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# On Comrade Germain's Half-truths: or How the ERP Flag Got on the Coffin

By Fred Halstead

In Comrade Germain's document "In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International" (International Internal Discussion Bulletin, Vol. X, No. 4), some statements appear designed to throw a cloud of doubt over the description of the concrete situation in Argentina contained in the document "Argentina and Bolivia — The Balance Sheet" by Hugo Blanco, Peter Camejo, Joseph Hansen, Anibal Lorenzo, and Nahuel Moreno (IIDB, Vol. X, No. 1).

There is always room for analysis clarifying differences and for factual material that throws additional light on the subject, but obscurantism is not in the Trotskyist tradition. The ranks of the Fourth International have a right to expect contributions from prestigious intellectuals that make it easier to understand events, not harder.

The following appears on page 17 of Comrade Germain's document:

"The way in which the minority's 'balance sheet' tells the story of the SITRAM-SITRAC national class struggle caucus meetings is most revealing of the half-truths and distortions of the minority document. The document fails to point out that, contrary to the Verdad group, the PRT [Combatiente] was represented in the leadership of SITRAM-SITRAC, the most progressive union development known till today in Argentina. It fails to point out that at the plenary session, the members of the PRT present were at least as numerous as those of the Verdad group. It fails to point out that whereas the members of the Verdad group present could act as trade unionists, because the credit of the Verdad group as a political group was extremely low among the assembled militants, a woman comrade, strike leader of the current strike who publicly spoke for the PRT was given a standing ovation and immediately taken to the presidium of the conference."

I shall go through this statement point by point to see which document contains the "half-truths and distortions."

While in Argentina recently I interviewed José Paez, one of the officers of SITRAC-SITRAM and a worker in the Concord Fiat factory from 1964 until October 1971, when the military government dissolved the union and barred him and other militants from the plant. I asked him specifically about the items in the above statement.

The following are my questions and Paez's answers:

Q: Was either the PRT(Verdad) or the PRT(Combatiente)

represented in the leadership of SITRAC-SITRAM at the time of the class struggle caucus plenary sessions held in Córdoba August 28-29, 1971, and September 22, 1971?

A: There were seven secretaries of SITRAC. These were the officers of the union. SITRAM had a similar arrangement. None of these officers were members of either PRT. In addition there were some 90 delegates representing different sections of the Concord plant, and half that many from the Materfer plant. None of these were members of the PRT (Verdad). A few were members of the PRT (Combatiente). None were elected to represent a political group. They represented the workers in sections of the plant.

(The "Balance Sheet" specifically states on page 28: "Because of the 1968 split in its own ranks, that is, with the comrades of the PRT (Combatiente), the PRT (Verdad) was greatly weakened in such cities as Rosario, Tucumán, and Córdoba. Until 1972, it had no influence in either of the two Fiat plants.")

Q: How many members of the PRT (Verdad) and how many of the PRT (Combatiente) were present at the plenary sessions?

A: It is hard for me to say exactly because I wasn't a member of either group and it was agreed beforehand that representatives would be from union or student groups, not political groups. But there were very few members of PRT(Combatiente) there. There were far more members of PRT(Verdad) representing union groups from Buenos Aires and elsewhere.

Q: Did the members of PRT(Combatiente) or of PRT (Verdad) who were there speak as members of these political groups?

A: There was an agreement beforehand that no one should speak on behalf of political groups. This agreement was violated only once, by a worker from Córdoba who introduced himself as speaking for Espartaco (Spartacus), a political group, instead of introducing himself as from his workplace or union, union caucus, or some form of that sort. He was called out of order and repudiated by the entire plenary. Viejo Pedro was chairman of these plenaries and he will verify that we did not want anyone speaking as from a political group, that members of political groups had agreed to refrain from doing this, and that the only time it was done the plenary repudiated it.

Q: Did a *compañera* who was a member of PRT(Comba-

tiente) speak? Was she well received? Did she speak as from her political group?

A: A *compañera* who was a member of PRT (Combatiente) spoke and was well received. She spoke as a delegate from a section of a plant, not as from a political group. She did not violate the agreement.

On the same page of Comrade Germain's document it says:

"During the Second Cordobazo [March 1971], the armed detachments of the ERP actually fused with the masses and led many mass actions. The banner of the ERP flew on most of the barricades put up by the fighting masses. Thousands of people followed the coffin of a youth killed during the actions and covered this coffin with the ERP banner."

Q: During the second Cordobazo what did the ERP do?

A: They were one of the best-known armed groups, though the ordinary workers generally thought of all the armed groups as Montoneros. The ERP was there as were all the groups, and all the revolutionary groups active at the university. They all put their flags and placards on the barricades. There were pictures of Lenin and Trotsky and Mao and lots of other stuff on the barricades. Any group that had something to put up did so. The ERP had people on motorcycles going around

from barricade to barricade putting up banners. As far as I know there was one action carried out by the ERP itself. They took over a supermarket and invited the people in to sack it. They also fought in the streets as did all the other groups. The action was led by the union leadership of SITRAC-SITRAM and the 8,000 workers in the Fiat plants.

Q: What happened at the funeral procession of the youth who was killed? Did the youth belong to a political group? What banner was on his coffin?

A: The youth who was killed was a 17-year-old construction worker, Adolpho Cepeda. He belonged to no political group. He was from the neighborhood. I knew him and his family. I was in charge of the funeral arrangements. His mother came to me and said people from the ERP had asked her if they could put their banner on the coffin, out of respect for the lad. She asked me what she should tell them. I told her fine, anyone who wants to show respect for the martyr that's good. Another group, Vanguardia Comunista, a Maoist group, also put its banner on the coffin. The Argentine flag was also on the coffin. If any other group had asked, they could have put a banner on the coffin too. The funeral procession was very large.

