses who were still under the

sway of reformist leaderships. Used in this way, the slogan itself had a transitional character.

c) In the Transitional Program (1938) Trotsky recognized this two-fold character of the workers' and farmers' government idea. He used and explained it both in the sense that he and Lenin had after 1917 in Russia (as a popularization of the dictatorship of the proletariat), and in the sense of the Fourth Comintern Congress (a government dominated by petty-bourgeois parties which would be "merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat"). The possibility of the second type of workers' and farmers' government actually coming to power he described as a "highly improbable variant;" and his main concern was in its use as a transitional slogan.

d) In the 1960s, Joseph Hansen used the concept of the workers' and farmers' government to analyze the development of the world revolution after World War II. He said that in Eastern Europe, China, and Cuba, Stalinist or other radical petty-bourgeois leaderships had taken governmental power; and due to specific exceptional circumstances had also proven capable of moving forward to the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. This he said was similar to the process conceived of by the Fourth Comintern Congress and by Trotsky in the Transitional Program, except that they had excluded the possibility that such governments would prove capable of actually taking this step of nationalizing the economy. Hansen also introduced a new meaning for the workers' and farmers' government concept--as a scientific descriptive term to indicate the period in a socialist revolution when the governmental and military power of the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, but decisive economic power remains in the hands of the old ruling class. This he distinguished from the "workers' state," which he defined as the period after the expropriation of the bourgeoisie.

2) Today we continue to use the idea of the workers' and farmers' government in all three of these ways. To the extent that we foresee an actual government in power with this slogan it is a popularization of and a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the same sense that Lenin and the Bolsheviks used it after October 1917 in Russia. When we use this slogan in a transitional way in approaching workers who are not yet fully convinced of a

revolutionary program, or when we call on mass reformist workers parties, in a country like France for example, to take power and wield it in the interests of the toilers, we are using a united front-type approach like that of the Fourth Comintern Congress. When we describe the current Nicaraguan or Grenadian regimes as workers' and farmers' governments, we are designating the stage of development of the revolutionary process in those countries. These different uses must be kept distinct and made clear in any discussion of the workers' and farmers' government.

3) A program of economic and social change is an inherent part of any anti-capitalist revolution. But although this program can be clarified, and steps toward its implementation taken through the dual power in the course of the political-military struggle against the old order, the victory of that struggle is a prerequisite for decisive economic and social measures. This is the unique characteristic of the socialist revolution, which means that there will inevitably be a period after the political and military power of the bourgeoisie has been overthrown but before economic power is decisively in the hands of the proletariat.

4) The tasks of the revolutionary government in this period--the period of the workers' and farmers' government--consist of dismantling whatever vestiges of bourgeois state power remain, and replacing them with proletarian forms; organizing the masses to implement workers' control over production; and taking whatever socialist economic measures are necessary to keep the economic power of the bourgeoisie under control--leading to the decisive transfer of that economic power to the proletariat.

5) The time that may elapse between the military-political victory of the working class and its final assumption of economic power has been shown by real life to vary according to the objective reality. But even in the most favorable circumstances it can only be a relatively brief interlude, and can in no case be considered a separate historical "stage." The length of this interlude will depend on many factors, including most importantly the strength of the domestic bourgeoisie and the ability and willingness of external counterrevolutionary forces to intervene. The stronger these dangers, the more quickly will

the necessity be posed of the working class appropriating the decisive economic power or being overthrown.

6) Historical experience has also demonstrated that the period of the revolution which Hansen characterized as the workers' and farmers' government can be filled by either the Bolshevik-type (proletarian) workers' and farmers' government, or by the Fourth Comintern Congress-type (united front, petty-bourgeois). In general, agreeing on a characterization of a particular regime as a workers' and farmers' government in the sense used by Hansen only begins to enlighten us as to its character. There is a qualitative difference between Russia in 1917, on the one hand, and Algeria under Ben Bella, on the other, to pick the most extreme cases. Other specific developments fall on a continuum between these two extremes based on the subjective factor--the degree to which the leadership of the workers' and farmers' government adheres to a revolutionary Marxist, i.e. Bolshevik, program. The fact that workers' and farmers' governments have been led by petty-bourgeois forces in most of the post-World War II social transformations has resulted in major sacrifices and hardships for the masses.

7) In the post-World War II social transformations such as Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, etc. where one or another type of radical petty-bourgeois government came to power, this set the stage for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat by disarming and disenfranchising the old ruling classes. However, the new ruling parties actively

disavowed socialist intentions (as they had before coming to power) and in the beginning took measures to consolidate a strategic coalition with the bourgeoisie which would be based on long-term guarantees of capitalist property relations. Therefore, we cannot speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat in these cases until a second qualitative turning point in the revolutionary process--the actual decision by these governments to expropriate the bourgeoisie and establish workers' states.

8) However, in the case of the conquest of power by a genuine revolutionary Marxist party (as in Russia in 1917), with a clear path charted toward the creation of a workers' state based on socialized property forms, then the establishment of the workers' and farmers' government in the sense we have been discussing marks the basic qualitative turning point in the transition from a capitalist state to a workers' state (the decisive resolution of the violent conflict between the old and the new). It is at this point that the dictatorship of the proletariat begins, although many tasks and battles lie ahead before it is completely consolidated and firmly constructed. The point at which economic power passes decisively into the hands of the proletariat is still an important milestone for the revolution, but even if this is delayed for some time it can only be correctly understood as a continuation, deepening, extension, and decisive consolidation of the original qualitative change which occurred when the proletariat assumed governmental power.

THE WORKERS' AND FARMERS' GOVERNMENT AND THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

by Steve Bloom

At the February-March 1982 plenum of the SWP National Committee, Jack Barnes asserted, "As comrades who've studied our material on the workers and farmers government know, I said nothing in the report from the Political Committee that has not been said in writing somewhere before by SWP leaders. I did, however, say some things we had not adopted previously" ("For a Workers and Farmers Government in the United States," International Internal Discussion Bulletin, Volume XVIII, #5, p. 27).

We cannot exclude the possibility that somewhere, at some time, all of the

ideas in this report on the workers' and farmers' government have been expressed by some leading member of the SWP (especially if we include the most recent period of theoretical evolution of that leadership). But the implication that there is nothing new theoretically in the report is completely false. In his presentation Barnes uses a portion of Joseph Hansen's theories, and throws them together with other theoretical ideas, some selected from Trotsky's writings, some from our traditional programmatic documents, and others which are quite new for our movement. In this

way he creates an eclectic theoretical hodgepodge out of which both Hansen and Trotsky, as well as our programmatic traditions, emerge unrecognizable. The purpose of these "Theses on the Workers' and Farmers' Government," and this accompanying explanatory article, is to try to sort out the tangled threads woven together by Barnes.

The essential difference between the Theses and the Barnes report is an appreciation of the distinctions between different uses of the workers' and farmers' government idea, as well as the differences between specific regimes to which we have applied this label. The Theses assert that there have been, and still are, three different uses of this concept--two developed by the Bolsheviks and the Comintern, and one by Hansen. Barnes, on the other hand, denies that we have continued to use the workers' and farmers' government in the sense of the Bolsheviks in 1917. He also equates Hansen's new use of the term with the Fourth Comintern Congress's use of it (as a transitional regime which was not the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Bolshevik sense) and claims that this was what Hansen considered a universal stage of the revolution.

In addition, Barnes introduces a fourth meaning for the workers' and farmers' government--as an actual coalition government between the working class and the peasantry. And this he superimposes on both Hansen and the Fourth Comintern Congress, as well as on the Russian revolution.

The effect of Barnes's effort is to counterpose his particular version of the workers' and farmers' government to our traditional programmatic perspectives on the class dynamics of the transition from capitalism to socialism. What is involved here is a programmatic revision, which as we shall see parallels the revision made by Doug Jenness in his recent articles on Lenin's view of the Russian revolution. Barnes and Jenness try to revive the content of Lenin's early concept--the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry"--under the name of the "workers' and farmers' government."

This idea was explicitly expressed by Comrade Steve Clark in his series of lectures on the workers' and farmers' government at the SWP's Oberlin educational conference in August 1982. He stated that in his view, the content of the workers' and farmers' government as we understand it is the same as what Lenin meant by his pre-1917 slogan.

Though Barnes is not as explicit in his report, the same conception is clearly present. This is not a problem of terminology, but an extremely important substantive dispute. Interestingly, Barnes uses a terminological quibble over the definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to cover his tracks. This makes it appear to the unwary reader as a simple continuation of things we have always said.

The workers' and farmers' government and the dictatorship of the proletariat

Barnes includes in his report an extensive exposition entitled: "What is the Dictatorship of the Proletariat?" Here he discusses the fact that the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" has had two different but related meanings for the Marxist movement. One is a regime of the Soviet type, such as the Bolshevik government in Russia, which is ushered in by an anti-capitalist revolution and rules in the interests of the workers and poor peasants. Such a government prepares the ground for the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. The second meaning is as a synonym for a workers' state already resting on nationalized property and a planned economy, after the expropriation of the bourgeoisie.

This explanation of how the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" has been used in the past is correct as a simple statement of fact. But Barnes goes further. In this section he suggests that the first usage is not precise and should be abandoned, while the second should be codified and adopted. He asserts that this was the view Trotsky developed after the degeneration of the Russian revolution:

"The problem here is that the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' has been used, and is still often used, in two different ways by Marxists.

"The first way is synonymous with the new revolutionary power . . .

"This is the way Marx, Engels, Lenin, and the other revolutionary Marxists normally used the term; it is the way Trotsky used it prior to the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union . . ." (p. 15).

"How precisely to characterize the transitional government that took power and led the workers in expropriating the bourgeoisie was not a

burning question under these conditions" (p. 15).

"Since the 1930s, however, our movement has usually used the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in another way. We use it as a synonym for a workers state . . ." (p. 15).

"In coming to grips with the degeneration of the Soviet Union and the consequent political tasks, Trotsky had to sharpen up Marxist thinking about the criteria that define the class character of the state. . . . As a result, our movement in the 1930s developed an understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat that we still use today--that is, a workers state." (p. 16).

"Trotsky's analysis also led him to look back with greater precision on the transitional government brought into being by the October revolution. It was clear that the proletarian property relations that defined the continued existence of a workers state in the Soviet Union in the 1930s had not come into existence immediately following the October revolution . . ." (p. 17).

"This is why we insist that it is neither sufficient nor correct to say that the workers and farmers government is merely a popular designation or synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat. That misses this all-important transition, which culminates in another qualitative turning point in any anti-capitalist revolution--the expropriation of the exploiting class and the establishment of state property. Only when this has been accomplished do we have a workers state which is fundamentally a popular designation or synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat." (p. 18).

