

La Paz, April 17, 1979
P.O.R. (Combate)

Bolivia

To the comrades of the
Vanguardia Obrera (V.O.)

Comrades:

Our national executive committee has decided to send this letter to clear up some aspects of the relations between our organizations about steps you have taken in relation to the IV International of which our party, the P.O.R. (Combate) is the Bolivian section; on the formation of the pro-Unity Committee of Bolivian Trotskyism; and other things which it seems necessary to clarify.

1.) June-July 1978. We met with Comrade Escobar, of the Vanguardia Comunista del P.O.R.... He demanded as a condition of unity, that POR (Combate) renounce the IV International... But later we learn that Nemesio of VC del P.O.R. was in Europe at the same time asking the United Secretariat to relate to V.C. DEL P.O.R.

2.) As a result of an internal crisis and the factional activity of the Bolshevik Faction, the O.S.T. was formed. Later Escobar broke with V.C. del P.O.R. and started Vanguardia Obrera Comunista (V.O.C.) In spite of this split, our party continued the relations with the V.C. del P.O.R. under the same accords established in June-July 1978.

At the end of January, we got unofficial news that the newly organized V.O.C. had called their founding congress and had invited delegates from the IV International as well as Hugo Blanco, a member of the leadership of the IV International. This seemed good to us, but our party, P.O.R. (Combate), the official section of the IV International was not invited to that congress. We want to clarify this point a bit more.

We, comrades of the Vanguardia Obrera (V.O.), are not Mandelistas, as Comrade Escobar calls us, but militants of the IV International. The normal thing would be to go through us, if you're interested in the IV International.

At first we thought these errors in conduct might be just "administrative" errors. But later, by looking at everything you write and do, we've come to understand that there's a political offensive against the P.O.R. and a denial of the revolutionary role of the movement-- organized trotskyism, ... P.O.R. (POR-Lora, POR-Combate).

(long paragraph on how the POR is Bolivian Trotskyism), and has been trying for unity discussion, but personal obstacles arise which should be secondary, but raise a big wall to Trotskyist unity.)

3.) After its first congress, the V.O.C. and P.O.R.-Combate signed, in the presence of a delegate of the IV, a promise to work for unity, including setting up a committee which would be charged with assuring that all the documents in the discussion reached all the members of both organizations. As was planned, the V.O.C. sent us

fifty copies of the documents from their congress...We sent them 50 copies each of two of our documents, on the elections and the FRI.. It is true that we sent our documents four days late, but we had problems.

Later, both leaderships met to discuss the points in question, that is to say, the seven points that our party had raised in January-February for the V.O.'s consideration. Those seven points were:

1. the revolutionary party
2. a balance sheet and perspectives on Bolivian Trotskyism
3. a historical balance sheet of the workers, peasants, popular and revolutionary movement in Bolivia
4. on present-day Bolivian politics
5. the politics of alliances and the FRI
6. armed struggle
7. The international situation, the IV International and the tasks of Bolivian Trotskyism.

We boiled these 7 points down to 5 and it seemed that things were moving along fine, now that the availability of the leadership of the V.O.C. showed clearly ~~and~~ the necessity and possibility of advancing on the road to Trotskyist unity. We took a break in the meetings, waiting for the arrival of Comrade Escobar, who at that time was in Europe.

4.) When Comrade Escobar returned, we agreed on a meeting..... We waited from 6:30 until 8 p.m. on the appointed day. Later we learned that Comrade Escobar was out of town that day.

WE don't think the faults of the leadership should be pinned on the entire membership. We tried to arrange other leadership meetings, but only Comrade Escobar would show up, and we couldn't settle anything. The last time, Comrade Escobar proposed forming a Block of Socialist Workers under an electoral program among the V.O., O.S.T., and P.O.P-Combate.

This proposal moved away from the aims outlined in the presence of the delegate from the IV International. Comrade Escobar let us know of his hard position on excluding the V.C. of P.O.R from the Block, arguing that Victor Sossa is a "lorista." They didn't give us any political argument, and this fact made us feel that their reasons weren't serious and more, that they reflected lorist sectarianism, that same approach which has never contributed anything positive to Bolivian Trotskyism.

5.) Through informants in Europe, and through the press, we found out about a possible visit to Bolivia by Hug Blanco, a member of the United Secretariat of the IV International, invited by the V.O. The V.O. comrades wouldn't tell us anything, despite persistent questioning. Neither would Escobar tell us about the conversations he had in Europe with the United Secretariat, despite what he had promised the United Secretariat comrades.