May 15, 1973

# Lenin Vs. Germain

By Peter Camejo

In his contribution to the discussion, "In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," Comrade Ernest Germain presents his views on armed struggle and the course followed by the PRT(C) (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Combatiente)—Revolutionary Workers Party) and the POR(G) (Partido Obrero Revolucionario(Gonzales)—Revolutionary Workers Party). He tries to establish that his views are a continuation of the views advanced by Lenin in 1906.

Comrade Maitan has likewise offered quotations from what Lenin wrote in 1906. In fact this is the chief source utilized by Comrades Maitan and Germain and those who agree with them in their efforts to show that the guerrilla orientation adopted at the last world congress conforms with Leninism.

Therefore, it is important to examine what Lenin said in 1906, to place his comments in historical context, and see if he ever actually supported an orientation of this kind.

As we shall see, the concept of organizing "autonomous and clandestine armed detachments" (*La Gauche*, April 21, 1972), that is, "armed detachments autonomous from the mass movement" (Germain and Knoeller, "The Strategic Orientation of the Revolutionists in Latin America," *Discussion on Latin America* (1968-1972), p. 103) has nothing in common with the concept maintained by Lenin in 1906 or at any other time. The actions initiated by the PRT-ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo—Revolutionary Army of the People) in Argentina or those projected at the last world congress for Bolivia by the then joint effort of the POR-ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—National Liberation Army) are completely alien to the traditions of Leninism.

Comrade Germain's effort to turn Lenin into an advocate of his position on armed struggle falls apart once the quotations from Lenin are put into the context of the Russian class struggle of 1905-1906. In fact the very quotations confirm the correctness of the stand on this question taken by the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency.

## Sweeping conclusions

The technique used to convert Lenin into a supporter of Comrade Germain's views is quite simple. A reference is made to present-day urban or rural guerrilla warfare in Latin America, a quotation from Lenin that includes favorable mention of "guerrilla warfare" is cited and the conclusion is drawn that Lenin's views are the same as Germain's—or the comrades in Latin America who tried to carry out the line of the last world congress.

Here is an example. After quoting from Lenin, Comrade Germain concludes, "It is in that spirit that our Bolivian comrades have acted. . . . It is in the same spirit that the Argentine section tried to act. . . . That also in our

opinion reconfirms that the position of the 9th World Congress as being in the real tradition of Leninism." ("In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," IIDB, Vol. X, No. 4, p. 18.)

Here is another example from the contribution by Comrades Germain and Knoeller. Following a quotation from Lenin, they say: "This quotation admirably expresses the problem confronting our movement with regard to guerrilla warfare and armed struggle in Latin America." ("The Strategic Orientation of the Revolutionists in Latin America," *Discussion on Latin America* (1968-1972), p. 105.)

Let us take a look at the events in 1906, Lenin's reaction to them, and then return to Comrade Germain's conclusions to see if they are justified.

## A mass workers party

The Russian revolutionists worked ceaselessly for years prior to 1905 spreading their ideas to and developing cadres in the labor movement. They argued against the formation of "autonomous and clandestine" armed groups organized by the Socialist Revolutionaries (populists). Lenin advised that only when the party directly led the masses could it go over to armed street struggles.<sup>1</sup> He wrote articles on the mass demonstrations of unarmed workers, and even counterposed them to the "exemplary" action of combat groups.<sup>2</sup>

With the outbreak of revolutionary events in 1905, Lenin began to urge the RSDLP (Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party) to prepare for an uprising. Although the RSDLP at first had only a few thousand worker members, it mobilized a million workers behind it.<sup>3</sup> In 1905 Russia had only 1,661,000 factory workers.<sup>4</sup>

The mass struggles led to a general strike in October of 1905 which opened up a short period during which the Russian revolutionists could act openly. It must be kept in mind that Lenin's party was built under difficult illegal conditions. Governmental repression in Tsarist Russia prior to October 1905 and after December 1905 was at least as bad if not worse than Onganía's repression in Argentina in the late 1960s.

During the revolutionary events of 1905, the RSDLP grew rapidly. By 1906 the party had 100,000 to 150,000 members with about half of them backing the Bolshevik wing. This estimate made by Lenin includes Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and the Bund. The Greater Russians numbered about 31,000.<sup>5</sup>

Lenin also gives us some rather interesting figures on the size of the RSDLP at that time in proportion to the size of the working class. In Petrograd, Lenin complains, we "have only 6,000 Party members" out of 150,000 workers; while in the Central Industrial Region, we "have only 20,000 Party members" out of 562,000 workers.

"We must *learn* to recruit five times and ten times as many workers for the Party in such centers."<sup>6</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

It was only after the 1905 October strike that the RSDLP made any important headway in organizing armed detachments. These were organized within the workers movement around the defensive formulation of protection against the Black Hundred pogroms. The party took the initiative in organizing and arming the defense squads.

These armed squads became known as the *druzhinnikki*. Both the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks helped organize them. The activity of these groups between October and December of 1905 is described in Leon Trotsky's book *1905*. (Vintage Books, New York, 1972.)

## The December uprising

The Moscow soviets, in which the RSDLP was the strongest party, decided to attempt a general strike in December of 1905. The *druzhinnikki* were brought into play as part of a general strategy by the revolutionary party that "directly led" the masses. The central strategic goal was to win over the troops by demoralizing them through the general hostility of the population and the harassment of the *druzhinnikki*, using hit-and-run "guerrilla" tactics. The *druzhinnikki* numbered 600 in Moscow.