There is a certain ambiguity in all of this. The word "merely" in the above quote could be read either to mean that the idea of the workers' and farmers' government is not only used in the sense of the dictatorship of the proletariat but that it might also be used in that sense, depending on the context (an idea which is correct); or else "merely" could mean that it is not really correct to use "workers' and farmers' government" in that sense at all. This is the

inference which the average reader will certainly draw from the overall context of the article. We should also note that Steve Clark, in his Oberlin classes, explicitly stated this view--that it is incorrect even in the Russian revolution to characterize the transitional regime (between the fall of 1917 and the fall of 1918) as the dictatorship of the proletariat, but rather as a workers' and farmers' government which was a "bridge" or "transition" to the dictatorship of the proletariat, by which we mean a workers' state based on nationalized property.

That this is the meaning of Barnes's exposition is also indicated by the way he formulated the question in his summary:

"What we call soviet power is not the dictatorship of the proletariat, a workers state, right off the bat. That would only be true if the soviets were entirely proletarian and if the expropriation of the capitalists were immediate. But both of these conditions are excluded in every country of the world" (p. 31).

Here it is clear that Barnes has completely identified the dictatorship of the proletariat with the workers' state already resting on nationalized property; and even the "soviet power" (a term which refers directly to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917) cannot be called the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The question arises, of course, can we accept this use of terminology proposed by Barnes? In the abstract we probably could. We could certainly all agree to say that the dictatorship of the proletariat doesn't really come into existence until a workers' state is established, and that before this we will call the revolutionary regime a workers' and farmers' government.

However, a problem arises if we do this and at the same time act as if this is also what the workers' and farmers' government and dictatorship of the proletariat meant to Lenin in 1917, to the Fourth Comintern Congress, and to Trotsky in the Transitional Program. This will lead us only to hopeless confusion. Yet Barnes presents his report precisely as if this were true, and in this way he introduces a new political content into old quotations. He even goes so far as to deny that Lenin and Trotsky believed that the social content of the transi-

tional regime (what we would now call the workers' and farmers' government) must be decisively proletarian.

We will investigate this aspect of things further, but first let's examine the contention that Trotsky, after the early 1930s, shared the view--which is the cornerstone of Barnes's presentation--that the dictatorship of the proletariat can only be scientifically understood as a synonym for a workers' state based on nationalized property. To do this it will be necessary to look in some detail at what Trotsky actually wrote on the subject.

Trotsky's view

In 1938 Trotsky had a number of discussions with comrades about the meaning of the Transitional Program. At that time his approach to the dictatorship of the proletariat was somewhat different from what Barnes would like us to believe:

"Now naturally it would be better if we could immediately mobilize the workers and the poor farmers to overthrow democracy and replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is the only means of avoiding imperialist wars. But we can't do it. We see that the large masses of people are looking toward democratic means to stop the war. . . .

"I believe that we can say to the masses, we must say openly: dear friends, our opinion is that we should establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, but you are not of that opinion" (Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution, Pathfinder Press, N.Y., pp. 93-94).

Note, the regime "we should establish" is the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is what Trotsky says we want to "immediately replace bourgeois democracy with. Does this mean that Trotsky is talking about instant revolution here? Immediate nationalizations, the establishment of a workers' state without a transitional phase? Of course not. Trotsky above all appreciated all of the subtleties of the transitional process. It is simply that Trotsky, in 1938, several years after the decisive degeneration of the USSR, doesn't agree with Barnes's assessment that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a synonym only for a workers' state resting on nationalized property; he also believes that the same characterization can be

correctly applied to the transitional regime which immediately follows the destruction of bourgeois political and military power. And this is exactly the same usage of the term applied by Marx, Engels, and Lenin which Barnes informs us resulted from conditions in which "how precisely to characterize the transitional government . . . was not a burning question."

This use of the concept "dictatorship of the proletariat" by Trotsky both to describe the Bolshevik-led Soviet government in Russia in 1917, and as a general description of the transitional regime which will immediately follow the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, is not unique to these discussions. A large number of examples could be cited from his writings, but we will limit ourselves here to an additional half-dozen, spanning the years of his struggle against Stalinism:

1927--"Dual power during the February revolution was progressive insofar as it contained new revolutionary possibilities. But this progressiveness was only temporary. The way out of the contradiction was the proletarian dictatorship" ("On the slogan of Soviets in China," Leon Trotsky on China, Pathfinder, p 155).

1929--"A new Chinese revolution can overthrow the existing regime and hand power over to the mass of the people only in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat" ("The Capitulation of Redek, Preobrazhensky, and Smilga," Ibid., p. 412).

1930--"The peaceful 'growing over' of a democratic revolution is possible only under the dictatorship of one class--the proletariat. The transition from democratic measures to socialist measures took place in the Soviet Union under the regime of the proletarian dictatorship" (Manifesto of the International Left Opposition," Ibid., p. 483).

1930--"Such was the connecting link between the old position of Bolshevism, which limited the revolution to democratic aims, and the new position, which Lenin first presented to the party in his theses of April 4. This new prospect of an immediate transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat seemed completely unexpected, contrary to tradition, and indeed simply would not fit into the

mind" (Re-arming the party," History of the Russian Revolution, Sphere Books, London, p. 300).

1936--"If, in its turn the French 'Communist' party had anything in common with communism, it would from the very first day of the strike have corrected its criminal mistake, broken off its fatal bloc with the Radicals, called the workers to the creation of factory committees and soviets, and thus established in the country a regime of dual power as the shortest and surest bridge to the dictatorship of the proletariat" ("The New Revolutionary Upsurge and the Tasks of the Fourth International," Writings of Leon Trotsky, '35-'36, Pathfinder, p. 336).

1937--"If Nin were able to think his own words through, he would understand that so long as these gentlemen leaders keep the revolution from rising to the dictatorship of the proletariat, it will inevitably fall to fascism" ("Revolutionary Strategy in the Civil War," The Spanish Revolution, Pathfinder, p. 261).

So the idea that it is "imprecise" to describe the transitional regime we advocate as the dictatorship of the proletariat does not originate with Trotsky, but with Barnes. In contrast to these examples we are offered one quotation from 1933 which appears to be a use of that term by Trotsky in a way similar to what Barnes advocates. He quotes extensively from an article by Trotsky entitled, "The Class Nature of the Soviet State." Here is the part Barnes cites:

"Not only up to the Brest-Litovsk peace, but even up to autumn of 1918, the social content of the revolution was restricted to a petty-bourgeois agrarian overturn and workers' control over production. This means that the revolution in its actions had not yet passed the boundaries of bourgeois society. During the first period, soldiers' soviets ruled side by side with workers' soviets, and often elbowed them aside. Only toward the autumn of 1918 did the petty-bourgeois soldier-agrarian elemental wave recede a little to its shores, and the workers went forward with the nationalization of the means of production.

"Only from this time can one speak of the inception of a real dictatorship of the proletariat. But even here it is necessary to make large reservations.

"During those initial years, the dictatorship was geographically confined to the old Moscow principality and was compelled to wage a three-years war along all the radii from Moscow to the periphery. This means that up to 1921, precisely up to NEP, that is, what went on was still the struggle to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a national scale.

"And since, in the opinion of the pseudo-Marxist philistines, the dictatorship had disappeared with the beginning of the NEP, then it means that, in general, it had never existed. To these gentlemen the dictatorship of the proletariat is simply an imponderable concept, an ideal norm not to be realized upon our sinful planet." (Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1933-34, Pathfinder, p. 106).

This certainly seems like Trotsky is using the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the way that Barnes advocates--as a synonym for a workers' state based on nationalized property. But if we look at the article from which this is excerpted, another interpretation appears more likely--especially in light of the abundant examples already cited of Trotsky's continued use of the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the traditional Bolshevik sense long after 1933.

The section of Trotsky's article which Barnes quotes from is headlined, "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat as an Idealistic Norm." That gives us a hint about what is involved here. Trotsky begins this section as follows:

"Messrs. 'Kantian' Sociologists (we apologize to the shade of Kant) often reach the conclusion that a 'real' dictatorship [note here that Trotsky puts the word 'real' in quotes--S.B.], that is, one that conforms to their ideal norms, existed only in the days of the Paris Commune, or during the first period of the October revolution, up to the Brest-Litovsk peace or, at best, up to the NEP. This is indeed sharpshooting: aim a finger at the sky and hit a bull's eye!"

What follows this, and what Barnes quotes from, is a development of the logic of this view of the dictatorship of the proletariat as an "idealistic norm." Trotsky demonstrates that applying these criteria you must deny the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Paris Commune, in the first period of the Russian revolution, and even after the autumn of 1918 up to NEP. His conclusion is that such a way of looking at things makes the dictatorship of the proletariat "simply an imponderable concept, an ideal norm not to be realized on our sinful planet."

Is Trotsky advocating this view, as Barnes would have us believe, that only after the autumn of 1918 "can one speak of the inception of a real dictatorship of the proletariat"? No, he is precisely pointing out the absurdity of this view, which flows from an idealistic understanding of the proletarian dictatorship. It will take more solid evidence than this if Barnes wants to convince us that Trotsky discarded the traditional Marxist understanding of the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" after the degeneration of the Russian revolution.

Slogan or government

Trotsky believed that the transitional regime would, of necessity, be the dictatorship of the proletariat because he believed that only a revolutionary proletarian government would be capable of leading the transition forward to the final expropriation of the bourgeoisie. How then did this relate to his understanding of the workers' and farmers' government? Here it is essential to keep in mind the two different meanings this term had after the Fourth Comintern Congress. Trotsky explained them both in the section of the Transitional Program titled, "Workers' and Farmers' Government." The first paragraph states:

"This formula, 'workers' and farmers' government,' first appeared in the agitation of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and was definitively accepted after the October revolution. In the final instance it represented nothing more than the popular designation for the already established dictatorship of the proletariat. The significance of this designation comes mainly from the fact that it underscores the idea of an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry upon which the soviet power rests."

Here Trotsky explains the use of the term to describe an actual government, the soviet power. In this case, he says, workers' and farmers' government was simply "the popular designation for the dictatorship of the proletariat."

The rest of this section of the transitional Program is devoted to an explanation of the second use of the workers' and farmers' government idea--as a transitional slogan to lead the masses in the direction of understanding the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat. After explaining how the Stalinists have distorted this concept and given it a purely democratic content, he contrasts the Bolshevik view:

"From April to September 1917, the Bolsheviks demanded that the SRs and the Mensheviks break with the liberal bourgeoisie and take power into their own hands. . . . If the Mensheviks and the SRs had actually broken with the Cadets (liberals) and with foreign imperialism, then the 'workers' and peasants' government' created by them could only have hastened and facilitated the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But it was exactly because of this that the leadership of petty-bourgeois democracy resisted with all possible strength the establishment of its own government. . . .