In this situation, our C.E.N. announced to the press orally and in writing the possible arrival of Comrad Hugo Blance, leader of the IV International, of which our party is the Bolivian section. We also prepared a program on the national level, because we considered

it only right that our party take into our hands organizational and security measures when a comrade from our world organization arrives in Bolivia. Our party did not declare that Huga Blanco came at our invitation, but that we were announcing his arrival because comrade Blanco is a militant and leader of our International. Also, we want to inform you comrades, that according to the information we have received, Blanco is coming to give us reports on the recent resolutions of the United Secretariat, especially a report from the U.S. delegation that was in Bolivia last February and on the XI World Congress which is coming up.

6.) We are aware that relations between two revolutionary organizations can be harmed if there isn't a frank and loyal relation. In the discussions around the electoral front, our party has had to combat the absurd sectarianism of groups which claim Trotskyist thinking, trying to keep out, for example the V.O. del P.O.R. or the V.O., a fact that has permitted tricky maneuvers by anti-Trotskyist groups.

On the other hand, we have also had to deal with the attitude of Comrade Escobar in the demonstration by the Independent Federation of La Paz Peasants on April 1, when the peasant comrades began to bring alive our slogan of a Workers and Peasants Government. Escobar said something to a comrade of ours that we would proclaim that slogan even into the bathroom and since it was a strategic slogan, we don't have to raise it. We reject this frivolous meddling by Trotskyists. To deny the validity of this slogan now, indicates ideological differences.

7.) In this way, the attitude of the V.O is at odds with the aims of our joint declaration. And this is complicated further when, after the normal, formal announcement of the Bolivian section of the possible visit of a leader of the IV International, some comrades of the V.O. leadership took the apolitical attitude of stopping greeting some of our leadership comrades. We think the correct thing to do if you thought our declaration was disloyal, would have been to ask for an immediate meeting. You didn't do that and what's more, you accused us of maneuvering in our approach. For us, comrades, maneuvering is at odds with the attitude and activity of a revolutionary; to us, it shows political weakness and ideological immaturity. In this case, your accusation is unfounded, because we are the first to combat and reject /olanetismo// inside the workers' movement and which, in the case of Bolivian politics, is an art of bourgeois and opportunist politicians.

8.) In accord with our declarations and intentions in relation to the possible unification of the Trotskyist movement and in accord with the contacts established in June-July 1978, and for the joint work achieved inside the FRI, the workers movement, peasants, universities, at the national level, and because of the agreements which have been achieved up until now between the P.O.R. -Combate and the Vanguardia Comunista del P.O.R., we have arrived at the conclusion that we should form the COMMITTEE FOR UNITY OF THE BOLIVIAN TROTSKYIST MOVEMENT, the declaration of which we have made public. This announcement has surprised no one; on the contrary, it confirms the spirit that both organizations have achieved in the recent months.

Rejecting

We reject the sectarian character which one sees so much in Trotskyist organizations, which reflects a personal rather than political approach, our party invites the comrades of the V.O. to join the committee for Unifying Bolivian Trotskyism, in order from there to sound out and examine our differences, push forward our agreements, with a view towards the road toward TROTSKYIST UNITY. In the same way we have invited, despite our serious differences, the comrades of the OST. In the same way, although through unofficial means, we have invited the comrades of the POR de Pié.

Under these clarifications and trying in a principled way to open the debate on the five approved points and on the basis of the revolutionary and internationalist principles, we invite you to a meeting with our party on the 24 of this month at 6:30 in our headquarters.

With revolutionary and internationalist greetings.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE POR-COMBATE

Francisco-Wallpa-Carlos-Sebastián-Mallku- Raúl-Lito

April 22, 1979

Vanguardia Obrera - Bolivia
Comité Central

To the Executive Committee of the POR(Combate)

The V.O. Answer to the Comrades of the POR(Combate)

ABOUT SMALL THINGS

In your letter of April 17 you take up a series of points about the relations between our two organizations, and as is natural, you touch on many important points, such as your criteria for the reconstruction or construction of ~~the leadership~~ the revolutionary leadership and party. Unfortunately, in the middle of these points you touch on a series of points which, despite being minor, it is important to clarify.

- Regarding the proposal of our leader FE that any possible unification of the Trotskyist forces would be at the periphery of the IV International, we should say that it was a requirement of the organization in which we belong, and with which we ~~are~~ were in agreement. That isn't in contradiction with the fact that some of our members were gathering information on the Fourth International; all the more so because in our organization we had members of the TB(today FB) to which you belong. It is another problem if, later, we adopt the line of discussing, before any unification, the international problem. That, besides being a product of experience, seems to us to be progress in our organization.
- Regarding the first National Congress of Vanguardia Obrera, we should say that, (it was an administrative error)
- Finally, comrades, it seems strange to us that you denounce "plañetismo within the workers movement" which is "an art of bourgeois and opportunist politicians", you have written a letter which, in the first place, isn't written to the leadership of our party and which, in the second place, makes personal allusions to our comrades, and which finally, uses our real names, although you use your war names.