The goal was to turn the general strike into an armed uprising, that is, an insurrection. The uprising failed after a week-long struggle. More than 1,000 workers and revolutionary fighters were killed. Lenin describes the fighting in Moscow and explains why the uprising failed in his article "Lessons of the Moscow Uprising."<sup>7</sup>

The struggles that had been building up in Russia did not end with the crushing of the Moscow uprising. Instead hit-and-run armed actions appeared spontaneously on a very broad scale. These actions continued for a prolonged period during which the mass movement gradually declined.

The defeat of the December uprising was the turning point in the revolutionary upsurge of the 1905 revolution. However, this was not clear at the time. Lenin's evaluation was that the defeat in Moscow marked only a temporary setback and that a new insurrection on a broader scale could be organized. The spontaneous increase in guerrilla-type actions seemed to confirm this evaluation.

In the winter months following the turning point and again in the late summer and fall of 1906, Lenin urged the party to prepare for a new insurrection. He urged the party to take note of the new form in which mass struggles were occurring.

"Armed clashes and conflicts between the Black-Hundred government and the population are taking place all over the country. This is an absolutely inevitable phenomenon at the present stage of development of the revolution. The population is spontaneously and in an unorganized way—and for that very reason in unfortunate and *undesirable* forms—reacting to this phenomena also by armed conflicts and attacks."<sup>8</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

Lenin saw these "guerrilla" actions as "partial, secondary and auxiliary" to the major forms of mass struggles; "the all-Russian political strike accompanied by local cases of barricade fighting (October 1905), mass barricade

fighting and armed uprising (1905, December), the peaceful parliamentary struggle (April-June 1906), partial military revolts (June 1905-July 1906) and partial peasant revolts (autumn 1905-autumn 1906)."<sup>9</sup>

These guerrilla actions were different from the previous terrorist actions even though they included actions of a similar kind, such as assassination of hated officials and confiscation of funds. They were different because the context was different. In Lenin's judgment, civil war had opened in Russia, and the guerrilla actions were simply the form mass armed struggle was taking between insurrections. In that phase of the class struggle, the masses were preparing for a broader, more decisive nationwide insurrection.

But Lenin warned that his conclusion could not be separated from the specific historical circumstances. "We are far from the thought of regarding a concrete assessment of particular guerrilla actions as indicative of a *trend* in Social Democracy." Lenin insisted that "Marxism, therefore, positively does not reject any form of struggle. . . . In this respect," he continued, "Marxism *learns*, if we may so express it, from mass practice, and makes no claim whatever to *teach* the masses forms of struggle invented by 'systematisers' in the seclusion of their studies."<sup>10</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

Lenin also gave importance to the actual class composition of the armed groups. "The old Russian terrorism," he explained, "was an affair of the intellectual conspirator; today as a general rule guerrilla warfare is waged by the worker combatant, or simply by the unemployed worker."<sup>11</sup>

The task of the party, Lenin concluded, was not to turn its back on this "mass practice" waged by "worker combatants" but to relate to it by supporting it and bringing it under the leadership of the party so that the energy of the masses would not be dissipated and could be oriented toward another insurrection.

The Mensheviks began to oppose the spontaneous armed actions as the "old" terrorism, anarchism, etc. In his article "Guerrilla Warfare," Lenin answered the Mensheviks and urged the party to organize and bring under its discipline the fighting units carrying out guerrilla actions.

## Lenin's misjudgment

History showed that Lenin misjudged the situation. As early as February 7, 1906, Lenin himself indicated that if he was misjudging the situation and Russia was entering a downturn in the class struggle, the preparations for an insurrection would be wrong.

"Nor can there be any doubt that it is more advisable fully to abandon the idea of insurrection, if objective conditions have made it impossible, than to waste our forces on new and fruitless attempts."<sup>12</sup> Later, on March 20, 1906, Lenin wrote even more explicitly what his attitude would be if the situation were no longer revolutionary and the movement faced a downturn. "In that case, we must completely shelve the question of insurrection and cease all work of arming and organizing fighting squads; for it is unbecoming for the workers' party to play at insurrection."<sup>13</sup>

By 1907 Lenin came to the conclusion that he had misjudged the tempo of events. "Two phases in the develop-



ment of the Russian revolution now stand out before us in all their clarity: the phase of upswing (1905) and the phase of decline (1906-1907)."<sup>14</sup>

The guerrilla groups became more and more isolated from the mass movement. Their actions degenerated into the "old terrorism," reaching a high point in 1907 with the assassination of 1,231 persons.

However, from January till July of 1906, it was not clear that the revolutionary movement now faced a prolonged downturn. Although the counterrevolution was increasingly on the offensive, several conjunctural revivals of the mass movement occurred, including troop rebellions and peasant revolts.

Thus it was not till 1907 that the Bolsheviks began to dissociate themselves from the fighting squads. They did so "completely" by 1909.<sup>15</sup> Never again did Lenin advocate "guerrilla warfare." Certainly guerrilla tactics were used in an auxiliary way by both sides in the civil war following the 1917 revolution, but Lenin was never an advocate of guerrilla warfare as a "method and orientation" or as a means to "build" the party.

In fact when Lenin looked back and drew some general lessons from the class struggle of the 1905-06 period, he downgraded guerrilla warfare.

I know of only three general analyses by Lenin summarizing the lessons to be learned from the experience of the 1905-06 revolutionary upsurge—an article dated May 10, 1908; another dated October 30, 1910; and his famous speech of January 9, 1917.<sup>16</sup>

In 1908, his first article summarizing the events of 1905, Lenin refers to guerrilla warfare. He agrees that in Poland it had a disorganizing effect because mass armed struggle as seen in the December Moscow insurrection did not materialize in Poland. In his observations in 1910 he refers in passing to the failure of terrorism. As for guerrilla warfare, he *does not even mention it* in 1910 or 1917.

