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**TROTSKYIST
DISCUSSION
BULLETIN**

POLITICS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
TROTSKYIST OPPOSITION:

A left opposition in the USFI?

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Introduction

This pack contains a number of documents unavailable elsewhere relating to the formation of the International Trotskyist Opposition (ITO) within the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI). The ITO was founded when the former Faction for a Trotskyist International of the USFI, led by Franco Grisolia, came together with the Trotskyist Opposition in the British USFI section and leaders of the expelled French youth section, JCR Egalité. It has published its tendency platform "Declaration of Principles" (July 1992) within the USFI.

The ITO is combining its formal project - a long term fight to make the next USFI World Congress an "open conference" - with an orientation towards various international Trotskyist organisations such as *Militant*, the WRP/WIRFI and the Liaison Committee of Communists (Voce Operaia and the Austrian RKL) and the French GSI (a split from Lambertism). One organisation significantly excluded from the ITO's "orientations" is the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. Despite requests for discussions with the ITO and its constituent groupings the LRCI has received no reply.

The documents in this bulletin go some way to explaining why. The ITO is on course to create yet another failed opposition within the USFI and yet another unprincipled international bloc. Its unifying feature will be opposition to the LRCI's programmatic clarity and unflinching struggle for revolutionary regroupment.

The LRCI's *Critique of the ITO Platform* lays out our basic disagreement with the politics of the Tendency and explains their pedigree in the politics of Alan Thornett's TILC and the former International Trotskyist Committee (ITC).

We also publish here for the first time a substantial critique of the LRCI's founding document, *The Trotskyist Manifesto*, by comrade ND, formerly of the Revolutionary Internationalist League, the ITC's British Section. Despite being advertised for publication two years ago *Critique of the Re-elaborated Programme* was never published or properly agreed by the RIL before the organisation split in 1992.

In November 1992 ND and his collaborator GD announced that they were intending to leave the RIL/ITC and apply for membership of the British USFI and the ITO within it, joining other former RIL comrades who left when the initial ITC split occurred in July 1992. Recognising that ND himself may have changed his opinions on his draft critique we wrote to him and offered him the chance to revise it. He did not reply. It remains a substantial critique and a reply by the LRCI is all the more necessary since it has been furtively circulated an "official" ITO document to individuals within the USFI.

The USFI is in crisis and terminal decline. Its British section is wracked by factional struggle over whether to fester in the Labour Party, launch an open organisation on an opportunist platform, or to make some form of break with the method of the past. We say to those within the British Section who want to make that break that only the politics of the LRCI are capable of guiding it to a revolutionary conclusion. This lesson has already been drawn by two of the delegates to the ITO's founding conference and we are unashamed in our attempt to convince others to follow.

The material in this pack offers but a glimpse of the crisis in the USFI. To read the LRCI's full critique of various developments before and after the XIII World Congress read the articles in our international press, available on request from Workers Power at the address below.

Workers Power March 1993

POLITICS OF THE ITO

No answer to USFI's crisis

The existence of an International Trotskyist Opposition (ITO) within the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) must appear encouraging to those members of the USFI who have watched for years as their leaders steadily abandoned more and more Trotskyist and Leninist positions. The disorientation and disintegration of the USFI reveal the need for a struggle to win the best elements to Trotskyism and away from the adaptation to, or dissolution into, various left Stalinist, reformist and Maoist organisations or petit bourgeois movements.

What does the ITO offer to militants within the USFI who want to reverse this abandonment of Trotskyism? In 1992 the grouping was launched following the coming together of a number of oppositional tendencies. Some of these, like the comrades of the Faction for a Trotskyist International, have been distinct, organised oppositions for many years. Others, such as the French comrades, had recently moved to the left.

Already the ITO has attracted interest around the world, as the collapse of Stalinism reveals the depth of the bankruptcy of the USFI leadership. At one level, the launch of the ITO clearly corresponded a felt need amongst the best militants of the USFI.

But the answer provided by the ITO to the crisis of the USFI is insufficient, both polemically and programatically. At its founding conference it adopted a "Declaration of Principles" which it will use in its tendency struggle within the USFI. Although the document ranges from the historic necessity of socialism to the need for a world party of the proletariat it is not, as claimed in the "Draft declaration of tasks of the ITO" adopted at the same meeting, "a programme . . . for the political regeneration and organisational reconstruction of the Fourth International".

From principles to adaptation

The ITO's founding document is precisely a "Declaration of Principles". The differences with the programmatic documents of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky are striking. The ITO deliberately advances positions that are vague and empty of programmatic content. Most of them are deliberately so anodyne and abstract that virtually any self-respecting "Trotskyist" could agree with them. After all, who could oppose "the aim of the Trotskyist party is to win hegemony over the masses in action", a criticism of "socialism in one country" or the call for "unification on the programmatic bases of Bolshevism of the forces of the vanguard of the proletariat"? But despite this carefully crafted catalogue of truisms there are a number of positions which reveal a systematic streak of opportunism.

The Declaration argues for the building of non-proletarian mass movements of the oppressed and exploited, "mobilising not only the proletariat but also the non-proletarian

oppressed and middle layers". It argues that revolutionaries "must fight against the petty-bourgeois (or sometimes bourgeois) leaderships of these movements, struggling for proletarian leadership of the non-proletarian mass movements."

Whilst this is better than the equivalent section in previous versions of the document (partly as a result of our polemics) it is still flawed and mistaken.

We agree that oppression of women, lesbians and gay men, youth etc exists in all classes, and that petit bourgeois and even bourgeois elements will be drawn into struggle around their oppression, but we do not draw the same conclusions as the Declaration. The ITO documents says that "They (non-proletarian mass movements - WP) are therefore continually brought into conflict with the capitalist class and its state."