"Nevertheless, the demand of the Bolsheviks, addressed to the Mensheviks and the SRs--'break with the bourgeoisie, take the power into your own hands'--had for the masses tremendous educational significance. The obstinate unwillingness of the Mensheviks and SRs to take power . . . definitively doomed them before mass opinion and prepared the victory of the Bolsheviks" (Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution, Pathfinder, pp. 133-134).

This use of the workers' and farmers' government idea does indeed describe a government which is not the dictatorship of the proletariat. It would be a petty-bourgeois government led by reformist parties. But the primary purpose of calling for this kind of government is not in order to bring it into existence. The Bolsheviks called on the Mensheviks and SRs to take power precisely in order to expose their unwillingness to do so, and to pave the way for a Bolshevik government, a workers' and farmers' government that would be the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Transitional Program explains this further:

"The central task of the Fourth International consists in freeing the proletariat from the old leadership. . . . Under these conditions the demand, systematically addressed to the old leadership--'break with the bourgeoisie, take the power'--is an extremely important weapon for exposing the treacherous character of the parties and organizations of the Second, Third, and Amsterdam Internationals . . ." (p 134).

It is important, of course, that this not be viewed in the sense of a cynical maneuver. Our appeal to the masses is not at all cynical, but completely sincere: "You have confidence in your leaders. Very well, we don't share your confidence, but we will help you put your leaders in power. There they will show us what they are worth. Demand that they take the power and break with the bourgeois government." We help the masses in this struggle because if the reformist leaders refuse to take the power, as we expect, their impotence will be exposed. If such a government does, in fact, come into existence then this too is a step forward for the revolution.

Trotsky did not exclude the possibility that such a workers' and farmers' government led by reformist parties might at some time take power, but this he described as "an extremely improbable variant" which "would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat" (p. 135). He was not primarily concerned with the transitional potential of the government itself in this case, exactly because he didn't consider it likely that it would ever come to power. It was the transitional nature of the slogan as a bridge to the idea of a soviet government under communist leadership which he was discussing. And it was this which was at the heart of the discussion of the workers' [and farmers'] government slogan at the Fourth Comintern Congress as well--the use of it as an extension of the Bolshevik concept of the united front.

Joseph Hansen's contribution

In the 1960s, after the Cuban revolution, Joseph Hansen attempted to put together an assessment of the social

transformations which had taken place in Eastern Europe, China, and Cuba without the benefit of leadership by a revolutionary Marxist proletarian party. He looked back at the discussion at the Fourth Comintern Congress, and at Trotsky's use of the workers' and farmers' government idea in the Transitional Program. He concluded that "the extremely improbable variant" of "petty-bourgeois parties, including the Stalinists, going] further than they themselves wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie" had, in fact, actually taken place. The break with the bourgeoisie had gone so far as to include the overthrow of its economic power.

This possibility, of course, had been theoretically excluded both by the Comintern and by Trotsky. In their minds such a workers' and farmers' government in power would be "a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat" not because it would later lead to the creation of a workers' state based on nationalized property, but precisely because it would prove incapable of this, and would thereby pave the way for proletarian forces to assume power.

So Hansen identified the postwar overturns as having been carried out by regimes which were workers' and farmers' governments of the petty-bourgeois type anticipated by the Fourth Congress; though the actual events differed considerably from anything which had been foreseen. But Hansen did something else as well. He asserted that our experience with the postwar overturns shows that it is necessary to distinguish a specific period in the anticapitalist revolution--a period between the overthrow of bourgeois military and political power on the one hand, and the decisive expropriation of bourgeois economic power on the other. This period he also termed the "workers' and farmers' government" as distinct from the "workers' state" which followed it. And he said that this political period of the workers' and farmers' government could, under specific circumstances, be filled with the social content of the workers' and farmers' government in the petty-bourgeois sense of the Fourth Comintern Congress Theses.

Here is how Hansen, in discussing the Chinese revolution, described his understanding:

"What I should like to call special attention to is the link in the revolutionary process through which

this qualitative leap [to a workers' state] was made possible--the workers and peasants government.

"From the theoretical point of view this is the item of greatest interest, for it was this government that set up the economic forms modeled on those existing in the Soviet Union, repeating what had happened in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia.

"The possibility of workers and peasants governments coming to power had been visualized by the Communist International at the Fourth Congress in 1922. But the Bolsheviks held that such governments, set up by petty-bourgeois parties could not be characterized as proletarian dictatorships, that is, workers states.

"The Bolsheviks were firmly convinced that petty-bourgeois parties, even though they went so far as to establish a workers and peasants government, could never move forward to establish a workers state. Only a revolutionary Communist party, rooted in the working class on a mass scale so as to be able to lead it into action, could do that.

"The experience in China showed that in at least one case history had decreed otherwise" ("The Workers and Farmers Government," Education for Socialists, April 1974, p. 27).

And Hansen went on to explain that the Cuban revolution particularly, as well as the Algerian, confirmed for us the general line of this approach to China. Robert Chester, in his study of the question ("Workers and Farmers Governments Since the Second World War," Education for Socialists, January 1978), also applied Hansen's approach to the workers' and farmers' government period and showed how it could help us understand the specific developments in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba and Algeria where petty-bourgeois forces had been in the leaderships of revolutions.

Hansen considered the key link in this process to be the setting up of governments based on the revolutionary mobilization of the masses. This is what he sees as a universal phase in the anti-capitalist revolution. The mass mobilizations which break the power of the bourgeoisie allow, in extraordinary circumstances, even petty-bourgeois leaderships to accomplish the transition to a workers' state, provided that they make a conscious decision to do so (a decision to carry out a proletarian program, which is one of the two possi-

ble options open to a petty-bourgeois leadership in power).

But Hansen never denied that this period of the workers' and farmers' government in Russia in 1917-18 had been filled with any other social content than what the Bolsheviks meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat. And he also did not deny that the goal of conscious revolutionary Marxists was anything else than to fill it with this content. Barnes's report does begin to deny these things, and in doing so he transforms Hansen's concept into a battering ram against the theoretical ideas of Lenin, Trotsky, and Hansen himself.

It should be noted that Hansen uses a formulation in the passage quoted above which sounds very much like the approach Barnes is proposing when he says: "But the Bolsheviks held that such governments, set up by the petty-bourgeois parties could not be characterized as proletarian dictatorships, that is, workers states."

What is important to keep in mind here is that Hansen is discussing the Bolsheviks' understanding. And in the terminology of the Bolsheviks "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "workers' state" were the same. Both applied to the working class in power with the perspective of building socialism, as well as to the period after the bourgeoisie has been economically expropriated. In their use of these terms the Bolsheviks made no distinctions between the period before and the period after the decisive nationalization of industry. This was considered an inevitable outcome of the proletariat coming to power. The reason the Bolsheviks didn't consider a petty-bourgeois type workers' and farmers' government to be the dictatorship of the proletariat (a workers' state) was that they didn't believe a petty-bourgeois leadership would prove capable of implementing a proletarian economic program.

But when Barnes equates the dictatorship of the proletariat with the workers' state he means something quite different. Today the term workers' state has a specific scientific meaning--given to it by Hansen only after the postwar transformations--as distinct from the period which he labeled the workers' and farmers' government. This understanding of "workers' state" was unknown to the Bolsheviks, and was not at all what they meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Only serious misunderstandings can come from discussing the ideas of the Bolsheviks while attributing to

their words our own specific, and much more recent, meanings. This will, at the minimum, create extreme terminological confusion. In the present case, however, the confusion is far from merely terminological.

Barnes is advocating a new social content for the transitional regime during the period we now call the workers' and farmers' government--a content quite different from any understanding the Bolsheviks or Hansen had. The terminological confusion Barnes creates over the meaning of "dictatorship of the proletariat" allows him to introduce his new conception while trying to appear as if he is maintaining the strictest orthodoxy.

What kind of transitional regime do we advocate?

We can see this most clearly if we look at Barnes's polemic, during his report, against the concept of "a workers' government in alliance with the poor peasantry." At the February-March 1982 plenum where Barnes's workers' and farmers' government report was adopted, a resolution entitled "The Iranian Revolution and the Dangers that Threaten It" had been presented under a previous agenda point. This resolution was submitted by the Fourth Internationalist Caucus in the SWP National Committee and discussed "the pressing need to chart a course to carry the revolution forward to the creation of a workers' government, in alliance with the poor peasantry" (p. 20).

Comrade Cindy Jaquith in her report for the majority on Iran (published in the same bulletin) and Comrade Barnes under the "Workers and Farmers Government" agenda point objected strenuously to this formulation. Although their objections were directed at the resolution of the Fourth Internationalist Caucus, their real polemic is with Lenin and Trotsky and the theory of permanent revolution. This, in fact, is precisely the way Trotsky translated the idea of permanent revolution into a governmental formula, first for the Russian revolution (from 1905 on), then for the Left Opposition, and finally for the Fourth International.

Let's examine Comrade Barnes's objection to this idea:

"This is why I disagree with what Comrade Steve Bloom said under the Iran discussion earlier in the plen-

um. Comrade Bloom defended the decision of the National Committee minority to drop the slogan of a workers and farmers government from its resolution on Iran and replace it with the slogan, 'a workers government in alliance with the poor peasantry.'

"I think the political reasoning behind this change and Comrade Bloom's motivation for it don't apply just to the governmental slogan for Iran--although the seriousness of the error is more glaring, given the size and weight of the peasantry and agrarian question there. I think this relates to the discussion of what our transitional governmental slogan should be in the United States as well.

"Comrade Bloom said during the Iran discussion that the phrase 'a workers government in alliance with the poor peasantry' in the NC minority resolution is not meant as a popular slogan, but as a 'scientific' characterization. By this, Comrade Bloom seems to be saying that in reality the slogan is calling for the dictatorship of the proletariat, to which the poor peasants (working farmers in this country) are 'allied.' It is not their government; it is the proletariat's government. The farmers are merely 'allied,' 'linked to,' 'supporting.'

"This is an ultraleft position. It heads toward a repudiation of the transitional use of our governmental slogan. We don't advocate that. We advocate a workers and farmers government, and we mean it. It is a pledge and a promise to the workers' allies in the countryside. And it is a necessary and powerful step on the road to a socialist America and a socialist world" (p 26).

The fundamental error in Barnes's comment is the same one which runs throughout his report--making an identity between the slogan "workers' and farmers' government" and the actual government which we believe must be realized in order to carry out the anti-capitalist revolution. These things are not the same, as we have seen; but neither are they counterposed (though Barnes falsely accuses the Fourth Internationalist Caucus resolution of counterposing them).