As we have seen, Lenin never advocated the formation of armed detachments autonomous from the mass movement. However, Comrade Germain believes the opposite. He believes that not only did Lenin advocate armed detachments autonomous from the mass movement in 1906, but that Lenin maintained such a position "until the end of his days."

Comrades Germain and Knoeller state: "Can the struggle of armed detachments autonomous from the mass movement be equated with putschism or with terrorism? It would be strange, to say the least, if Lenin, who had struggled his entire life against putschism and populist terrorism should suddenly become an advocate of such methods in 1906 and maintain this position until the end of his days." ("The Strategic Orientation of the Revolutionists in Latin America," *Discussion on Latin America* (1968-1972), p. 103.)

The position maintained by Lenin to "the end of his days" was that armed struggle must arise out of the struggles of the masses themselves. Possibly Comrade Germain has quotations indicating otherwise. If so, why doesn't he cite them?

For Trotsky's evaluation of the position taken by Lenin in 1906 and for further information on this question, a convenient source is Comrade Hansen's contribution "In Defense of the Leninist Strategy of Party Building," specific-

ally pages 110-116 of the collected *Discussion on Latin America* (1968-1972).

Unfortunately, almost none of Trotsky's writings on the period of 1906 dealing with the "armed detachments" have been translated from Russian. It is thus difficult for those unable to read Russian to compare the stands taken by Trotsky and by Lenin, or to determine where Lenin's misjudgment of the objective situation may have led him to misjudge the actual role of the armed groups. It is likewise difficult to determine whether the class composition of the armed groups changed between 1905 and 1907.

What is completely clear, however, is that Lenin's position was that armed struggle must develop out of the mass movement, as a continuation of the class struggle of the workers themselves.

There is one other source of information which comrades can refer to. Comrade Ian Angus of the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvriere, the Canadian section of the Fourth International, prepared a contribution titled "Terrorism, Guerrilla Warfare, and the 'Strategy of Armed Struggle': The Leninist View" for the pre-congress discussion of his own section. (LSA/LSO discussion bulletin number 19, 1972.) This contribution has also been reprinted in SWP Internal Information Bulletin No. 2 in 1973.

Angus's excellent contribution traces the views of Lenin (and Trotsky) from his 1902 writings against terrorism through 1906, and on through 1921. It also gives clear, precise definitions to the terms which have been so misused in the present discussion by Comrades Germain and Maitan.

Let us keep in mind the situation confronting Lenin in 1906. The RSDLP was a party of more than 100,000 members, half of whom supported the Bolsheviks. A high percentage of them were workers, directly leading masses of workers in factories throughout the country. Both the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks participated in the widespread armed struggle that flared after the Moscow insurrection was crushed. Thousands of workers were moving spontaneously toward armed actions, as was shown by the fact that guerrilla bands developed outside the control of any party or political current. To Lenin the task facing the RSDLP was to win leadership of these groups in order to supersede the chaotic, anarchistic, and self-defeating nature of the struggle and convert it into a nationwide insurrection.

### 'Admirably expresses the problem'?

This is what Lenin was referring to in a quotation cited by Germain and Knoeller. They quote Lenin as follows:

"It is not guerrilla actions which disorganise the movement, but the weakness of a party which is incapable of taking such actions *under its control*. That is why the anathemas which we Russians usually hurl against guerrilla action go hand in hand with secret, casual, unorganized guerrilla actions which really do disorganise the Party. Being incapable of understanding what historical conditions give rise to this struggle, we are incapable of neutralising its deleterious aspects. Yet the struggle is going on. It is engendered by powerful

economic and political causes. It is not in our power to eliminate these causes or to eliminate this struggle. Our complaints against guerrilla warfare are complaints against our own Party weakness in the matter of an uprising."<sup>17</sup>

Comrades Germain and Knoeller then write: "This quotation admirably expresses the problem confronting our movement with regard to guerrilla warfare and armed struggle in Latin America." (*Discussion on Latin America* (1968-1972), p. 105.)

Let us check the facts. First as to our movement in Latin America. Do any of the Trotskyist groups there compare in strength to either the Bolsheviks or the RSDLP as a whole in 1906? Let us take the strongest organization that is carrying out the "9th World Congress turn," the PRT(Combatiente).

The PRT is not a mass party. It does not lead a single union. It does not have dominant influence in a single factory. It does not even have dominant influence in a single trade-union tendency. Nowhere does it "directly lead" the masses.

Secondly as to the situation in Argentina. Is it a replica of the situation in Russia in 1905-07? No spontaneous guerrilla warfare of a mass nature exists in Argentina. The guerrilla actions since the "9th World Congress turn" have all been initiated by small groupings such as the FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias—Revolutionary Armed Forces), FAP (Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas—Peronist Armed Forces), Montoneros, and the PRT-ERP. Most of these groups are not even socialist but part of the Peronist movement.

Thirdly, unlike the situation that faced Lenin in 1906, the guerrilla actions in Argentina do not arise out of the mass workers movement. The composition of the small "autonomous and clandestine armed detachments" is overwhelmingly petty bourgeois, consisting mostly of students and members of the professions.

The PRT acts independently of the mass movement. Its actions, as outlined approvingly by Comrade Maitan, include expropriating funds from banks to finance its operations; expropriating medicine, milk, and meat to be distributed in slum areas; raids to acquire arms; and brief armed occupations of factories for the purpose of giving lectures to workers. (See "The Political Crisis and Perspectives for Revolutionary Struggle in Argentina," IIDB, Vol. X, No. 6, p. 18; and *Intercontinental Press*, April 26, 1971, p. 388.)