This is an adaptation to petit bourgeois "movementism", to the idea that such movements - be they the peace movements of the early 1980s or the women's movement of the 1970s - are "objectively anti-capitalist" or have an "anti-capitalist dynamic".

Bourgeois and petit bourgeois women, or other oppressed sectors, while facing real oppression under capitalism, do not have the same interests as proletarian and poor peasant women in emancipation through working class revolution. Their interests are not solely, nor primarily, determined by their oppression, but rather by their relationship to production, by their class position.

Of course the best oppressed individuals within the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie may be ideologically convinced of the need to struggle for socialism to overcome oppression. But this is not the same as arguing that their struggle against oppression will automatically bring them into conflict with capitalism in the state.

That this is not an isolated "poor formulation" but part of a wrong method is shown by the section on the "anti-imperialist united front". The comrades reject the "revisionist" idea that "it is possible to establish anti-imperialist united fronts with the national bourgeoisie of an oppressed country", arguing that only petit-bourgeois nationalist parties or organizations can be partners in such a front. The only kinds of agreement which are permitted with the national bourgeoisie are "limited practical agreements". But surely, comrades, that is a united front!

The ITO clearly suggest that something other than "limited practical agreements" are possible with "petit-bourgeois nationalist parties", in the name of the "anti-imperialist united front". This is opportunism masquerading as orthodoxy. Call them what you will: the only kinds of agreements which are possible with forces of other classes are precisely "limited practical agreements". Anything else - such as an electoral bloc or a common organisation - will inevitably lead to a confusion of banners, to an opportunist adaptation of the revolutionary programme to that of the alien class

forces.

As with the section on oppression, the comrades around the FTI have changed their formulations over the years in reaction to our criticisms. But the fundamental methodological error resists all re-drafting, for the simple reason that this is what the comrades believe. Their cross-class "movementism" in the imperialist countries goes hand in hand with leaving the door open to an unprincipled "united front" in anti-imperialist struggles.

Denunciation is not enough

Oppositionists within the USFI will agree with the ITO on the need to resolve the political crisis in the Fourth International, which according to them includes two elements: "political revisionism and organisational dispersion". To rally people within and outside of the USFI (the ITO directs its appeal to the whole "world Trotskyist movement") it is necessary to explain exactly what the errors of the existing USFI leadership are and have been, how these can be understood in relationship to the degeneration of the revolutionary tradition of the FI, and what would have been the correct positions to have fought for in key events of the class struggle.

This approach is important not for reasons of "revolutionary purity" or in order to insult the USFI leadership, but because without a clear diagnosis of the errors, the necessary prescription for regenerating Trotskyism cannot be determined.

Many oppositionists within the FI, and certainly many opposing groups who claim adherence to Trotskyism, will agree that the USFI is indeed marked by political revisionism and organisational dispersion. Many will also agree with the ITO when it states, "The problem is that for decades the leadership of the FI, in part for subjective, in part for objective reasons, has not been able to build the International and strengthen it politically and organisationally enough so that it could become a mass Fourth International", and that there is a need to launch "a struggle against the deepening revisionism of the majority leadership of the USFI".

But will all the oppositionists - or even all the members of the ITO - agree on which particular positions, interventions or perspectives and on which bit of the leadership over the years were revisionist? Was it the belief that the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution installed some kind of "workers' government"? Was it the entry into the British Labour Party and the attempted creation of a class struggle left wing with left reformist forces? Was it the support for and attempted fusion with ex-Communist Party members around Pierre Juquin in France? Was it the description of Cuba as a workers' state, not degenerate but merely needing some reforms? Or was it the USFI position on the USSR in the Gorbachev years which called for a "deeper glasnost"? Or the total adaptation to Solidarnosc, including its pro-imperialist leadership? Or all of the above?

And if the USFI leadership(s) were wrong over, for example Nicaragua, what was the revolutionary position? Could revolutionaries have given any support to, or even entered the Sandinista government? Or in Poland how should revolutionaries have intervened around the mass movement led by Solidarnosc, and where would we have stood when Jaruzelski sent the troops in? Where would revolutionary Trotskyists have placed their forces during the August Coup in the Soviet Union?

Our purpose in raising these questions is not to go through the last 30 years of international class struggle and present the line of the LRCI alongside a critique of the USFI, but to point out that there are many different issues on which the USFI leadership has taken wrong positions, and also many interpretations of the "revolutionary" position. In the process of defeating the ideas and actions of the revisionist leadership of the USFI it is necessary to be precise in identifying errors and in providing alternative

positions.

If all that was needed was a denunciation of the revisionism of the USFI leadership, then almost the whole of the left that has any adherence to Trotskyism, including a majority of the USFI, would join the ITO. Rectifying the errors and building "a mass Fourth International" on a revolutionary basis requires a serious accounting with the errors of the past, an understanding of the process of degeneration of the FI.

No criticism from the ITO

The "principles" put forward by the ITO contain neither a rounded critique of the USFI's leadership or practice, nor any positions on the key issues that have divided those who regard themselves as Trotskyists over the past three decades. Without such clarity the "Declaration of Principles" remains an ineffectual statement of broad principles which fails to arm revolutionaries. The ITO's only criticisms of the USFI leadership are the following:

"The International majority has for some time been progressively abandoning the perspective of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Now, in face of the fall of the Stalinist regimes and under pressure from the reformist leaderships - for example, the Lula leadership in the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) - it is abandoning the concept of the Leninist party as the essential political instrument of the proletariat in the struggle for socialism. This political break with Leninism, is reflected organisationally both in the dissolution of sections and, in those sections that remain, in an organisational regime in which the leaders do as they please and the members do as they please".