A PROBLEM WHICH IS NOT OURS

Comrades, you certainly have the right to be the official section of the Fourth International in Bolivia, but at the same time, we have the right to seek our the international contacts that we find convenient. Starting from this premise, we have to say that our first contacts with the Fourth International through the TB. They sought us out and through them we began to know the IV better. It's clear, in the translation of the TB. For that reason, we have not only the right but the obligation to obtain more information on the problems of the International.

When we say that the problem isn't ours, we mean that if you believe that maintaining fraternal relation with the leadership of the IV has infringes on norms of organization statutes in the IV", you should discuss this with the leadership of the IV and not with us, because we don't belong to the IV. So you see, the problem is not with VO, but with the leadership of the IV.

THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM

When you refer in your letter to small things, you say that initially you believed that the problem was administrative in character, but later you came to understand that "a political offensive existed against the Bolivian POR, emphatically denying the revolutionary role of the organized Trotskyist movement, expressed in the initials P.O.R. (POR Lora, POR Combate)". Comrades, it is not that we deny the revolutionary role of the POR -- and forgive our honesty, we refer to the POR Lora--, it what we affirm is that the POR-Lora in its last stages had and has a counterrevolutionary role, because it led the working class to its worst defeats. For us the POR has finished its historic cycle; at one stage the bourgeoisie was revolutionary, so also at one point the POR was right, and was a progressive, revolutionary movement. But it has grown, has developed, and as a product of its errors, it has been buried. Reviewing the contributions of the revolutionary movement and like good Trotskyists we should know that the Bolsheviks went through a process, conquered power, and for a variety of reasons were squashed by Stalinism. The III International in the epoch of the fifth congress on was not the same as the III International in the epoch of the first four congresses. In comparing the deformation of the Bolshevik party and the III International, the tragedy additional of the POR is that it didn't even take power, it is a party that has been deformed prematurely, has rotted in the bud.

We have made a balance sheet on the POR and we think there is a basis for constructing the Trotskyist movement.....

True, there are big differences. For example, you think the POR- Combate, not the POR of Lora is the real thing. So you think you can revitalize the name, you say the name isn't important. But isn't Bolshevism different than Menshevism? Leninism different than Stalinism?

Trotskyist Unity: Volunteerism, candor or what?

We have a long history in the Bolivian Trotskyist movement. We spent four years in polemics inside the POR... later, we left with the most advanced members, broke with Lora. Those most advanced soon showed that they stuck to the traditions of Lora; today they are called the POR de pie (on foot?). When we said that a critical balance sheet was necessary to rebuild the party, they told us "work and don't discuss" explaining that "Lora is a theoretician and that's why he failed." That is why we broke with CO and company.

Later we saw in VS a valid participant in the discussion of the balance sheet. Despite the fact that this individual had only spoken up to make common cause with Lora against the "nationalism" of FE and his group. Only when Lora expelled him, S. wrote volumes against Lora, hysterically. We discussed with VS for a year... but in the end there were two opinions: we felt a new leadership and a new party must be built.

To us it seems that neither the POR de Pie or the POR of VS hve anything to do with Trotskyism, with the difference that the first work harder than the second. Both want to reconstruct the POR without Lora, both defend adventurist politics and ultraleft both--and in this they are like Lora--use slander instead of political discussion.

In conclusion, comrades of the POR-Combate, we don't have any interest in "Trotskyist unity"--and luckily now we aren't talking of posadismo--nor in participating in any "unification committee." We are interested in discussing with you and here's why: we think that there is a point of agreement and that is that we both are interested in making a balance sheet on the past. It is for this reason that we consider it important to have a political discussion with you, despite the fact that in the past few days you have done some things we consider regressive (Unity Committee with VS). To concretize, comrades, we want to say that, if you have discussed the subject of these discussions, we should in preparation for it exchange documents. In our case, that would be "Antecedents historical and political" of Vanguardia Obrera", approved by our First Congress. Later we have the "Plan for Vanguardia Obrera's Program," a document which takes up the characterization of the country, classes, the workers and peasants government, armed struggle, proletarian internationalism. A third document which we would put at your disposal is a balance sheet on the one year of existence of Vanguardia Communist of POR. These are the documents that we would submit to you, hoping that you would offer yours. The international problem is being discussed now in our organization and in September at a national conference we hope to define our balance sheet and arrive at some conclusions, including whether or not to enter the IV and on what positions.

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We want to explain why we are not participating in the planned front established between the POR of VS and the POR-Combate:

Fundamentally, we consider it impossible to do any work with the first group.

And in general, we believe that using the name POR closes the door to building a revolutionary party. As we explained above, we believe the POR has complete its historic cycle.

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We hope this letter ends a dangerous circle of misunderstandings between our organizations and allows us finally to begin the process of discussing the possibility of joining forces to construct the Party.

Revolutionarily,
for the Executive Committee
of Vanguardia Obrera

cc:IV Intl

s/Gregorio Olmos April 22, 1979