The last type of action is highly approved of by Comrades Maitan and Germain. To enter a factory at gunpoint, assemble the workers, and give them a talk is, it seems, a way of "linking up" with the masses.

In his latest document, Comrade Germain gives the accolade to this type of action as the "most important" of all. It would have been more accurate to call it the "most revealing." Here is what he said:

"The most important military activities of the PRT and ERP took place in close connection with the class struggle. The ERP detachments penetrated into some 30 factories where special conditions of repression existed, and where armed factory guards of the bosses and the army terrorised the workers. They disarmed the guards, convened all the workers into general assemblies and held long discus-

sions with them on the present and next stage of the class struggle in Argentina. Each of these actions was an important success." ("In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," p. 17.)

This is adduced as crushing proof that the comrades of the ERP and PRT are not isolated from the masses!

We are left in the dark as to how what Lenin said in 1906 "admirably expresses the problem confronting our movement. . . ." To talk to the workers did the Bolsheviks have to make guerrilla raids on factories and call assemblies at the point of a gun? Lenin's party was *in* the factories. The Bolsheviks were enmeshed with the workers *on the job*.

Lenin never projected that small revolutionary organizations should engage in guerrilla warfare by creating their own "autonomous and clandestine armed detachments" and then arousing interest among the workers by delivering free food to them, occasionally staging a factory raid to deliver a message on socialism, or executing a hated bourgeois figure now and then to electrify the masses. Nor would Lenin ever dream of endorsing a scheme by which two organizations, each having no more than 100 members like the Bolivian POR and ELN, would buy or seize a few guns and launch guerrilla warfare in a nonrevolutionary situation. Nor would Lenin approve calling for small armed groups to engage in "exemplary" armed actions in periods of decline such as the one in Bolivia after Banzer (1971) or Brazil since the last world congress.

The quotation from the *Collected Works* of Lenin used by Comrades Germain and Knoeller concerns the tasks of a party confronted with a spontaneous growth of armed detachments on the eve of an organized insurrection. That was the situation as Lenin judged it during the heat of the events in Czarist Russia in 1906. By leaving out of consideration the party's mass base and the specific historical context of Lenin's statements, Comrades Germain and Knoeller are able to claim that Lenin's quotation "admirably expresses the problem confronting our movement with regard to guerrilla warfare and armed struggle in Latin America."

On the level of methodology the error is a serious one.

## Terrorism, Lenin, and the PRT

Let us take another example. Comrade Germain writes, "Finally, to identify the actions of the PRT and ERP as 'terrorist,' putting them on a par with the actions of the Russian populist/terrorists, is to misunderstand completely the situation in Argentina. The comrades of the minority who use this parallel should ponder the following words of Lenin:" ("In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," p. 17.)

Before we ponder the words of Lenin, we must first register a protest over Germain's way of quoting Lenin. As he indicates, he makes his own English translation—not from the Russian original but from the German translation. Comrade Germain deserves full credit for his excellent knowledge of English, but after all it is not his native tongue. To this it should be added that good as the German translation of Lenin is, it still remains German and not Russian. The consequence is that Comrade

Germain's translation of Lenin into English differs perceptibly from the standard translation—and also from the original. Lenin, one must think, would frown at the departures from his thought, all the more so since the departures fall into the pattern of Comrade Germain's thought.

Thus, to give an example, Comrade Germain is enamored of the phrase "link up" with the masses, or the mood of the masses. But Lenin always speaks of giving expression to the mass mood from within the mass movement, not linking up with it from the outside. Thus in a key phrase in the quotation, where Lenin said "undoubtedly reflect," Comrade Germain puts it in English as "undoubtedly linked." I will use the standard English translation and not Comrade Germain's exercise in converting the German version into English.

Comrades interested enough in this subject to check the sources will also note that in this instance Comrade Germain cut Lenin off before he had finished his thought. This was especially reprehensible because in the very next sentence Lenin made clear that the guerrilla operations he was talking about occurred in what he judged to be an "insurrection now in progress." Moreover, Lenin emphasized the "mass character" of the struggle and his evaluation that the "proletariat is seriously ready for insurrection."

Here is the section of the quotation used by Germain as given in the standard English translation:

"We will make a slight digression here about the guerrilla operations by the fighting squads. We think it is wrong to put these operations on a par with the old type of terrorism. Terrorism consisted in acts of vengeance against individuals. Terrorism was a conspiracy by groups of intellectuals. Terrorism in no way reflected the temper of the masses. Terrorism never served to train fighting leaders of the masses. Terrorism was the result—and also the symptom and concomitant—of lack of faith in insurrection. of the absence of conditions for insurrection.

"Guerrilla operations are not acts of vengeance, but military operations. They no more resemble adventurous acts than the harassing of the enemy's rear by raiding parties of huntsmen during a lull on the main battlefield resembles the killing of an individual in a duel or by assassination. Guerrilla operations conducted by fighting squads—formed long ago by Social-Democrats of both factions in all the important centres of the movement and consisting mainly of workers—undoubtedly reflect, clearly and directly, the temper of the masses. Guerrilla operations by fighting squads directly train fighting leaders of the masses."<sup>18</sup>

Immediately after this quotation Germain voices the conclusion that the course followed by the PRT and the POR, in fact the "turn" itself adopted by the last world congress, conform to the traditions of Leninism.

"It is in that spirit," Germain writes, "that our Bolivian comrades have acted, with a real, if modest success before and during the August 1971 days. It is in the same spirit that the Argentine section tried to act, at any rate till the second Cordobazo and during the insurrection. That alone should be sufficient to discuss the views of these comrades seriously and thoroughly and not through the caricatures which the minority presents in its document. That also in our opinion reconfirms that the position of the 9th World Congress as being in the real tradition of

Leninism." ("In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," p. 18.)