"For a long time, there has been a tendency in the USFI to lose sight of the general value of the method (of the Transitional Programme - WP) as a system of intervention in the class struggle. There is a tendency to consider transitional demands simply as the 'most radical' demands that can be used when it is necessary to have a higher political profile. There is also a tendency to forget the general methodological importance of using transitional demands as a form of agitation, where the objective situation and our forces allow it. . . We also have to reject a method that has marked the policy of the USFI in the past, that is, the pretension that we can seize on one 'anti-capitalist demand' that has a unique and central value for our action in the class struggle."

"For fifty years the Trotskyist movement has been under massive pressure from the Stalinists and reformists, and sections of it have adapted to the Stalinist conception of the united front as a policy of mixing banners, and even to the transformation of the united front into a popular front with directly bourgeois forces. In many cases, the small size of the Trotskyist organisations has intensified that pressure, as the organisation's independent agitation has seemed so weak as to be ineffective. Often the adaptation has taken the form of turning the united front into an abstract general principle to which the organisation's independent propaganda is sacrificed. A Trotskyist rejection of mixing banners is then characterised as 'sectarian'. The Fourth International must make a decisive break from this adaptation and return to the Leninist policy of the united front as an agreement on concrete practical action, within which the participants put out their own propaganda and agitation."

These timid criticisms of the leadership of the FI are broadly correct, so far as they go, but they hardly form a convincing or rounded analysis of decades of vacillation and misleadership. Nor are any examples of these crimes presented, as if making specific rather than general criticisms would cause offence - or reveal differences.

Even more striking is the fact that the "declaration" contains whole sections on the working class and permanent revolution, the need for independent revolutionary parties in all countries, the need for a democratic centralist international, the revolutionary struggle in the trade un-

ions, centrism, the anti-imperialist united front, the workers' government, oppression, the national question, the deformed workers' states and war, and in each of these contains no critique of the disastrous centrist policies of the USFI!

Take the section on oppression, for example. The ITO makes a general statement about the necessity for the proletariat and its party to be a "tribune of the people" and champion the struggle of all the oppressed and exploited. Who could disagree? It goes on to argue for mass movements of the oppressed, including the statement "(Trotskyists) must fight against the petty-bourgeois (or sometimes bourgeois) leaderships of these movements, struggling for proletarian leadership of the non-proletarian mass movements". It also calls for the creation of revolutionary caucuses where movements of the oppressed are under opportunist leaderships. There is not a word of criticism of the USFI's practice on oppression!

There is no recognition that the USFI has taken key positions within the leadership of cross-class movements and used their positions to hound Trotskyists not only for organising "caucuses" but for daring to argue revolutionary class politics within these movements. The USFI leadership in Britain, for example, adapted to the petit bourgeois feminists all along on theory, organisation and politics. They became the hatchet women of the feminists, denouncing revolutionaries for the crime of fighting against the petit bourgeois leaderships and struggling for proletarian leadership.

How to fight against "Trotskyist" centrism

Perhaps the ITO consider that the positive principles they advocate are sufficient, or that they form a clever "hidden polemic" by arguing abstract positions that the USFI has clearly rejected in practice. If this is the idea behind the document's method it is an inadequate, even dishonest, way of building an opposition. To rectify mistakes requires that they are identified, understood and the correct alternative debated out and agreed upon.

The USFI is a centrist organisation and has been since its inception in 1963. Composed of a reunification of most of the elements of the 1953 split in the Fourth International, the USFI has never broken with the centrism which marked the FI from 1951 onwards. It shares this characteristic with virtually all the various "Trotskyist" organisations which, through the many subsequent splits and fusions, have retained the fundamental centrist errors of this initial degeneration. We have written on this elsewhere, particularly in our book *The Death Agony of the Fourth International and the Tasks of Trotskyists Today* (Workers Power & Irish Workers Group, 1983). Before the errors of the present and recent FI leadership can be corrected, an understanding and agreement on the origins of this centrism within the FI is necessary.

To group together a new leadership capable of defeating the revisionists requires clarity of understanding of the degeneration of the FI, a sharp critique of the present leadership and a programme which deals with the necessary strategy and tactics in the class struggle at the moment. But the Declaration fails on all three counts. It neither provides a coherent critique of the USFI leadership, nor an evaluation of the degeneration of the FI nor, whilst purporting to be a programme, does it provide a guide to action in the current class struggle. It does state a number of "principles" of Trotskyism, but does not give them the level of detailed content necessary for the discussion of concrete situations.

A bit of history

The driving force behind the ITO is what used to be the Faction for a Trotskyist International, led by Franco Grisolia

of the Italian section of the USFI. The method used by the ITO in its founding documents is that used by the comrades of the FTI to build their organisation over nearly 15 years. Indeed, not only the method is the same: the very document adopted by the ITO is an amended version of one first put forward in 1980!

At the end of 1979 the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC) was formed. It included within it the British Workers Socialist League (WSL), led by Alan Thornett (now in the USFI), the Bolshevik Leninist Group (GBL, later the LOR) of Italy, plus the RWL of the USA and the TAF of Denmark. As well as adopting the original version of the ITO "Declaration of Principles", the TILC adopted a document called "The Transitional Programme in today's class struggle". It explicitly confined itself to revolutionary principles without any discussion of their tactical application. We were observers at the founding conference of the TILC, and we explained that this was a method of building an international tendency which would inevitably cover over real political differences, and would sooner or later lead to a split.

Three years later, we were proved right. The TILC's founding documents, like those of the ITO, contained a formally correct position on any war between a semi-colony and imperialism, namely defeatism for the imperialist country and defencism with regard to the semi-colony. But at the first concrete test, the member organisations took different positions on the outbreak of war between Argentina and Britain over the Malvinas.