The resolution, by reaffirming the need for a workers' government in alliance with the poor peasantry in Iran, in no way denied the need for transi-

tional slogans in order to get there. This was not a manifesto to the workers and peasants of Iran, but a resolution to guide the work of a revolutionary Marxist party. The goal of our party in Iran is a workers' government in alliance with the poor peasantry, i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat as understood by the Bolsheviks. This is the kind of government we advocate to lead the transition.

We recognize now, after our experiences since World War II, that other variants exist as possible roads to a workers' state. But we do not favor any other course. Stating this does not, as Barnes asserts, "head toward a repudiation of the transitional use of our governmental slogan;" on the contrary it reaffirms our traditional understanding of what the slogan is a transition toward. We believed that such a reaffirmation was and is needed, and that's why this formulation was used in our resolution. The remarks of Comrade Barnes only confirm our belief.

Does saying that the transitional regime we advocate is, in a scientific sense, the dictatorship of the proletariat necessarily say to the farmers that this is not their government as well? No, this is false; and it is in contradiction to everything our movement has traditionally written on the subject. Let's see what Trotsky's views were on this question, and we will discover who is the author of this "ultraleft position" defended by Comrade Bloom. (Again, there is a superabundance of material to choose from, and we will select a representative sample):

1928--"The alliance of the workers and peasants under the dictatorship of the proletariat does not invalidate this thesis, but confirms it, in a different way, under different circumstances. If there were no different classes with different interests, there would be no talk even of an alliance. Such an alliance is compatible with the socialist revolution only to the extent that it enters into the iron framework of the dictatorship of the proletariat" ("Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution," Leon Trotsky on China, Pathfinder, p. 329).

1931--"The slogan dictatorship of the proletariat and poor does not contradict the slogan dictatorship of the proletariat but only supplements the latter, and makes it more under-

standable to the people. In China the proletariat is only a small minority. It can only become a force by uniting around it the majority, i.e. the city and village poor. This idea is in fact expressed by the slogan dictatorship of the proletariat and poor. Naturally, we must point out in the platform and in programmatic articles clearly and distinctly that the role of leadership is concentrated in the hands of the proletariat, which acts as the guide, teacher, and defender of the poor. However, in agitation it is completely correct to employ the term dictatorship of the proletariat and poor as a short slogan" ("To the Chinese Left Opposition," *Ibid.*, p. 493).

1931--"To be sure, the proletarian revolution is at the same time a peasant revolution; but under contemporary conditions, a peasant revolution without a proletarian revolution is impossible. We can say to the peasants quite correctly that our aim is to create a workers' and peasants' republic, just as, after the October revolution we called the government of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia a 'workers and peasants government.' But we do not counterpose the workers' and peasants' revolution to the proletarian revolution; on the contrary, we consider them identical. This is the only correct way of putting the question" ("The Spanish Revolution and the Dangers Threatening It," The Spanish Revolution, Pathfinder, p. 121).

1931--"A perspective of struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat is opening up before you. To accomplish this task, you must consolidate around you the working class and arouse the millions of village poor to the aid of the workers" (*Ibid.* p. 128).

1932--"The slogan of a workers' and peasants' government, which would be foolish for Germany, is correct for Greece, where there is a peasant movement, a movement of debt-burdened refugees. It represents masses and since the proletariat in Greece does not constitute the majority, the slogan for a workers' and peasants' government can become important--as a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but one that is comprehensible to the peasants. It is, in

fact, more than a form. The role of the peasantry in Greece requires that the vanguard of the proletariat take it into consideration and formulate its own policy and own measures accordingly. That was also the situation in Russia, yet we spoke about a workers' and peasants' government only after the conquest of power, and Lenin was not entirely certain about the characterization. But for us the decisive fact was that the proletariat had already won power and taken over the government" ("A Discussion on Greece," Writings of Leon Trotsky, Supplement, pp. 127-28).

1938--"We say to the workers and farmers: You want Lewis as president--well, that depends on his program. Lewis plus Green plus La Follette as representative of the farmers? That, too, depends upon the program. We try to concretize, to make more precise the program--then the workers' and farmers' government signifies a government of the proletariat which leads the farmers" ("How to Fight for a Labor Party in the U.S.," The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution, Pathfinder, p. 88).

1938--"The important thing is that we ourselves understand and make the others understand that the farmers, the exploited farmers, cannot be saved from utter ruin, degradation, demoralization except by a workers' and farmers' government. By and by we must give this understanding to the agricultural workers and to the semi-proletarian farmers--that their own government cannot be conducted by La Follette and other bourgeois, only by revolutionary workers.

"We must thoroughly understand ourselves that the peasants and farmers, who economically represent a survival of the productive system of the middle ages, can have no guiding role in politics. They can decide only through the cities; better, they can be guided only by the workers. But it is necessary to pose this slogan before the peasants themselves. We say you must not choose as your alliance the bourgeois, but the workers, who are your brothers. And this government would be your government of workers and poor farmers--not of all farmers, but of poor farmers" ("For a Workers and Farmers Government," Ibid., pp. 196-197).

Trotsky's conception emerges quite clearly through these excerpts. The transitional regime will indeed be a government of workers and farmers. But it will be that only in a very specific sense--in the sense that the government of the semi-proletarian farmers "cannot be conducted by La Follette and other bourgeois, only by revolutionary workers." Only the dictatorship of the proletariat is capable of ruling in the interests of all the toilers; and it is this understanding which we try to convey through the slogan of the workers' and farmers' government. The proletariat "acts as the guide, teacher and defender of the poor." It must "arouse the millions of the village poor to the aid of the workers."

This is the consistent position maintained by Trotsky through all of his writings. What revolutionary Marxists consider necessary to advance the revolution is a workers' government in alliance with the poor peasantry--the same concept which Barnes finds so objectionable in the resolution of the Fourth Internationalist Caucus.

Trotsky's understanding of the class nature of the transitional regime as proletarian is not in contradiction to his understanding of the need to forge an alliance between the peasantry and the workers. Nor is it in contradiction to his appreciation of the slogan of the workers' and farmers' government in a transitional sense. It is the essential complement of these ideas. Like any transitional slogan the idea of the workers' and farmers' government is comprehensible to the masses on the basis of their current level of consciousness, their experiences in bourgeois society, and their loyalty to their current leaders. Understood in this way it is not at all identical to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

But also like other transitional demands, the workers' and farmers' government cannot be realized in its true sense except through the socialist revolution. This is what gives it its transitional character. So to the extent that the idea of the workers' and farmers' government becomes concretized in an actual governmental power, according to Trotsky, the "only possible form" is as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

And this is likewise the only way to decisively cement the alliance with the peasantry--for the proletariat to take power and rule in the interests of all the oppressed classes. Nothing else is

possible except the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. "The exploited farmers cannot be saved from utter ruin . . . except by . . . the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Developments in the world revolution since World War II have expanded our understanding of the possible varieties of workers' and farmers' governments that can actually come into existence and expropriate the capitalists; but none of these developments requires us to change anything at all about the kind of regime we consider necessary for a completely successful proletarian revolution. The fact that Barnes and Jaquith raise such strenuous objections to the idea of "a workers government in alliance with the poor peasantry"--a clear restatement of the traditional program of the Trotskyist movement--as a correct formula for the Iranian revolution, and that Barnes objects to this perspective for the American revolution as well, is the clearest indication of the depth of the fundamental political challenge the SWP leadership is raising to that program.

Barnes states, "We don't use the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' such anyway, for obvious reasons. Working people in the twentieth century have had enough 'dictatorship' . . ." (p. 19). But his objection is clearly not just to the use of the term "dictatorship of the proletariat." It is to the political content, the class content of the government which is behind that concept, and which we have always asserted is necessary for a successful socialist revolution. The real question is whether for us, as for Lenin and Trotsky, "the decisive fact" must be "that the proletariat [has] won power and taken over the government."

What kind of governmental coalition?

While it is clear that Barnes rejects our traditional understanding of this, he doesn't state explicitly what perspectives he would replace it with. He indicates, however, that the transitional regime as he understands it is some sort of more-or-less equal partnership or coalition between the workers and farmers in the government itself:

"We are fighting for a government of the workers and the farmers, just as the slogan says. We're fighting for a government in which the workers--(exploited wage labor)--and wor-

king farmers--(exploited rural commodity producers)--govern together" (p. 25).

"The governmental slogan in our transitional program is not a trick. Communists are not trying to trick the farmers into a workers government by giving it another name. We're fighting for a government of the workers and exploited farmers, who together will use that governmental power to transform the economic foundations of society. We say to the farmers, as Trotsky advised us more than 40 years ago, 'it will also be your government.' and we say so truthfully" (p. 26).

"We advocate a workers and farmers government, and we mean it" (p. 26).

"Of course there can be and have been two-class governments. We advocate such a government.

"A two class government existed in Russia between October 1917 and the end of 1918, at least. Lenin accurately named it a workers and peasants government . . ." (p. 27).

This idea that the Soviet government in Russia was a genuine coalition, a two-class government is also raised by another SWP leader, Doug Jenness, in his polemic against Ernest Mandel and Trotsky entitled, "Our Political Continuity with Bolshevism" (International Socialist Review, June 1982)

"So, at least through the first phase of the revolution, the coalition between the working class and the peasantry existed both as a coalition of soviets and of parties [between Bolsheviks and Left SRs--S.B.]. This runs contrary to Mandel's unqualified assertion that the peasants would not be able to exercise any independent, organized role in a revolutionary government.

"Moreover, the Bolsheviks' efforts to forge a coalition with the left SRs played a crucial role in the first months of the revolution, when the Bolsheviks remained a small minority among the peasants . . ." (p. 10).

The basic point that Jenness is trying to prove in this section of his article is that the entire Bolshevik strategy in 1917 was determined by the need to forge this governmental coal-

tion in which the peasantry would play an independent role. But this exaggerates both the importance of the actual part played by the Bolshevik-Left SR coalition in 1917, and the real independence of the SRs within that coalition. For Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 and afterward, the key to any revolutionary government was that the proletariat must be decisively predominant, even if there was a governmental coalition. And Lenin frequently declared the willingness of the Bolsheviks to govern alone if necessary after a successful insurrection. Barnes and Jenness insist that the transitional regime must be some more-or-less equal partnership between politically "independent" forces; the idea of a purely proletarian government is completely excluded in their schema.

Is the Barnes-Jenness approach really what we mean when "we say to the farmers, as Trotsky advised us 40 years ago, 'it will also be your government'?" If so, then Trotsky himself didn't understand the meaning of his own words, as we have seen. He meant that the poor peasants must choose a workers' government, which is their government, instead of a bourgeois government, which is not. And one of the main tasks of the proletariat is to make this clear to the peasantry through its actions and slogans. Barnes finds this idea particularly objectionable. But by rejecting this he is rejecting a fundamental concept of Marxism.