What connection Lenin's comments on the differences between the armed actions of pre-1905 and those during 1906 have to do with the course of the POR in Bolivia around August of 1971, when no guerrilla warfare or terrorism was involved, or the course of the PRT in Argentina, or the resolutions adopted at the last world congress is certainly not clear from Germain's invocation of the "spirit" of Lenin.

Lenin said that the old terrorism is not the same thing as the guerrilla actions of 1906. He said that the guerrillas were made up of workers, organized by the mass workers party, and were part of the mass movement. He said that actions under these circumstances helped train fighting leaders of the masses. The old terrorists, in contrast, were petty bourgeois, they were conspiratorial, their actions did not train fighting leaders of the masses. Therefore, concludes Germain, the last world congress resolution orienting the Trotskyist movement in Latin America toward guerrilla warfare on a continental scale in the 1970s was in the Leninist traditions! Therefore the POR and the PRT carried on in the Leninist spirit! And "that alone should be sufficient to discuss the views of these comrades seriously and thoroughly . . ." (?)

This is what Germain offers us as a "serious and thorough" discussion. A quotation torn out of context in which Lenin argues that the guerrilla warfare of 1906 is not the same as the old terrorism is pointed to as proof that the PRT has not engaged in terrorist actions but has acted in the spirit of Leninism and that the decisions of the last world congress on guerrilla warfare represented the real tradition of Leninism!

## Once again terrorism and the PRT

Comrade Germain's handling of the quotations from Lenin obfuscates the issues. Comrade Germain leaves the impression that Lenin opposed terrorism but supported guerrilla warfare. Lenin's approach was not that simple.

Guerrilla warfare is only one form of the utilization of arms. It cannot be correctly counterposed to terrorism.

The word "terrorism" is commonly used to mean the politics of those who believe that violent actions against individual bourgeois figures can bring about social change, precipitate a revolutionary situation, or electrify or help mobilize the masses even if undertaken by isolated individuals or groups. Terrorism in that sense is rejected by the Marxist movement. But under the conditions of civil war, terrorist acts can have a totally different political import. Their isolated nature fades. In the process of an insurrection, terrorist acts *may be* advantageous to the workers movement. They may also be damaging. But terrorist acts that are not part of a generalized mass armed struggle remain isolated and are detrimental to the workers movement.

In the 1940s James P. Cannon, in his polemic against the ultraleftist position of Grandizo Munis, then a leader of the Fourth International, explained, "Marxism is opposed to terrorist assassinations, for example, but not to wars of liberation waged by the oppressed masses, even though wars entail some killing of obnoxious individuals. So, also, with acts of obstruction and destruc-

tion as *part of* and *subordinate to* wars waged by the masses, not as substitutes for them. 'Terrorism' and 'sabotage' are then no longer the same things. Everything changes, including the attitude of Marxists, according to what is *dominant* and what is *subordinate* in the circumstances." (*What Policy for Revolutionaries—Marxism or Ultra-leftism?*, p. 57, Merit Publishers, New York, 1969.) (Emphasis in original.)

Lenin makes this point clear in *The Lessons of the Moscow Uprising* (Vol. 11, p. 171.) But even earlier in 1901 Lenin wrote, "In principle we have never rejected, and cannot reject, terror. Terror is one of the forms of military action that may be perfectly suitable and even essential at a definite juncture in the battle, given a definite state of the troops and the existence of definite conditions. But the important point is that terror, at the present time, is by no means suggested as an operation for the army in the field, an operation closely connected with and integrated into the entire system of struggle, but as an independent form of occasional attack unrelated to any army." 19

Thus it is wrong to claim that Lenin was for guerrilla warfare and against terrorism. That is why Lenin said that the guerrilla actions in 1906 were different from the *old* terrorism. The actual actions of the guerrilla groups in 1906 included many terrorist acts.

The question is not whether the PRT-ERP's kidnappings (Sylvester, Sallustro, etc.) or assassinations (Sanchez, etc.) are "urban guerrilla warfare" or "terrorism." *Every kidnapping or assassination is a terrorist act.* The question is, was such a tactic called for? Did the "definite conditions" exist that could conceivably justify carrying out these terrorist acts? Or were these acts carried out by small groups as an "independent form of occasional attack unrelated to any army"? Did these actions take place in the process of an unfolding civil war of mass armed struggle, or was it the result of a schema in which it was thought that such actions would "stimulate," "inspire," or "spark" the masses? I will return to these questions later.

The editor of *La Gauche*, for instance, totally confused the issue when it counterposed terrorism and guerrilla warfare. This could only lead to the miseducation of the cadres of the Fourth International and to approval of a policy of terrorism under the excuse that it was "urban guerrilla warfare."

Here is how the editor of *La Gauche* actually put it: "Our comrades of the ERP do not uphold individual terrorism at all and do not practice it either. They uphold the principles of urban guerrilla war, which is hardly foreign to the traditions of the workers movement. That is, unless one excludes from the workers movement Lenin, who advocated guerrilla warfare after December 1905 in Russia. . . ." (*La Gauche*, April 21, 1972.)

The logic followed by Comrade Germain leaves a little to be desired in its clarity: Guerrilla warfare, according to Lenin, is not terrorism. Lenin favored practicing guerrilla warfare. The PRT practices urban guerrilla warfare. Thus the PRT does not practice terrorism.

## Civil war

In 1906 Lenin recognized that the mass struggles had evolved from strikes to demonstrations, then to sponta-

neous barricade fighting, and finally to coordinated insurrectionary attempts and the beginning of mass armed struggle. Lenin's tactical proposals flowed from his evaluation that Russia was in a state of civil war.