The abstract principles failed to help when it was revealed that the British section, having a different understanding not of general principles but of the specifics of, in this case, the "right to self determination" of colonial settlers, decided that this was the decisive feature. The British section took a defeatist position on both sides, whilst their comrades in the other sections correctly stood on the other side in the conflict and defended Argentina against imperialist aggression. The TILC split.

The non-Thornett TILC groupings subsequently set up the International Trotskyist Committee (ITC) with sections inside and outside of the USFI which in turn split; those inside the USFI (principally in Italy and Denmark) created the Faction for a Trotskyist International (FTI) which gained some more support (e.g. France). The FTI then helped to set up the ITO.

The ins and outs of all these splits are largely of interest only to archivists, but what is of fundamental importance is to understand why this method of regroupment is so wrong. For those who look to the ITO as a step forward in the USFI it is important to recognise how unstable and ultimately impotent tendencies built on such a basis are.

The problem with the ITO

The ITO is being built on the basis of broad agreement on principles which serve to cover up real differences of analysis, perspective and programme amongst its members. In addition, it is not clear in its critique of the USFI leadership.

The section of the document on the crisis of leadership defines as centrist organisations whose positions vacillate between reformism and Trotskyism, have not in general developed overt consistent counter-revolutionary activity, and with their opportunist policies constitute "a supplementary obstacle to the proletarian revolution".

That definition fits the USFI very well, even according to the relatively mild critique in the Declaration. Yet the comrades stop short of applying the label to the organisation that they are seeking to reform. Why? This has long been the method of those within the USFI who seek to reform it from within. They regard it as having a leadership making serious errors, but not requiring the name centrist as this would perhaps frighten off USFI members from supporting the opposition and may even get them expelled from the USFI.

But regrouping a revolutionary vanguard to rescue revolutionary politics from the revisionism of the USFI and the other large FI fragments is a serious and urgent task. The Declaration itself suggests that the crisis of humanity is "in elemental form the crisis of the Fourth International". Diplomacy, leading to a refusal to label the leadership centrist will only serve to confuse, not clarify. The "crisis of humanity" will continue.

Mandel is not about to read the ITO Declaration, recognise his errors and turn the USFI into a healthy International. He needs to be exposed as a misleader, as do all the other USFI leaders, majority and minority, for their role in miseducating thousands of young militants, and squandering opportunities for the working class and oppressed.

The reluctance to call the USFI centrist is not just a diplomatic nicety. It is based on a wrong understanding of revolutionary regroupment as outlined above, but also on a false idea about the fate of the FI and of Trotskyism.

The Declaration explicitly argues that the USFI is only a fragment of the FI, and argues "the need to develop the struggle for the political regeneration and organisational reconstruction of the Fourth International in all the trends of the world Trotskyist movement".

This "FI" is clearly not the USFI, or it could not exist "in all trends of the world Trotskyist movement". What is it then? Is it a programme which all the different fragments agree upon? Clearly not, since they all argue vociferously about what is wrong with the others. Is it the tradition of the revolutionary struggle against Stalinism in the 1930s? Partly, but to be of any practical use in today's class struggle, the political lessons of 60 years ago need to be applied clearly and concretely. And that leads us back to the political differences which separate the myriad tendencies which claim to be Trotskyist.

Ernest Mandel thinks that the FI exists. He also thinks he leads it. Gerry Healy thought the same thing. Pierre Lambert and Nahuel Moreno did too. So too did Anibal Ramos and Michel Varga. There has hardly been a shortage over the years of groups claiming to be "the" FI. But no matter how crazy some of their ideas may have been, at least their versions of "the FI" were rooted in concrete reality: their own groups.

The FTI/ITO idea that the FI exists as a set of ideas, somewhere in the heads of scattered groups of Trotskyists across the six continents is a nonsensical myth, a metaphysical comforter for all those looking for an excuse not to break politically with one of its fragments.

The world Trotskyist movement, referred to at other times as "the world family of Trotskyism", is a similar vague claim that there is something common to those whose centrism originates in the degeneration of the FI that distinguishes them from centrists from reformist or Stalinist traditions. Again this creates illusions in some kind of "special" form of centrism, and leads to the conclusion that revolutionary regeneration will necessarily occur through some regroupment of these dissident Trotskyist siblings. Indeed, the ITC/FTI used to peddle this kind of argument to explain that the USFI itself was a particularly healthy form of "centrism sui generis" as they called it.

We reject this argument. The centrism of groups that have their origins in the FI can be as right wing and disastrous for the working class as centrists of any origin. Revolutionaries need to make this clear, not promote the illusion that the USFI, or the LIT or any other "Fourth International" are a more progressive kind of centrism. A decisive break needs to be made from both their organisations and politics to win militants to revolutionary Trotskyism. Where there are numbers of disaffected members a faction fight within the USFI is absolutely correct and necessary. But such a struggle must lead to a break with the existing USFI, recognising this will not be a process of steady reform but rather one of forcing a split with the inveterate centrist leaders.

In or out of the USFI?

What are the ITO's perspectives? The Opposition's documents are deliberately vague. The "organizational resolution" argues that their intervention in the USFI "will culminate in the struggle around the Fourteenth World Congress". This clearly suggests that their work within the USFI could be over in 2 to 3 years.

But if this is the case - and this accusation has been used in factional attacks against ITO members, notably those around the JCR-Egalité in France by the majority of the USFI - why does the ITO refuse to clearly characterise itself as a faction?

