

Introduction



The four articles in this document were originally presented as speeches to the Trotskyist and Revolutionary Socialist Conference, held in San Francisco in November 1985.

This was the first of several conferences called to discuss the possibilities for U.S. Trotskyist regroupment in the wake of the abandonment of Permanent Revolution and Trotskyism by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1983. Hosted by the Workers Socialist League, attendees included International Socialist League (Fourth Internationalist), Spark, Bolshevik Tendency, Revolutionary Socialist League, and representatives of the Committee for a Revolutionary Socialist Party (CRSP) and the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP). CRSP was founded in 1977 by the FSP and others as a Trotskyist regroupment alternative to the discredited SWP.

Programmatic regroupment of the U.S. and world Trotskyist movement is a crying necessity today, given the slide into Stalinism by the SWP and the revisionist effacement of Trotskyism by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. CRSP and FSP welcomed the 1985 conference as an opportunity to initiate programmatic discussion of key revolutionary issues that are the necessary starting point for regroupment.

Among the topics discussed at the conference were the reasons for the degeneration of the SWP; the coming American revolution and the role of Trotskyists within it; the centrality of feminism and lesbian/gay liberation in

our time.

These subjects are integrally related. Likewise, an organization's position with regard to any one of them will reflect its approach to the others.

In their presentations and intervention in discussion, CRSP/FSP comrades argued forcefully that the U.S., because of its economic and military weight, was central to world revolution, and that Trotskyists must become Bolshevik leaders of U.S. socialist upheaval. They traced the degeneration of the SWP to its refusal to come to grips with the American Question, i.e., to recognize race and sex as the key *class* issues of our era. They then pinpointed the significance of race and sex to revolution, and the leading role that people of color, women, and lesbians and gays will play in the coming showdown with capitalism.

All other tendencies at the conference downplayed the primary importance of the American revolution. In keeping with this, they ascribed the SWP's fall not to its denial of the American Question, but to the "bureaucratism," "lack of theory," and sundry "mistakes" of SWP founder James P. Cannon. No doubt their anti-Cannonism stems from the fact that it was he who first insisted on the central importance of U.S. revolt in his *Theses on the American Revolution* in 1946.

The anti-Cannonites accordingly pooh-poohed the importance of feminism and the leadership of the most oppressed to socialism. Echoing the SWP, they extolled the revolutionary virtues of straight white male workers in heavy industry, the element that composes the U.S. labor aristocracy.

This laborite fixation is dangerous: unchecked it will kill all faith in workers' revolutionary potential, undermine belief in Marxist theory, and squelch the desire to build U.S. Bolshevism.

Disagreements over the nature, significance, and per-

spectives of the American revolution necessarily lead to disparity over basic program and strategy. Yet Bolshevik unity—the avowed goal of the conference—is by definition programmatic. For this reason CRSP/FSP comrades maintained that meaningful regroupment could only be reached through discussion and resolution of the fundamental differences represented at the conference.

Other tendencies argued for regroupment on the basis of united actions on issues such as opposition to the U.S. war drive and through work in mass movement coalitions. The rationale was that such work would, of itself, lead to unity and closer political perspectives.

CRSP and FSP are not opposed to coalition work with Trotskyists—or with other leftists with whom we have far greater differences. We have worked in and built many such coalitions in the past 20 years. But coalition work is by nature limited and transient. Every issue sooner or later poses alternative courses of action. Tactical, strategic and programmatic questions inevitably arise and must be resolved if the coalition is to survive.

How much truer this is with regard to regroupment! In fact, united action without simultaneous discussion of program means the effective *burial* of regroupment, and the subsuming of Trotskyism in politically polyglot coalitions.

No agreement was reached on an approach to regroupment at the 1985 conference. Yet because proceedings were open and thoroughly democratic, it provided for a rich exchange of ideas and opinion, and laid the basis for continuing regroupment efforts. The conference was thus an optimistic move toward beginning the regroupment of forces that will make the American revolution.

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March 30, 1988