Can the peasantry create a political force which will govern "together" with the proletariat in the transitional period in the way Barnes and Jenness propose? Like many disputes in our party, this question has its historical precedents and antecedents. Trotsky took up this same problem during the Chinese revolution of 1927, and he did so precisely in light of the experience of the Russian revolution:

"The workers of Canton outlawed the Kuomintang, proclaiming all its tendencies illegal. What does this imply? It implies that for the solution of the fundamental national tasks, not only the big but also the petty bourgeoisie could not put forward such a force as would enable the party of the proletariat to solve jointly with it the tasks of the 'bourgeois-democratic revolution.' But 'we' are overlooking the many-millioned peasantry and the agrarian revolution A pitiable objection . . . for the key to the entire

situation lies precisely in the fact that the task of conquering the peasant movement falls upon the proletariat, i.e. directly upon the Communist Party; and this task cannot be solved in reality differently than it was solved by the Canton workers, i.e. in the shape of the dictatorship of the proletariat . . ." ("Three Letters to Preobrazhensky," Leon Trotsky on China, p. 278).

"Notwithstanding the fact that the directives of the ECCI had nothing to say on the slogan of the proletarian dictatorship and socialist measures; notwithstanding the fact that Canton is more petty-bourgeois in character than Shanghai, Hankow, and other industrial centers of the country, the revolutionary overturn effected against the Kuomintang led automatically to the dictatorship of the proletariat which, at its very first steps, found itself compelled by the entire situation to resort to more radical measures than those with which the October revolution began" ("Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution," Leon Trotsky on China, p. 303).

This view, that the peasantry or petty-bourgeoisie as a class is unable to present a coherent, politically independent force (more precisely an independent program) and that therefore the alliance between the workers and the peasants can only result in the political rule of the proletariat, is one of the foundation stones of the theory of permanent revolution. This concept was defended by Trotsky from 1905, and was strikingly confirmed by the Russian revolution of 1917, despite the new interpretation which Coarade Jenness wants to put on it. Lenin, too, defended this correct political perspective beginning in April 1917. Here is how Trotsky described the relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry in Russia in his History of the Russian Revolution:

"Although lacking the power to draw by themselves the necessary political inferences from their war against the landlords, the peasants had by the very fact of the agrarian insurrection already adhered to the insurrection of the cities, had evoked it and were demanding it. They expressed their will not with the white ballot, but with the red cock--

a more serious referendum. Within those limits in which the support of the peasantry was necessary for the establishment of a Soviet dictatorship, the support was already at hand. 'The dictatorship'--as Lenin answered the doubters--'would give land to the peasants and all power to the peasant committees in the localities. How can you in your right mind doubt that the peasant would support that dictatorship?' In order that the soldiers, peasants, and oppressed nationalities, floundering in the snow-storm of an elective ballot, should recognize the Bolsheviks in action, it was necessary that the Bolsheviks seize the power" ("The Art of Insurrection," Vol. III, pp. 169-170).

Again, the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry could only be consummated if "the Bolsheviks (i.e. the proletarian vanguard) seize the power." This is necessary for the peasantry to "recognize in action" the leadership of that proletarian vanguard. And this Bolshevik government (this proletarian government), as we have seen, was considered by Lenin and Trotsky to be the dictatorship of the proletariat, and also a workers' and farmers' government. This was not a deception or "trick" on the farmers, but the only honest perspective which revolutionary Marxists can present in the age of imperialism. Anything else is the cruelest sort of deception--not only of the farmers, but of the workers as well, and especially of their vanguard.

The confusion created by the manner in which Barnes poses the idea of a two-class coalition government can be seen if we look at the way in which he discusses two totally different kinds of "coalitions," representing two distinct senses of the workers' and farmers' government, but neither one of them representing a genuine coalition of the type Barnes and Jenness are trying to read into the events of 1917.

In the section of his report entitled "Where the Slogan Comes From," Barnes describes the proposal by Lenin, made to the Mensheviks and SRs in September 1917, that they set up a government based on the soviets and independent of the bourgeoisie. Here is part of what Barnes quotes from Lenin:

"The compromise would amount to the following: the Bolsheviks, without making any claim to participate

in the government (which is impossible for the internationalists unless a dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasants has been realized), would refrain from demanding the immediate transfer of power to the proletariat and the poor peasants, and from employing revolutionary methods of fighting for this demand. . . .

"The Mensheviks and SRs, being the governmental bloc, would then agree (assuming that the compromise has been reached) to form a government wholly and exclusively responsible to the Soviets" ("On Compromises," Collected Works, Vol. 25, pp. 310-311).

Barnes then goes on to explain how, under these conditions, the Bolsheviks would agree to peacefully try to win over the majority of the soviets. But the Mensheviks and SRs did not set up such a government, and the Bolsheviks took power by force. Then Barnes continues with the following sentence: "Even then, as Trotsky explains in his History of the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks did not reject the idea of a broader coalition government of parties based on the workers and peasants."

This is hopelessly confused. One cannot speak of Lenin's proposed pre-October compromise in the same breath as the post-October policy of the Bolsheviks. Barnes throws them both into the same pot, stirs them around a little, and produces a stew called "the idea of a broader coalition government of parties based on the workers and peasants."

But these two "coalition governments" are not at all the same. They have nothing in common in terms of their class character, and they have nothing in common in terms of the attitude of revolutionary Marxists toward them.

Lenin's proposed compromise with the Mensheviks and SRs was the use of the idea of the workers' and farmers' government (though that specific term is not used) in a united front sense, as a demand on the reformist parties which still maintain the allegiance of the masses. This is the sense that was later discussed and codified at the Fourth Comintern Congress, and the sense in which Trotsky presented the workers' and farmers' government slogan in the Transitional Program. In fact, this is the very example which Trotsky used as an illustration in that document. We have already examined this. The purpose of the proposed compromise was not primarily to create an actual government,

though if that had occurred it would have advanced the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Its primary purpose was to expose the reformist parties for refusing to take the power.

And what would the nature of such a government be if it should actually be formed? What would the attitude of the Bolsheviks have been toward it? The passage Barnes quotes from Lenin tells us explicitly: Participation by the Bolsheviks in such a government "is impossible . . . unless a dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasants has been realized." Trotsky explained the Bolsheviks' attitude toward this particular "coalition government of parties based on the workers and peasants" as follows:

"In 1917 we proclaimed to the workers and peasants: you have confidence in the SRs and Mensheviks--then oblige them to take power against capitalism. That was a correct approach. But we remained in opposition against Kerensky. Had he broken with the capitalists and made a coalition with the Mensheviks and SRs we would have remained in opposition, but this government to us would have been a step toward the dictatorship of the proletariat" ("The Struggle Against War and the Ludlow Amendment," Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution, p. 97).

And describing a possible analogous development in the United States Trotsky said:

"But again we will say: You can't accept [the workers' and farmers' government] as a dictatorship of the proletariat and poor farmers. You wish to put on the ballot workers' and farmers' candidates. We will help you. If these candidates are elected and they are the majority, will we take responsibility for their program? No, no, their program is not sufficient. Here is our program. . . . It is very possible that under our influence and under the influence of other factors there comes to be a government of John Lewis, La Follette, and La Guardia and they will name it a Labor-Farmer government. We will then oppose it with all vigor" (Ibid., p. 96).

So when we are discussing Lenin's proposed compromise we are talking about a "coalition government" which the Bol-

sheviks cannot even participate in because it is not the dictatorship of the proletariat (dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry). They must remain in opposition. (It should be noted here that the Fourth Comintern Congress did not completely exclude the possibility of Communist participation in such a government under some circumstances.)

On the other hand, what is the second type of "coalition government" which Barnes lumps together with this (the post-October coalition with the Left SRs)? It is a government which the Bolsheviks not only participated in, but which they created and led. This is the dictatorship of the proletariat, and on the basis of this "decisive fact that the proletariat had already won power and taken over the government," the Bolsheviks invite all other "parties which are based on the workers and peasants" to join in a coalition.

It is certainly correct to describe this Bolshevik-Left SR bloc as a coalition, but it is a coalition based on Bolshevik power. The prerequisite for the Left SRs joining it is their acceptance of the Bolshevik program for the government--their acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In what way does this represent an "independent, organized role in a revolutionary government" as Doug Jenness described it? Perhaps such a statement could be made in the loosest sense--that the Left SRs acted on their own and decided "independently" (i.e. without any coercion) to participate in the governmental coalition. But any independent power or influence that they wielded within that coalition was quite limited; and they weren't independent in any real political sense, in any programmatic sense. The proletariat was the dominant coalition partner. These are the points with real meaning for our discussion.

The role of the Left SRs, important as it was for the success of the revolution, is essentially dependent on the political program of the Bolsheviks. When the Left SRs came to disagree with the Bolsheviks there was only one option open to them--to leave the government. Does this create a big governmental crisis? No it doesn't. Does it disrupt the alliance with the peasantry? Not at all. Does it cause the Bolsheviks to stop referring to a "workers' and farmers' government"? No; because for them this was in no way dependent on any actual form of governmental coalition with the peasantry. For the Bolsheviks,

the whole process from 1917 on represented one and the same thing from a class point of view: a workers' government, leading, allied with (or whatever term you choose) the poor peasantry--the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This is crucial to understand. The idea that the period described by Hansen as a workers' and farmers' government is necessarily filled with some actual class content of governmental coalition between two classes, each playing an "independent" political role is a recent innovation by the SWP leadership. It cannot be found in Hansen, in Trotsky, or in Lenin. In fact, it thoroughly contradicts their thinking, as the passages already cited in this article make clear.

The workers' and farmers' government and the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry

Why has the SWP leadership introduced this innovation? What political function does it serve? The answer to this question brings us back to the new thesis on Leninism presented by Doug Jenness in his two articles: "How Lenin Saw the Russian Revolution," and "Our Political Continuity with Bolshevism" (ISR, June 1982).

Among their other errors, the Jenness articles attempt to revive the theoretical content of Lenin's formula, "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." This was Lenin's attempt--before 1917--to predict the class relationship which would be embodied in a revolutionary government in Russia--an economically backward country with a large peasant majority. The formula included two key concepts.

First, the dictatorship was "democratic," by which Lenin, using the term in its classic Marxist sense, meant bourgeois democratic. It would be bourgeois democratic for several reasons--because the anti-tsarist revolution was a bourgeois revolution; because the economic level of the country was too low for a socialist revolution; and because the masses of the peasantry, a petty-bourgeois class which was the overwhelming majority of the population, would reject any moves by the proletariat to take socialist measures. Action along those lines by the workers would endanger the alliance of the proletariat and peasantry.

The second central concept in Lenin's slogan is that carrying out the bour-

geois revolution in Russia would require rule by a government of the proletariat and peasantry, not of the bourgeoisie itself. This was true, Lenin believed, because the Russian bourgeoisie was too hesitant and vacillating, tied in too many ways to the tsarist autocracy, to play a truly revolutionary role.