In the history of Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism the terms faction and tendency have quite distinct meanings. A faction is a group of oppositionists who have a distinct platform from the leadership and are trying to replace the existing leadership. Trotsky's struggle inside the CPSU and the Comintern in the late twenties and early thirties was a factional one. A tendency on the other hand is organised to change particular policies of the organisation, not overthrow a bankrupt leadership. Which is it to be?

The draft organisational resolution of the ITO explicitly states that it is a tendency. Its aims are "to conduct a tendency struggle in the USFI against the revisionist and liquidationist line of the International majority". Does this mean that the comrades are agreed that the line can be changed without changing the leadership? If this is the case, it seems strange that one of the founding organisations of the ITO, indeed the originator of the call for the ITO, was the *Faction* for a Trotskyist International. As an open faction it was fighting to change the leadership.

It appears as if the members of the FTI have changed their position and agreed that a factional struggle is not necessary and a tendency will do. Or perhaps they just dropped the term factional in order to win broader support. This is no way to defeat revisionism inside the USFI or any other organisation. It is a refusal to take seriously and fight for the positions you believe in, and instead replace them with a diplomatic compromise to win wider influence but at the expense of fighting for your programme against the established leadership.

A consciously opportunist method

This is the fundamental method that the ex-TILC, ex-ITC and now ex-FTI members have been using for nearly 15 years. In addition to compromising over whether they need a factional or a tendency struggle, they are always keen to compromise on political positions rather than risk losing partners in their tendency. The vague statement of principles will appeal to many people but glosses over many real differences that exist among those that sign up to join the tendency.

A new revolutionary leadership, true to the positions of Lenin, Trotsky, the first four congresses of the Comintern and the founding documents of the FI, needs to be forged through common agreement on the principles, strategy and tactics of the class struggle. With agreement on programme, including key tactics, a new leadership can be built within the working class through practical intervention and defeating the centrist, reformist and nationalist alternative leaderships.

The TILC-ITC-FTI tradition has always rejected the idea that revolutionary regroupment needs to be on the basis of agreement on tactics as well as strategy and principles, arguing that tactics are somehow less fundamental. This is a serious error leading to the kind of compromise positions we see in the declaration.

This is clearest when we look at the key question of the last few years: the collapse of Stalinism. Not surprisingly, the Declaration says very little about the programme of revolutionaries in this situation. There are of course broad statements on the transitional nature of the economies and states, the need to defend social property and the call for a

political revolution "of a special type".

But the international workers' movement has been thrown into disarray by the wave of political revolutionary crises which have swept Eastern Europe since 1989. The growth of democratic struggles in these states, the mass revolutionary uprisings against Stalinist repression in some of the states, and the ability of pro-imperialist and nationalist leaderships to come to the head of these movements, leading them to counter-revolution - all these developments have been testing the principles, strategies and tactics of all sectors of the labour movement, including self proclaimed Trotskyists. This has been the most important development of recent years, and if revolutionaries fail to analyse it correctly and develop the correct strategies they will be unable to build the mass international that the ITO claim to want.

The August coup in the USSR in 1991 was a key event. One wing of the bureaucracy staged a coup, and was resisted by another wing of the bureaucracy. Events like this in the midst of political and economic turmoil can be the spark for revolutions, counter-revolutions and the rapid development of political forces through struggle. Revolutionary internationalists must put forward a position on such events, we cannot throw up our hands and say - it's a long way away and we are not sure what to say.

But the "declaration" says nothing. Perhaps they forgot? No, they did not forget since it was a point for discussion amongst those coming together to form the tendency. The reason it is missing is because the people within the ITO disagree. On the one hand the Grisolia supporters have a position of "we would have supported the coup if only the masses had supported it", believing that it represented some kind of defence of the USSR against restorationists. Others argued for opposition to the coup and defence of the democratic gains made in the previous six years.

Staying silent on such an issue does not resolve the problem. It guarantees that the farce of the TILC's collapse in the face of the war will be repeated. Were the August coup to happen tomorrow, the ITO would be completely split. It would either be reduced to silence or would see its different components putting forward positions which would, literally, put them on opposite sides of the barricades! And they deliberately chose not to confront this difference! This is hardly the mark of a serious revolutionary opposition. The ITO consciously sacrificed political clarity in the name of short-term organisational expediency.

Confronting such differences in an attempt to reach common agreement on programme can lead to the development of positions, to the welding together of a leadership around a common programme based on living struggles, to establishing a solid basis for revolutionary regroupment.

Why do we think that key tactics are so important? Having correct tactics for a strike, a campaign, a demonstration, a war, or a revolution will determine not only who will win, assuming your tactics are adopted, but will also demonstrate the correctness of revolutionary principles and strategy to workers in struggle. Tactics are not divorced or secondary issues, they are the focusing of and implementation of programme, and they are fundamental to winning leadership within the working class.

The wrong positions of centrist leaderships are often on tactical questions, but frequently signify an underlying methodological difference on points of strategy. Glossing over tactical differences will, in reality, also cover up differences over strategy. This is clearly the case with regard to the August coup and the ITO.

Conclusion

The development of an international opposition which claims to advance a revolutionary critique of the USFI is of great importance. The USFI continues to organise thousands of militants around the world, many of them subjective revolutionaries, increasingly revolted by the opportunist

ism of their leaderships. The USFI majority leadership is aware of this, and at the moment the ITO is the subject of their factional attentions.

Yet the ITO does not represent a revolutionary alternative for critical members of the USFI. Over 15 years, the method employed by its founders has proved their inability to forge a new programme and a new organisation. The potential represented by those who have recently been attracted to the banner of the ITO will be wasted if the old method, which led to the shipwreck of the TILC and the wasted years of the ITC, is repeated.