In Argentina the class struggle evolved from strikes to mass demonstrations, to spontaneous barricade fighting in several industrial centers (*excluding* the key to the Argentine revolution, Buenos Aires). But it never approached mass armed struggle. In the past year the maneuver by the ruling class of staging parliamentary elections and turning to a new Peronist government has temporarily diverted the mass movement from confrontations in the streets.

Has Argentina been in a state of civil war since 1969? The PRT answers, yes. Most of the Maitan-Mandel-Frank tendency leaders now answer, no. But what was their position from 1969 to the end of 1972? Whether a civil war has been raging for four years in Argentina is not a minor question in deciding on strategy and tactics there.

The resolution on Latin America adopted by a majority at the last world congress did not refer to a civil war specifically in Argentina, but it did assert that ". . . Latin America has entered a period of . . . prolonged civil war on a continental scale," (IIDB, *Discussion on Latin America* (1968-1972) p. 46.)

In an article published in *Intercontinental Press*, April 26, 1971, written at the request of the majority of the United Secretariat, Comrade Maitan wrote:

"The strategic perspective the Argentina comrades are following is the one laid down by the Ninth World Congress of the Fourth International—elaborated and made more precise by the last two national congresses of the PRT—of a prolonged war, which might involve the intervention of the imperialists and thus could not be waged without profound ties to, and increasing participation by the masses." (p. 388)

Comrade Maitan here limits himself to a perspective of "prolonged war" for Argentina. But the PRT Fifth Congress, held in July 1970, was much more definite. This is the second of the two national PRT congresses which, according to Comrade Maitan, "elaborated and made more precise" the line of the Ninth World Congress. In a resolution on "Dynamics and Relations of Our Revolutionary War" the PRT Fifth Congress declared: "The Fourth Congress pointed out that Argentina as a whole was in a prerevolutionary situation. Reality confirmed this day by day and today we are witnessing something even more concrete: the revolutionary civil war has begun. Given this reality, it is useless for us to begin discussing in what geographic area we are going to initiate a war that already began more than a year ago and in which we are already involved up to our necks."

The PRT holds that civil war opened in Argentina in mid-1969 (one year before its Fifth Congress). The position of the leaders of the Maitan-Mandel-Frank tendency is much more obscure. They have never clearly stated that civil war was in full sway in Argentina. Nor have they explicitly pointed to Argentina as an example bearing out the conclusion of the 1969 World Congress resolution on Latin America that the entire continent had entered a phase of prolonged civil war. Nevertheless, amidst the confusion they left the strong implication that there

were no differences with the PRT on this question, at least until April 1972, when more qualified characterizations began to emerge following the kidnapping of Oberdan Sallustro.

The April 13, 1972, press release of the Italian section of the Fourth International defined the situation in Argentina as "at least partial civil war." The editor of *La Gauche* on April 21, 1972, referred to Argentina as being "on the verge of civil war." (For both items see *SWP Internal Information Bulletin* No. 5 in 1972, "Documentation on Latin America.")

The December 1972 IEC document on Argentina, drafted by Comrade Maitan and adopted by a majority, states that "embryonic forms of civil war were taking form" in 1969. ("The Political Crisis and Perspectives for Revolutionary Struggle in Argentina," IIDB Vol. X, No. 6, p. 17.) This document also implies that these "embryonic forms" never became full-fledged. It states that, following the PRT's Fifth Congress, "a schematic analysis constantly obscured the distinction that must be made between a trend toward civil war and the first stages of armed confrontation on the one hand and revolutionary war in the strict sense on the other." (Ibid., p. 19.)

Finally, Comrade Germain's document, "In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," dated January 5, 1973, makes no mention of civil war in its section on Argentina, neither "embryonic" nor "prolonged" nor any other kind. However, Comrade Germain says he has differences with the PRT on the "concept of the revolutionary army, as developed especially since the second Cordobazo." (IIDB Vol. X, No. 4, p. 18.) The second Cordobazo took place in March 1971, eight months after the PRT's army was formed to take part in the civil war that the PRT believed to be raging.

Perhaps the April 1972 references by leaders of the Maitan-Mandel-Frank tendency to "at least partial" civil war, or a situation "on the verge of" civil war, stemmed from their attempt to justify support being given to terrorist acts like the Sallustro kidnapping. But in spite of the seeming confusion, the facts are clear. No civil-war situation exists in Argentina, nor has such a situation existed in the recent period. Yet the PRT has been carrying out terrorist actions with the explicit political approval of the majority of the United Secretariat. Thus at the December 1972 IEC plenum Comrade Maitan, as the United Secretariat majority reporter on Argentina, declared the Sallustro kidnapping to have been politically correct—even though he thought a few tactical misjudgments were involved, such as the amount of ransom demanded.

While the PRT may try to justify its terroristic acts as being part of an on-going "civil war," it is unprincipled for others who realize that no civil war is taking place in Argentina to approve these acts. It means approving the kind of terrorism Lenin opposed throughout his life, including in 1906.

## The forgotten example

In his document "In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," Comrade Germain includes a section which he entitled "The Forgotten Peruvian Ex-

ample." Quoting from Hugo Blanco's excellent book *Land or Death* (Pathfinder Press, New York, 1972), he attempts to show that Hugo Blanco initiated armed struggle even though the situation in Peru was far from reaching the level of the situations in Argentina or Bolivia and even though there was no immediate prospect for a mass upsurge of the working class. As Comrade Germain views it, in the final stages Blanco chose a course of going down fighting in order to set an example before the masses.

Then comes the rhetorical question: "Isn't that exactly the same spirit in which the Bolivian and Argentinian comrades developed their turn towards the armed struggle?"