Lenin's slogan, however, was not accepted by Trotsky, who developed instead the idea of permanent revolution. Trotsky agreed with Lenin's conception on both the political importance of the Russian bourgeoisie, and the central revolutionary role of the alliance between the workers and the peasants. But he developed this further.

Trotsky said that within the context of the worker-peasant alliance only the proletariat was capable of developing a program to move the revolution forward. The petty-bourgeois peasantry was historically incapable of creating an independent program. It must follow either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. This, in turn, meant that the dominant role in any governmental bloc between these classes could not be left "algebraic," as Lenin had done. It must be assigned to the proletariat; and the character of the revolutionary regime must be recognized as proletarian, as a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Only such a proletarian regime, Trotsky asserted, would be able to actually carry out the bourgeois revolution. But such a proletarian regime could not limit itself to a "democratic" dictatorship. It would immediately confront the tasks of the socialist revolution, and would have to undertake these as well if it was to survive and satisfy the needs of the masses. Trotsky summed up his perspective in the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat in alliance with the poor peasantry, an idea we have already discussed.

History confirmed Trotsky's expectations, and beginning with his famous April Theses, Lenin put the same content as Trotsky into his approach. He began the fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat, first inside the Bolshevik party and then in the mass movement. The key points of convergence on this question between Lenin and Trotsky were, first, an understanding that the coming revolution would be proletarian--i.e., socialist--in character and that the bourgeois-democratic tasks would be carried out under the socialist dictatorship; and secondly, a recognition of the subordinate role of the peasantry in a political sense, despite their extreme

importance from a revolutionary-tactical point of view. This political subordination of the peasantry to the proletariat was what made the socialist revolution possible in Russia in 1917.

In order to revive Lenin's old formula, which Lenin himself discarded in April 1917, Jenness has had to blur the dichotomy between what Lenin meant by the slogan of the democratic dictatorship and the actual course of the revolution in Russia. He does this both by reinterpreting the meaning of Lenin's old slogan, and by rewriting the history of the revolution to fit that new interpretation. Barnes's approach to the workers' and farmers' government, through redefining key terms and putting a new class content into the various phases of the Russian revolution, makes the same theoretical and historical revisions.

Jenness's thesis asserts that by the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry Lenin really meant nothing more than the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry to carry out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution. Since this did indeed take place as a result of the October revolution, he states, how can anyone say that Lenin's formula is inadequate?

But the big problem is that the key question left open by Lenin was answered correctly by Trotsky--the relative political weight of the proletariat as opposed to the peasantry within that alliance. And that correct answer allowed Trotsky to see that the socialist revolution was indeed possible in a backward country like Russia. In fact, it was a necessity. The bourgeois democratic tasks in Russia could not be carried out by the proletariat and the peasantry if they were limited to a bourgeois republic, under the influence of the peasant side of the formula as Lenin had predicted they would be, but only by a socialist government, a workers' government. This is a view that all revolutionary Marxists have consistently defended from 1917 up to the present.

In order to maintain his defense of the democratic dictatorship idea, Jenness denies that the Russian revolution took place as a socialist revolution. He points out what we have always recognized, that the early stages dealt predominantly with the bourgeois-democratic tasks (although he minimizes the importance of the socialist measures that were taken). From this he concludes that until the fall of 1918, the government corresponded to Lenin's pre-1917 formula.

la. This is in complete contradiction to what both Lenin and Trotsky said--that it was a socialist dictatorship.

Jenness also finds it convenient to discover an actual, real-life coalition with the peasantry manifested in the participation in the government by the Left SRs. This, too, he counterposes to the Leninist understanding that the Soviet government was proletarian in essence.

Barnes's conception of the workers' and farmers' government is part of this consistent view being presented by the SWP leadership. Barnes, like Jenness, refuses to acknowledge that the Bolshevik-led government in 1917 was the dictatorship of the proletariat. He counterposes the workers' and farmers' government to the dictatorship of the proletariat by defining that dictatorship as being equal only to a workers' state based on nationalized property. He thereby attempts to define away the difference between the Lenin of the democratic dictatorship and the Lenin of the April Theses (since that difference deals precisely with the question of whether the bourgeois-democratic tasks of the Russian revolution would be solved by the proletarian or democratic dictatorship). And making clear that the problem is one of substance, and not just one of definition, Barnes maintains that the workers' and farmers' government in Russia was not "a workers' government in alliance with the poor peasantry," but was, in fact, a genuine governmental coalition with a major "independent" governmental role for the petty-bourgeois peasantry.

In the discussion on Barnes's report at the plenum, he was asked specifically about the relationship between his conception of the workers' and farmers' government and Lenin's slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. He responded as follows:

"On the one hand, the Bolsheviks' formula [democratic dictatorship--S.B.] is a model of the transitional method that Lenin used to build a proletarian party capable of leading the Russian workers and peasants to power in October 1917. Like the workers and farmers government slogan, it correctly captured the strategic class alliance that the workers had to forge in order to lead the revolution to victory. It gave the correct answer to the class content of the victorious revolutionary government.

In that sense, the two slogans have similar ties in their fundamental strategic concept and use.

"On the other hand, Lenin described the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry as the formula used by the Bolsheviks as 'a Marxist definition of the class content of a victorious revolution' in Russia. He never claimed it to be a governmental slogan for the world, and he rarely used it after the October revolution.

"The slogan of the workers and farmers government as first discussed and adopted in the Comintern, however, is a different matter. That was projected by the Bolsheviks at the Fourth Comintern Congress and the subsequent ECCI meeting as a governmental slogan with worldwide application" (p. 29).

What does Barnes tell us here about the relationship of the workers' and farmers' government to the democratic dictatorship? He asserts, as Jenness does, that Lenin's pre-1917 formula "gave the correct answer to the class content of the victorious revolutionary government." The reason we don't generalize this slogan for world-wide use is because Lenin viewed it only as a specific translation of this class content into Russian conditions. For the rest of the world we now use the formula of the workers' and farmers' government which has, according to Barnes, "Similar ties in (its) fundamental strategic concept and use."

The point could not be more explicit without jumping off the page. Barnes believes (as does Steve Clark, whom we cited earlier) that the class content of the workers' and farmers' government is the same as that of Lenin's discarded formula. The democratic dictatorship, he says, is simply a particular translation into Russian reality of the idea we now generalize in the workers' and farmers' government slogan. This revelation of Barnes would have come as quite a shock to Lenin, Trotsky, and especially to Hansen, who did the most theoretical work on the question of the workers' and farmers' government. This explicit statement about his approach makes clear why Barnes is at such odds in his report with a traditional Trotskyist view of the transitional regime.

Lenin's conception

Though it has been my contention in this article that Barnes's approach to the workers' and farmers' government is counter to both Lenin's and Trotsky's views on the kind of government necessary in the transitional period, I have concentrated so far mainly on what Trotsky wrote on the subject. This is because Trotsky lived for a longer period after the Russian revolution, and was able to apply the lessons of that revolution to many other experiences of the world proletariat. This was also necessary because Barnes falsely claims a continuity with Trotsky in his definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a synonym only for a workers state based on nationalized property forms.

But Lenin, too, after April 1917, yields a rich crop in terms of understanding the class character of the transitional regime. I will again cite only a small part of the available material:

April 1917--"The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution--which, owing to the insufficient class consciousness and organization of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie--to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasantry" ("The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution," C.W., Vol. 24, p. 22).

May 1917--"The conclusion is obvious: only assumption of power by the proletariat, backed by the semi-proletarians, can give the country a really strong and really revolutionary government" ("A Strong Revolutionary Government," C.W., Vol. 24, p. 361).

July 1917--"The aim of the insurrection can only be to transfer power to the proletariat, supported by the poor peasants, with a view to putting our party program into effect" ("The Political Situation," C.W., Vol. 25, p. 180).

September 1917--"The Socialist Revolutionaries are deceiving themselves and the peasants precisely by assuming and spreading the idea that these reforms, or similar reforms, are possible without overthrowing capitalist rule, without state power being transferred to the proletariat, without the peasant poor supporting the most resolute, revolutionary measures of the proletarian state power against the capitalists. The significance of the appearance of a left wing among the 'Socialist Revolutionaries' is that it proves there is a growing awareness of this deception within their party" ("From a Publicist's Diary," C.W., Vol. 25, p 280).

October 1917--"We have not yet seen, however, the strength of resistance of the proletarians and the poor peasants, for this strength will become fully apparent only when power is in the hands of the proletariat" ("Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" C.W., Vol. 26, p. 126).

March 1918--"The revolution of October 25 (November 7), 1917 in Russia brought about the dictatorship of the proletariat, which has been supported by the poor peasants or semi-proletarians.

"This dictatorship confronts the Communist Party in Russia with the task of carrying through to the end, of completing, the expropriation of the landowners and the bourgeoisie that has already begun . . ." ("Rough Outline of the Draft Program," C.W., Vol. 27, p. 152).

March 1919--"And the measures taken by the Soviet government since October 1917 have been distinguished by their firmness on all fundamental questions precisely because we have never departed from this truth and have never forgotten it. The issue of the struggle for supremacy waged against the bourgeoisie can be settled only by the dictatorship of one class--the proletariat. Only the dictatorship of the proletariat can defeat the bourgeoisie. Only the proletariat can overthrow the bourgeoisie. And only the proletariat can secure the following of the people in the struggle against the bourgeoisie.

"However, it by no means follows from this--and it would be a profound mistake to think that it does--that in further building communism, when

the bourgeoisie have been overthrown and political power is already in the hands of the proletariat, we can continue to carry on without the participation of the middle, intermediary elements" ("Report on Work in the Countryside," C.W., Vol. 29, p. 200).

March 1920--"The dictatorship of the proletariat implies and signifies a clear concept of the truth that the proletariat, because of its objective economic position in every capitalist society, correctly expresses the interests of the entire mass of working and exploited people, all semi-proletarians (i.e. those who live partly by the sale of their labor power), all small peasants, and similar categories.

"The proletarians will attract these sections of the population (semi-proletarians and small peasants) to its side, and can attract them to its side, only after it has achieved a victory, only after it has won state power, that is after the proletariat has overthrown the bourgeoisie, and emancipated all working people from the yoke of capital and shown them in practice the benefits (the benefits of freedom from the exploiters) accruing from proletarian state power.

"This is the concept that constitutes the basis and essence of the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat . . ." ("Draft (or theses) of the RCP's Reply to the Letter of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany," C.W., Vol. 30, pp. 339-340).