Building a group around positions which are designed to cover up real political differences can hardly lead to a thoroughgoing fight for political clarification against the USFI leadership. If we can detect the political differences between the various components of the ITO from outside the USFI, you can be sure that the USFI majority will be able to do at least as much. The political differences concealed by the ITO will explode to the surface at the first real test of the international class struggle. Rather than being part of the answer to the "crisis of the Fourth International", the leaders of the ITO are confirming their status as part of the problem.

We do not simply address a call to the comrades of the ITO to join the LRCI. Those of you who consider that we are right on any or all of these points but who think that your leaderships can be won over should raise your criticisms within your national sections and win your comrades away from their current method. The key task is to apply the method of Trotsky's Transitional Programme to today's class struggle and to fight for international revolutionary regroupment on a clear programmatic basis, devoid of diplomatic "no-go" areas and evasive centrist abstractions. That was Trotsky's method in the 1930s; it should be our method today.★

CRITIQUE OF THE RE-ELABORATED PROGRAMME

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This document was originally conceived as a critique by the *C of the LRCI's 'Trotskyist Manifesto' and substantially written in the summer of 1990. Some more work was done in about February 1991. Since then, nothing. The *C/R# essentially ditched the project for a number of reasons, all of them bad ones. Rather than fiddle about with it I have decided to circulate it in its original, incomplete form as soon as possible in order to provoke discussion. Cdes are invited to comment, criticise, update or whatever, but I think that something should come out in some form, even if only semi-public, as a challenge to the LRCI's "bible" is long overdue.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT THE 'TROTSKYIST MANIFESTO' IS, AND WHY A RESPONSE IS NECESSARY

Launched at the end of 1989 by the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) amidst some triumphalism, the 'Trotskyist Manifesto' (TM) purports to be the "re-elaboration" of Trotsky's Transitional Programme, but even concerning its stated aim and purpose there is a definite air of ambiguity and confusion. Within the ranks of Workers' Power, the LRCI's British section, some regard it as a bible to be thumped. Others, more modestly and more seriously see it as a summation of the theoretical progress made by WP/LRCI since the emergence from the International Socialists (IS) in the mid 1970s. This is not a new programme, but a fudge which sacrifices clarity. It is, in fact, a very slippery document, diplomatically written, which has something for everybody. It has been awaited several years and took so long to produce because it had to meet so many pressures from differing political positions internally and from other LRCI sections. It has confused and confusing positions, sometimes within a few pages of each other. Whatever the claims made for the document, coming from a current which claims to take a more serious approach than most to questions of programmatic clarity and development, and with which we share, at least formally, a number of important positions, it deserves thorough consideration and a serious reply.

It is no accident that this has not yet been done. The LRCI shares with the *C the position that Trotsky's Fourth International (FI) collapsed into centrism in 1951. Both refute any idea of "continuity"—the "thin red line" of Trotskyism. Both regard all the currents claiming to be the FI, or the organising centre for its reconstruction as centrist, in other words, say that they do not consistently defend the programme of Trotskyism, yet neither have they passed, as have social-democracy and Stalinism, into the camp of counter-revolution. While it is not inconceivable that one or other of these centrist currents might venture a criticism of the TM, centrists have never been the most consistent or exacting critics of centrism. The job of making any sort of serious and objective analysis of the TM within its own terms of reference therefor falls to the *C.

In many respects the TM is a distillation of the political method of the LRCI/WP, reflecting both the strengths and weaknesses of the tendency. In terms of its content, some of the TM is an overdue and constructive attempt to develop the 1938 Transitional Programme, both to take account of developments of the last 50 years, and to develop those aspects which by

the Trotsky's own admission were incomplete, such as the struggles in the semi-colonies. However, at the heart of the TM is all that is negative about the LRCI/WP: scholasticism, primitive economism, and most importantly, an apparently irredeemable sectarianism on the fundamental question of international regroupment, manifesting itself as confused agnosticism on what are the tasks in the present period, and on what should be their programmatic basis. This weakness eats away at the guts of the TM, producing the evident confusion on what is the ultimate purpose of the document.

CONFUSION ON THE PROGRAMME

The introduction to the TM contains a general exposition of the LRCI's conception of the Transitional Programme, with apparently uncontroversial observations on the transitional method itself, on the need for a "bridge" between the minimum and the maximum, stating that while the transitional method predates 1938, the Transitional Programme was the:

"clearest and most complete expression that had occurred in the preceding 90 years of Marxism" (p3) and that:

"programmatic declarations of Marxism were enriched as capitalist society developed. In each case the Marxists found it necessary to refine and re-elaborate the programme in the light of experience, which in Trotsky's words, is the supreme criterion of human reason"(ibid)

Clearly, Marxists have to be continually developing the Marxist programme. The failure to develop the 1938 programme was part of its abandonment in practice by post-war Trotskyists. Where it has been used, inadequately, this has generally manifested a one-sided view of programme either as abstract propaganda, or in a purely agitational way. This means that when conditions become unfavourable for large-scale agitational work, the programme is seen as redundant. In both cases, there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the method of the Transitional Programme- of the duality between propaganda and agitation. Either the duality is ignored so that propaganda and agitation become indistinguishable and the Transitional Programme is ladled up in huge, indigestible chunks, irrespective of the needs and demands of the situation. On the other hand, there is the notion that the programme is simply an agitational tool, to oil the wheels of the "onward movement of the working class". When this "onward movement" judders to a halt, and it becomes difficult to raise advanced demands in a purely agitational way on a large scale, then the whole programme is deemed inappropriate- both agitation and propaganda. Both these wrong methods are characteristic of the crisis of post-war Trotskyism, and we shall return to this question later.