Followed by another rhetorical question: "If it hadn't been an error to turn to armed confrontation growing out of a regionally limited mass movement as was that of the La Convención valley in Peru, how can one argue that it was an error to turn to armed confrontation growing out of the mass struggles in Argentina and Bolivia which were much wider and more generalized than those of the 1962 peasant movement in which comrade Blanco was involved?"

Comrade Germain offers the following answer: "The key criteria is whether the masses *understand* the need for armed struggle. This was the yardstick applied by Lenin in 1906." (Emphasis in original.) He continued: "Comrade Martine Knoeller and myself used the same method in our contribution to the discussion entitled, *The Strategic Orientation of Revolutionists in Latin America*. The question thus becomes concrete: Did the brutal tyranny of Barrientos convince large sectors of the Bolivian masses that armed struggle against the armed violence of the enemy was necessary? Did the brutal Onganía dictatorship convince the Argentinian masses likewise? Was the turn of the Bolivian and Argentinian comrades therefore timely or not, according to that criterion?" (pp. 20-21)

Comrade Germain fails to see the fundamental difference between the armed struggle led by Hugo Blanco and the armed struggle projected by the POR-ELN in 1969 under Barrientos in Bolivia and the current actions carried out by the PRT-ERP in Argentina. He equates all three. In fact, as he views it, the latter two are more justified if anything.

The difference is that Hugo Blanco's armed struggle grew out of the mass movement while the "armed struggle" of the PRT-ERP and the POR-ELN originated in isolation from the masses, consisting of securing a few guns for themselves which they used by themselves. That difference is what separates Comrade Germain's concept from the Marxist concept of armed struggle, from Lenin's position both before, during, and after 1906. That difference has served to divide the Fourth International today into two main tendencies.

The simplistic formula presented by Germain (a "brutal tyranny" can "convince large sectors" that "armed struggle" is "necessary") leaves out the dynamics of the class struggle. Tyranny by itself never educates the masses on what is required to liberate themselves. They learn only through assembling their numbers and engaging in action themselves.

In Peru the leaders of the peasant movement headed by Hugo Blanco, which involved hundreds of thousands of peasants, began to organize armed self-defense as a logical and necessary extension of the mass struggles. In Bolivia and Argentina a tiny group of revolutionists

took it on themselves to go into action completely separate from the masses. Comrade Germain does not see the difference! He thinks the latter type of action is all right if "tyranny" has "taught" the masses that "armed struggle" is necessary.

Under this theory—in reality an adaptation to ultra-leftism—emphasis is not placed on penetrating the mass movement and building a party based on the masses but on creating (to use Germain's own words) "armed detachments autonomous from the mass movement." These "autonomous" armed groups are then supposed to show the masses by exemplary actions how they should fight. This in turn will enable them to "link up" with the mass movement and broaden the armed actions to the scale of a civil war. Along this road, we are told, the revolutionary party can be built in Latin America.

This theory is completely false. Experience has shown that the "autonomous armed detachments" in Argentina and Bolivia have not been able to "link up" with and lead the mass movement. Comrades Germain and Maitan have complained more than once in their articles that the PRT has not yet "linked up" with the masses. The complaint is repeated in the October 31, 1972, letter from six United Secretariat members to the PRT and in the resolution on Argentina adopted by the majority of the IEC in December 1972. [IIDB, Vol. X, No. 6.] But the PRT is only

faithfully carrying out the line adopted at the last world congress.

The kidnapping and execution of Sallustro by the PRT is viewed by Comrade Germain as not different in substance from the armed clash of Hugo Blanco's peasant defense squads that resulted in the death of a policeman. Consequently, he is unable to understand how the SWP can be opposed to the Sallustro kidnapping but support the actions of Hugo Blanco. The only explanation that occurs to him is that the SWP has moved in a reformist direction and is now rejecting armed struggle.

"Why did the SWP *change* its position in that respect?" asks Germain. "Why the *different* attitude toward similar, if not identical events in Peru and Argentina? What are the objective motive forces behind this change?" ("In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," p. 40.) (Emphasis in original.)

No, it is not the SWP that has changed but Comrade Germain. In the the early sixties he could differentiate between a mass movement involving hundreds of thousands of peasants turning to armed self-defense and a handful of armed individuals kidnapping a capitalist for ransom. Today, defending the orientation adopted at the last world congress, he has lost this capacity.

May 20, 1973

1. "Concerning Demonstrations," *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 262.
2. "New Events and Old Questions," *Ibid.*, pp. 279-8.
3. "Revolution and Counter-Revolution," *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, p. 120.
4. "The Historical Meaning of the Inner-Party Struggle in Russia," *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, p. 381.
5. "Philistinism in Revolutionary Circles," *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, p. 252.
6. "On Convening an Extraordinary Party Congress," *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, pp. 264-65.
7. "The Crisis of Menshevism," *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, pp. 358-59.
8. "Lessons of the Moscow Uprising," *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, pp. 171-78.
9. "Guerrilla Warfare," *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, pp. 220-21.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
13. "The Present Situation in Russia and the Tactics of the Workers' Party," *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 115.

14. "The Russian Revolution and the Tasks of the Proletariat," *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 143.
15. "Against Boycott," *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, p. 29.
16. "The Faction of Supporters of Otzovism and God-building," *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, p. 31.
17. "The Assessment of the Russian Revolution," *Ibid.*, Vol. 15, pp. 50-62. "The Lessons of the Revolution," *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, pp. 296-304. "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution," *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, pp. 236-253.
18. "Guerrilla Warfare," *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, p. 219.
19. "The Present Situation in Russia and the Tactics of the Workers' Party," *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, pp. 117-118.
20. "Where to Begin," *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 19.

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