Is any commentary on this material really necessary? Lenin seems firmly committed to what Barnes calls the "ultra-left" notion that the overthrow of the bourgeoisie requires the working class to take power, even in a predominantly peasant country. The working class, he says, will be "backed by," "supported by," (in alliance with?) the poor peasants. "Only the dictatorship of one class--the proletariat-- . . . can defeat the bourgeoisie." And, in fact, it is only "after the proletariat has won state power," that it can really cement its alliance with the peasantry and "attract these sections of the population . . . to its side."

And Lenin, too, warns against deception. But in his view the danger is not one of "trick[ing] the farmers into a

workers government by giving it another name." Lenin wants the peasantry to understand that no progress is possible toward their goals "without state power being transferred to the proletariat, without the peasant poor supporting the most resolute, revolutionary measures of the proletarian state power against the capitalists."

What kinds of distinctions should we make?

Comrade Barnes asserts in his report, "We distinguish between the workers and farmers government and the dictatorship of the proletariat because it is necessary from a political standpoint to emphasize the transition--the difference between getting there and being there" (p. 26).

We agree that this distinction "between getting there and being there" is a necessary one; and also that some distinctions must be made between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers' and farmers' government. But these distinctions, correctly understood, are not the ones that Barnes proposes. Let's review here the point of view of the Theses, and see how it relates to Barnes's approach.

Both the Theses and the Barnes report agree that there is a longer or shorter period of time after the overthrow of bourgeois political power when the working class will not yet have expropriated the decisive levers of the economy. This period is universal in the socialist revolution and it is this period which Hansen described as a workers' and farmers' government, "the first form of government that can be expected to appear as the result of a successful anti-capitalist revolution."

The Theses make a distinction between this idea of the workers' and farmers' government as the first period in an anticapitalist revolution, on the one hand, and the social and class content of the government which fills that period on the other. Here there are different possibilities. First, a government dominated by a proletarian party with a clear revolutionary Marxist perspective; and second, a government led by petty-bourgeois forces, with ties to the working class movement, but without an explicitly socialist program. (Intermediary forms are also possible.)

The Theses agree with Lenin and Trotsky that the first type is the dictatorship of the proletariat. They are also

in accord with Hansen's belief that the second type is analogous to the workers' and farmers' government as discussed at the Fourth Comintern Congress and described by Trotsky in the Transitional Program as a highly improbable variant which would be a bridge to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat. The Theses also point out that the Fourth Comintern Congress and Trotsky discussed this particular concept of the workers' and farmers' government primarily as an application of the united-front approach to the transitional slogan, and did not in any way favor the actual creation of such workers' and farmers' governments as opposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat under Bolshevik leadership.

Barnes makes no distinctions between these different meanings of the workers' and farmers' government. He says that the Fourth Comintern Congress was discussing the workers' and farmers' government as it actually developed in Russia in 1917. This is the same mistake which he makes when he equates the pre-October "compromise" proposed by Lenin (to the Mensheviks and SRs) with the post-October coalition (between the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs). The Fourth Comintern Congress was concerned primarily with the "compromise"-type, united-front approach which never actually led to the creation of a government in Russia. Barnes also notes that Hansen linked this united-front (petty-bourgeois) type workers' and farmers' government to the post-war overturns; and then places an equals sign between this parallel and Hansen's definition of the workers' and farmers' government as the first form of government which will appear after a successful anti-capitalist revolution (including in Russia). In this way the circle is completed back to the Bolshevik revolution, and Barnes dissolves all of the different uses of the workers' and farmers' government into a single package.

Barnes does insist, in the passage quoted at the beginning of this section, on counterposing this amalgamated conception of the workers' and farmers' government to the dictatorship of the proletariat, which he identifies with the workers' state based on nationalized property. The Theses maintain the more traditional use of "dictatorship of the proletariat" to mean the political rule of the working class in the interests of all the toilers. (I should repeat here that the objection to Barnes's proposed new terminological definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat to mean

workers' state is not based on a desire to hold onto old terminology for its own sake, but on a very real practical problem. As we have seen, through abandoning the characterization of the Bolshevik government in Russia in 1917 as the dictatorship of the proletariat, Barnes has become free to project a new class content onto that government. He has also eliminated a crucial distinction between the Russian workers' and farmers' government, and those, for example, in China or Cuba. It is such distinctions which must be maintained, no matter what terminology we may choose to describe them.)

We do not agree with Comrade Barnes that the workers' and farmers' government and the dictatorship of the proletariat are necessarily counterposed. A particular government can be both, and in fact the creation of exactly such governments is the goal of revolutionary Marxism. The distinction "between getting there and being there" is quite important, but it is only correctly understood as a distinction between the workers' and farmers' government (which may or may not be the dictatorship of the proletariat) and the workers' state. That was Hansen's point of view, which we should maintain. Posing things in this way also allows us to distinguish between the petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat in power.

How many turning points?

Another difference, though a somewhat subtle one, between the Barnes report and the Theses is over the assessment of the points of qualitative change in the process of consolidation of a workers' state. Barnes explains his view: "There are two qualitative turning points, not just one, in the course of an anti-capitalist revolution. . . . We state, definitively, that without the resolution of dual power, there can be no workers' and farmers' government. That's the first qualitative turning point.

"We also state that there must be a second qualitative turning point, that is, a workers and farmers government, regardless of its leadership, cannot expropriate the bourgeoisie without mighty mobilizations of the toiling masses themselves. When the new economic relations have become the dominant ones through that process, a workers state has been consolidated."

The problem with this formulation is not that it is incorrect per se, but that it is somewhat one-sided as a generalization covering all types of workers' and farmers' governments. It repre-

sents, to some extent, an overgeneralization from the post World War II experience.

It is certainly true that in China, Eastern Europe, Cuba, etc., the nationalization of the economy represented a decisive qualitative turning point in the revolutionary process. But this was true mainly because there was some doubt, given the nature of the leadership and its program, about whether these steps would be taken at all; and when they did occur they had the character of a sharp, sweeping break with past policy.

The same general process must be accomplished in the case of a workers' and farmers' government with a revolutionary Marxist leadership. But with a clear perspective about where the revolution is going, such a leadership would begin to implement its economic and social program from the very first day--even if we agree that it can't be effected all at once. In this case, the second qualitative turning point should be considerably harder to locate, and the general process of socializing the economy will not have such a sharp and decisive character. It will be more of an inevitable culmination of an ongoing process.

In the case of Russia and the Bolsheviks we would agree that the Fall of 1918 saw decisive measures in this regard. But as Comrade Barnes himself points out, the sweeping nationalizations of the Bolsheviks were forced upon them prematurely by the outbreak of the civil war. Under other circumstances (revolution in the West, staying the hand of imperialism and Russian reaction) the nationalization of industry would have occurred more gradually and rationally.

So we must recognize a difference here between a workers' and farmers' government which is led by a revolutionary Marxist party and one that is not. In the case of such a leadership of the transitional regime, which presupposes a clear socialist program and perspective, that program and perspective serve as a promise for the successful creation of a workers' state. In this case, the second turning point that Barnes discusses, while still present and important, does not have the same fundamental character. It is really a logical and natural development of the first turning point--the taking of power--to which it is subordinate. It is the first which is truly decisive for the victory of the revolutionary proletariat.

But in the case of a leadership of the workers' and farmers' government which is not clear programmatically on

where the revolution is going, the second qualitative turning point is indeed decisive; even more, perhaps, than the first because it clearly defines a proletarian outcome. We might say that in the one case the creation of a workers' state is guaranteed if the workers' and farmers' government is not overthrown; while in the other, the overthrow of the workers' and farmers' government is guaranteed if it doesn't create a workers' state.

What are the time limits?

Barnes states in his report: ". . . There is no a priori time limit to how long such a transitional formation can last short of consummating the transition to its new economic base, a workers state. . . .

"Moreover, there is no advantage in the abstract to the transition being quick, as opposed to prolonged. It's dead wrong to judge the leadership of a workers and farmers government by 'how quickly' it is expropriating the bourgeoisie."

This idea, too, while not incorrect per se suffers from a severe one-sidedness which can easily lead to incorrect conclusions. Are there "a priori" time limits? No. But there are time limits--imposed by the material reality of the class struggle, as Barnes points out in his report ("the concrete evolution of the class struggle, inside and outside the country, will constantly bear down . . ."); but also, and perhaps even more importantly, by a factor which Barnes leaves aside--the objective laws of economic development. These factors pose a challenge to the leadership of any workers' and farmers' government; and while it may not be correct to judge that leadership purely on the basis of 'how quickly' it is expropriating the bourgeoisie, it is correct to judge it on the basis of how clearly and decisively it meets this challenge.

The question of tempo is a factor of major importance. A leadership which lags behind the objective necessities of the situation, as a result of either a lack of program or judgment, seriously jeopardizes the development of the revolutionary process.

It was in this sense that Joseph Hansen was speaking when he addressed the Cuban experience in the following terms:

"Take it from the economic side. Look at the delays that occurred down there in the process of the revolu-

tion, in expropriating the properties; they had to wait until they were pushed into it by American imperialism, slapped around, then there was a response, a defensive reflex to these blows struck by American imperialism. They were stumbling, fumbling, losing all kinds of valuable time which the bourgeoisie in the United States utilized in order to prepare the ground psychologically for their counterrevolution. Two years of time--a year and a half at least--was wasted almost, while the bourgeoisie in the United States, step by step, got prepared psychologically for the counterrevolution" (Dynamics of the Cuban Revolution, Pathfinder, p. 93).

Hansen explained this not out of concern with some "a priori time limit," but with the actual objective development of events, which required a rapid and decisive response from the Castro leadership. The willingness and ability to take the necessary steps, at the appropriate time, is one of the indications of the programmatic clarity of any revolutionary leadership.

This question is particularly important because the ability of a leadership to time its anticapitalist measures correctly becomes, in and of itself, a factor in the development of the class struggle. It can help to rally the masses around the workers' and farmers' government and intensify the general level of combativity against the bourgeoisie and the landlords. A leadership which lags behind the objective need, on the other hand, runs the risk of spreading demoralization and disillusionment. For all of these reasons, revolutionary Marxists pay close attention to the question of timing in the transition to a workers' state.

"There is no advantage in the abstract to the transition being quick, as opposed to prolonged." That is correct "in the abstract." But in the concrete there is frequently, not only an advantage, but even a necessity for it to be quickly and decisively consummated.

We should note here that many groups and individuals who consider themselves Trotskyists have raised these kinds of questions in order to criticize the Nicaraguan and Grenadian leaderships for going too slowly. This is an incorrect approach, and that is not our intention in discussing this point. On the whole, the slow pace of measures against bourgeois property in these cases has not extracted an insurmountable cost, and has had the effect of helping to make

intervention by U.S. imperialism more difficult. This doesn't mean that there are no contradictions here. The Nicaraguan government, for example, has stopped short of imposing a full monopoly on foreign trade. This gives considerable leeway to market forces in the economy. In addition, there seems to be some unclarity within the FSLN on the character of the "mixed economy." Is this a temporary concession to the bourgeoisie in order to allow a more rational transition to a predominantly socialized economy? Or is it an attempt to create a strategic alliance between the proletariat and the "anti-Somocista" bourgeoisie? The difference between these two variants is extremely important.