The Programme's updating and development are inseparable from the fight for its method, for consistent Trotskyism, for international regroupment and regeneration, and against the sectarians and opportunists who have made a profession of the distortion of Trotskyism over the past forty years. At least that is how the ITC understands it.

How does the LRCI understand it?

On p4 of the TM it states that:

"Our programme, like the 1938 programme, is a development of the previous

programmes of Marxism, not a break from them. It stands on the shoulders of the preceding gains of revolutionary Marxism. It bases itself on their method and incorporates all their essential features as well as many of their demands".

However, the TM does not live up to the extravagant claims made on its behalf. For a start, for all the talk about the "re-elaboration" of the Transitional Programme, the TM is in fact intended to replace it. The whole project is based on a profound misconception of what the Transitional Programme is, and what it represents. In order to justify its own existence, the TM presents the Transitional Programme in a completely one-sided way. Throughout the 'Introduction' there are frequent assertions that the Transitional Programme is an "action programme" and nothing else. (e.g. p4)

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Certainly aspects of it have that character, for example the opening: "Mankind's productive forces stagnate" ('TP' SLL edition p10). This was true at that time, and the TP was written in the expectation of imminent war-revolution and current world crisis. In that sense, it was an action programme to equip the FI programmatically at a particular conjuncture. However, that is not fundamentally what the Transitional Programme is. The Transitional Programme is a programme for this epoch, the epoch of Imperialism, an epoch of wars and revolutions. It is a programme which addresses itself to the crisis of working class leadership, to Stalinism and social-democracy and the need to build a world party of socialist revolution.

Is a new programme necessary? Has, for example, Stalinism become a new mode of production? Have the "Trotskyists" crossed class lines as did the degenerate Comintern? The answer is of course No, subject to well-known exceptions in the latter case. So what does all this preoccupation with the programme mean for the LRCI? Surely it boils down to the question of the international: a new international, a new programme.

For us, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), the International Workers' League (IWL) and others are not counter-revolutionary, there can be a serious perspective of struggle around the Trotskyist programme. This is based on our understanding of these centrist forces as not only continuing to formally identify with Trotskyism, but to actually continue to defend aspects of the Trotskyist programme in practice, albeit inconsistently and inadequately, and to act as a pole of attraction to advanced workers.

The LRCI's perspective is different. It is not one of struggle, but of passive and sectarian propagandism. That is how WP have built many of the LRCI's sections, that is how they approached the break-up of the WRP. This is how they approach the crises in the USFI. Its conception of programme flows from this practical method.

However, in px of the 'Preface' to the TM we read that the problem is not that the Transitional Programme is out of date, it is that it has: "long been abandoned by those who call themselves his followers". Fight for the existing programme, or draft a new one? This is just one of the examples of self-contradiction and ambiguity that, despite its triumphalism, run through the whole document.

LRCI say "re-elaborate"
w dishonesty

THE CLASS STRUGGLE AS THE "MOTOR OF HISTORY"

On p1 of the "Introduction" of the TM there appears the statement that the:

"Marxist programme asserts that the class struggle is the motor force of history".

As a description of Marxist historical materialism this is simply wrong. The motor force of history is not the class struggle, but the development of the productive forces, and the contradiction between this development and the social relations of production.

The class struggle is part of the superstructure, dependent on the economic base, or infrastructure. Anxious to refute accusations of crude economic determinism, and conscious that they may have overstated their case at the outset, Marx and Engels frequently qualified this relationship, pointing out that the class struggle, as well as law, politics and ideology was no mere passive agent of the economic base, but capable of dialectically interacting with it, and in fact giving many historical struggles their particular form, while remaining, ultimately, subordinate. This qualification is actually expressed most lucidly by Engels in a letter to Joseph Bloch (September 1890):

"According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimate* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor myself have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms the proposition into a meaningless, abstract senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure- political forms of the class struggle after a successful battle etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into a system of dogmas- also exercise their influence in the course of the historical struggles, and in many cases predominate in determining the *form*. There is an interaction of all these elements, in which, amid all the endless hosts of historical accidents, (that is of things and events whose interconnection is so remote or so impossible to prove that we can regard it as nonexistent, as negligible), the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary. Otherwise the application of the theory to to any period of history would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree."

So what, then, lies behind the LRCI's revision of Marxism on this question? A slip of the pen, or careless drafting, perhaps? To shed more light on this we need to go back to an exchange between the WRP (Workers' Press) and WP sometime during the WRP's "Prague Spring", probably 1986. In their document entitled 'Dialectics and the WRP' WP make this same point thus: "The motor force of human history is the conflict between one class which has a monopoly of the decisive means of production and exploits the labour of another class." (p5)

Just above this, in an apparent attempt to give it some sort of authority is the quotation from the 'Communist Manifesto':

"All history of all societies is the history of class struggle", which is

quite a different proposition altogether (and in any case was heavily qualified by Engels in a footnote to the 1889 English edition to the effect that "all history " should really be "all written history".)

Further, when reflecting on Engels' famous speech at Marx's graveside on the nature of society, Workers' Power states that: "In short, purposeful productive labour is the key to our understanding". This remark is meaningless. It starts from a pure abstraction: "purposeful productive labour". The labour process is common to all societies. What is important is not the process itself but the social forms that it takes in any given period; the social relations of production and the necessity for those relations to be overthrown when they come into insoluble contradiction with the development of the productive forces.

What are the practical implications of positions such as these?

If the LRCI/WP regards the class struggle as the motor of history, it becomes easier to understand where its economism comes from, and how this can be manifested as strong tendencies towards syndicalism, "workerism" and trade union rank and filism. In practical terms, therefore, the end result is the sectarianism on the national question. A particular specific aspect of this is the position on British trade unions in Ireland i.e. that it is opposed to demands that these unions, which which are part of the sectarian apparatus, withdraw from Ireland. Here is trade union rank and filism at its worst. A second example is the chronic economism exhibited on the question of special oppression, to which we will return in more detail later.