But the relative weight of these various factors is not the main point of our discussion here. The more important question is how much we can generalize from these particular experiences in Nicaragua and Grenada. Here there is a danger of drawing incorrect theoretical conclusions which will jeopardize our ability to act quickly and decisively when this is required to destroy the economic power of the old ruling classes.

Nicaragua and Grenada

It is obvious that this discussion on the meaning of the workers' and farmers' government concept is stimulated by the development of the Nicaraguan revolution, and to a lesser extent by Grenada. These two examples figure prominently in the Barnes report, and have been the center of various discussions in our world movement about the use of this characterization. Let's see how these important victories for the world revolution fit into the frameworks outlined by the Theses, and in contrast, by the Barnes report.

First, what points do we have in common? We agree that these revolutions ushered in "workers' and farmers' governments" in the sense of the first form of government which will emerge as a result of a successful anticapitalist revolution. These are regimes which are brought to power by mass mobilizations that completely destroyed the old ruling structure. The new regimes are independent of the bourgeoisie, and consciously base themselves on the workers and peasants. They are attempting to advance the revolutionary process in the interests of the masses, as opposed to compromising those interests for the sake of an alliance with the bourgeoisie.

These leaderships are not obstacles to the revolutionary process, no matter what their theoretical limitations might be. We also agree that our attitude toward these revolutions must be one of political support, defense against counterrevolution, and participation in the process of advancing the class struggle.

How does this fit into our overall framework? As the Theses point out: "In general, agreeing on a characterization of a particular regime as a workers' and farmers' government in the sense used by Hansen only begins to enlighten us as to its character. There is a qualitative difference between Russia in 1917, on the one hand, and Algeria under Ben Bella, on the other, to pick the most extreme cases. Other specific developments fall on a continuum between these two extremes based on the subjective factor--the degree to which the leadership of the workers' and farmers' government adheres to a revolutionary Marxist--i.e. Bolshevik--program." On this continuum there are two broad divisions--between proletarian and petty-bourgeois regimes; but other distinctions must be recognized even within these two main categories (for example, the qualitative difference between the Castro leadership in Cuba in 1959 and the Stalinist leaderships in China and Eastern Europe, both of which we would characterize as petty bourgeois).

Where do the regimes in Nicaragua and Grenada fit onto our continuum? The leadership of the SWP declares that the FSLN and the NJM are proletarian in the sense of "revolutionary Marxist." We must clearly reject this exaggerated contention. The way our movement has generally used the characterization "revolutionary Marxist" has been to indicate a current with a complete and rounded program for the world revolution in all three of its sectors, which cannot be said of the Nicaraguans and Grenadians.

This is not a condemnation of these leaderships, or some kind of moral judgment. It is simply a statement about their current level of theoretical understanding and programmatic clarity. The FSLN and the NJM have demonstrated their capacities in action. They are deeply rooted in the masses of their own countries, and have mobilized those masses against the bourgeoisie in order to capture governmental power.

Nevertheless, their theoretical inadequacies do pose pitfalls for the revolutions in Nicaragua and Grenada, and for the broader goal of advancing the world revolution to other countries. The

FSLN and NJM are part of the Castroist current, and share its weaknesses and problems. This tendency is profoundly revolutionary. Nevertheless it arose and developed in a period when the continuity with authentic Leninism and Marxism had been broken as a result of the rise of Stalinism in the USSR and the subsequent spread of deformed workers' states after World War II. The ideological influence of Stalinism (a petty-bourgeois current) has inevitably put its stamp on Castroism, and has created a kind of hybrid ideological tendency with a revolutionary approach in certain situations, combined with a bending to Stalinist theoretical practices and conceptions in others. This includes, at times, popular frontist and other class-collaborationist notions (especially with regard to the neocolonial bourgeoisie), as well as a tendency to identify the Stalinist bureaucracies with the workers' states that they rule.

Does the presence within this tendency of such petty-bourgeois ideological elements derived from Stalinism mean that we must put a minus where the SWP leadership has placed a plus and declare the FSLN and NJM to be petty-bourgeois? This would be incorrect. The determination of these currents in mobilizing the masses, both in the struggle to overthrow the old regime, and in the struggle to reconstruct society since that overthrow, as well as their willingness to take power themselves, are not at all characteristic of the petty bourgeoisie. They are, in fact, defining characteristics of a proletarian current.

In addition, though it has not been completely clear and consistent, there is a general trajectory (from 1979 to today) toward a proletarian solution of the remaining social contradictions in Nicaragua and Grenada--i.e., toward the creation of workers' states. And the current leaderships in these countries have a broadly socialist perspective, though perhaps not appreciating the fact that these remaining social contradictions will, in the period immediately ahead, require resolute action in order to guarantee the victory of the workers and peasants. When such action becomes a necessity, the ability and willingness of the FSLN and NJM to identify with and fight for the independent interests of the masses will be decisive in this process. Consistency along these lines will allow them to successfully chart the road forward.

Given all of these factors, the FSLN and NJM can only be characterized as proletarian currents, but not in the sense intended by the SWP leadership. We must recognize that they lack a com-

pletely rounded revolutionary Marxist program. Putting a label of "proletarian" or "petty bourgeois" on a political grouping doesn't resolve all theoretical questions. There are inevitably contradictory elements which at times can be quite important, and even decisive. As we have seen there can be petty-bourgeois aspects in the program of a proletarian current. But this is not the only complication. A proletarian party can have a petty-bourgeois wing, or vice versa. In addition, our judgments on such questions can't be fixed or determined for all time; a current can change its class character. The Russian Bolshevik party degenerated from proletarian to petty bourgeois during the late 1920s and early 30s. Conversely, Castroism has developed from a petty-bourgeois current in 1959 to a proletarian one today.

This evolution of Castroism is a result, among other things, of its experiences in the course of the Cuban revolution and the lessons it learned in that process. Most important of these was the realization of the necessity to create a workers' state in Cuba, a state which exists as an example for other Castroist leaderships to follow.

From the point of view of the Barnes report, an assessment of the character of the FSLN and NJM (as proletarian) has no particular bearing on our understanding of the workers' and farmers' government. He asserts that we must apply the Fourth Comintern Congress use of that term to all transitional regimes, no matter what the class character of their leaderships. But if we take the point of view of the Theses, which agree with the traditional Bolshevik use of "dictatorship of the proletariat" to mean a proletarian party in power, then we will apply this term as well as the characterization "workers' and farmers' government" to Nicaragua and Grenada today.

We call the governments in Nicaragua and Grenada "dictatorships of the proletariat" in the same general sense as that used by Marx and Engels to characterize the Paris Commune. Of course, any analogy with the Commune is only a rough one. We don't consider the FSLN and the NJM politically analogous to the Blanquist and Proudhonist leadership of the Commune. And we have a reasonable expectation that the end result will be different in the current cases. The analogy comes from the fact that Marx and Engels considered the Blanquists and Proudhonists to be proletarian currents in the broad sense despite their many programmatic differences, and these currents in power, resting on the insurgent Parisian masses, represented the dictatorship of the proletariat.

There are additional examples of currents which are not revolutionary Marxist but which are clearly proletarian. Solidarnosc in Poland is another contemporary one. If Solidarnosc should come to power that would certainly constitute the dictatorship of the proletariat; but such a government would undoubtedly make many errors stemming from theoretical gaps and a lack of real Marxist training. The IWW is an example of such a current in American history. And in Hungary in 1919, the errors and inexperience of the Communist party under Bela Kun was largely responsible for the defeat of the short-lived Soviet state. Yet Lenin referred to that CP as a proletarian party, and to the government it headed as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

We can see, then, that it is incorrect to make "proletarian" synonymous with "revolutionary Marxist" in the way the SWP leadership has. In fact, such an identification leads to dangerous political consequences. If we believe that the Cubans, the Sandinistas, and the NJM are all revolutionary Marxists in the same sense as we have applied that term to the Bolsheviks in 1917, and to Trotskyism since the degeneration of the Russian revolution, then there will be an inevitable tendency to bend to their incorrect programmatic conceptions on key questions of the class struggle, instead of maintaining adherence to our own traditional historical understanding where it is correct as against Castroism. This, indeed, is what the SWP leadership has begun to do over the last few years; a fact which has been demonstrated, and will be further demonstrated through the course of the discussions in our world movement.

It is necessary to differentiate along our theoretical continuum of possible transitional regimes, even within the broad category of "proletarian," between a revolutionary Marxist, Bolshevik leadership on the one hand, and present-day Castroism, the FSLN and NJM on the other. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Nicaragua and Grenada must be differentiated from the one that was initiated by the October 1917 revolution in Russia. In the same way we distinguish on the petty-bourgeois side between Stalinist leaderships in power and the July 26 movement. Barnes dissolves all of these distinctions in his workers' and farmers' government concept. But this does not eliminate them in life. The differences continue to exist, and they are crucially important

in understanding the nature of any particular transitional regime.

Conclusion

The ostensible purpose of the Barnes report was to motivate a change in the official governmental slogan of the SWP in the United States from "for a workers' government," back to "for a workers' and farmers' government," as it had been before 1967. It is certainly in order to consider such a change, and our dispute is not over the use of one slogan or another. Either slogan is acceptable as long as it is given the correct political content.

Above all, our understanding of the class character of the government we expect to emerge from a successful American revolution--the kind of government we are fighting for--must be crystal clear. This question of the class nature of the workers' and farmers' government is the crux of our disagreement with the new conception being presented by the SWP leadership. A revolutionary government in the United States will be a proletarian government, which will rule in the interests of, with the support of, in collaboration with, in coalition with, or in alliance with, all of those oppressed by the bourgeoisie, or it will not rule at all. Only such a proletarian government can really lead the transition to a socialist society.

Comrade Barnes and the SWP leadership must answer explicitly whether they agree with this, or whether their idea of a "coalition" government has some different class content, as suggested in the Barnes report. Do they believe (as is implied by their attempt to resuscitate the "democratic dictatorship" idea) that the Russian revolution of 1917 ushered in a government with some different class content?

If so, then they must openly acknowledge a theoretical break with the entire history of the Trotskyist movement, and ultimately a break with Leninism itself, of which Trotskyism is the continuation. They have a responsibility to defend their new theories honestly on the grounds that current events demonstrate the need for new theoretical explanations, instead of trying to cover themselves with the cloak of pre-1917 "Leninism" and with quotes from Trotsky and Hansen, torn completely out of context and grossly misrepresented.

--November 3, 1982