ON "THE OBJECTIVE BASIS FOR SOCIALIST REVOLUTION"

Much of the chapter so called is a resume of the principle features and tendencies of the post-war era, the world market, combined and uneven development, the increasing inequalities, the results of imperialist exploitation in the semi-colonies, the inter-imperialist competition etc. It asserts that the objective conditions for socialist revolution on an international scale exist, as they did when the Transitional Programme was written, that the social relations of production are a fetter on the further development on the productive forces and that it is the problem of leadership of the working class that is preventing it from fulfilling its historic mission. In particular it stresses the role played by social-democracy and Stalinism in actually rescuing imperialism from apparently terminal crisis. In the main, so far as it is a commentary on the main features of the post-war world, there would appear to be little to disagree with.

However, in the midst of this is a reference to South Africa having "caught up" with the imperialist countries. This an example of a kind of formalism, the point of departure in any kind of analysis being "what category can we put it in?" rather than approaching something as a many-sided phenomenon. South Africa exhibits characteristics of imperialism in its local economic and military role in Southern Africa, and the presence of a relatively large and independent industrial bourgeoisie. It is an exporter of capital and has a financial oligarchy. However, the low level of productivity of

its working class, its dependence on the export of primary products to the imperialist countries and the migrant labour system etc. puts the nature of South Africa firmly into perspective. While South Africa cannot simply be regarded as a semi-colony, neither can it be seriously regarded as imperialist. It does, however, have characteristics of both.

The same problem manifests itself later on on p65 where Portugal is described as "imperialist". Portugal had colonies, but to describe it as imperialist only on this basis is extremely dubious. Throughout the imperialist era, Portugal has been economically weak, with a small industrial base, an even smaller finance capital base, and agriculturally backward, particularly in the north. As for its colonies, while it might have owned the cow, others certainly drank the milk. These colonies were virtually run and exploited by British imperialism which preferred the pliant Portugese to the French or Germans in Africa, with the Portugese plantation-owning bourgeoisie taking their cut. The relatively weak Portugese bourgeoisie did not have the resources to develop their colonies even in the one-sided, distorted way that the British and French developed theirs. Neither did Portugal gain the same benefits from its colonies as the other colonial powers in terms of accumulation, super profits, the creation of a strong, stable, privileged labour aristocracy. Portugal itself had almost a semi-colonial relationship to British imperialism, depending on British markets for its almost entirely agricultural exports. In 'Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism' Lenin considers this very question in the context of an analysis of "finance capital and its corresponding foreign policy (which) gives rise to a number of transitional forms of state dependence, the diverse forms of dependent countries which, officially, are politically independent, but in fact are enmeshed in a net of financial and diplomatic dependence."

"Portugal" he continues "is an independent sovereign state, but actually, for more than two hundred years, it has been a British protectorate. Great Britain has protected Portugal and her colonies to fortify her own position in the fight against her rivals, France and Spain. In return, Great Britain has received commercial privileges, preferential conditions for importing goods and especially capital into Portugal and the Portugese colonies, the right to use the ports and islands of Portugal, her telegraphs, cables etc." ('Imperialism' Peking edition pp101-102) To describe Portugal as imperialist on the basis of its colonies, which in many ways were simply a left-over from Portugal's maritime power in the sixteenth century, is simply inadequate. Describing it as a country of intermediate capitalist development may take a little longer, but at least it recognises the contradictions which exist. If Portugal is still supposed to be imperialist after the loss of its colonies, is there any serious comparison with the imperialist states, even the weaker ones of West Europe? If, having lost its colonies it is no longer imperialist, this does not say much for the LRCI's analysis of imperialism! If the LRCI still describe Portugal as imperialist then how do they regard Greece, or Ireland, which are comparable according to many of the indices used to measure economic development?

ANTI-INTERNATIONALISM ON THE QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

On p8 of the TM we will find the following:

"(The working class) has not yet found or been able to preserve the leadership capable of completing the task of world revolution. Only briefly, between 1917 and 1923, did the international working class possess such a leadership in the form of the world centre of the Comintern. The bureaucratic leadership of the USSR and the triumph of Stalinism robbed the proletariat of this leadership. Based on the the lessons learned from these failures, and from its achievements, the proletariat must return to the offensive if it is to be spared further crisis and a potentially final world holocaust. On its success rests the future of humanity".

All in all, a fairly conclusive statement of the reducibility of the crisis of the human race to the crisis of leadership in the working class.

However, on TM p19, the first page of the Chapter entitled "The Crisis of Proletarian Leadership" appears the following:

"However, today it would be wrong to repeat that all contemporary crises are reduced to the crisis of leadership. The proletariat worldwide does not yet face the stark alternative of taking power or seeing the destruction of all its past gains. Nevertheless in many countries and indeed whole continents, the crisis does reach such a level of acuteness."

This is a puzzling and alarming statement, not just because it appears to be in flat contradiction to the statement on p8 quoted above, but because it appears to be denying the international character of the crisis of capitalism in its final and most acute stage: imperialism. Presumably, and this has to be a presumption, the LRCI are saying that the immediate implications of the crisis of leadership are not as drastic as they were in 1938. Surely they would not deny that the crisis reaches "such a level of acuteness" in, for example, South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, the USSR, China, Poland and Peru anymore than they would argue that it has reached that level in Britain or Belgium, but that does not mean that the crisis of leadership is not an international question, to be approached from an international perspective by revolutionaries, hence the central importance of the regeneration of the Fourth International. Therefore the crisis of capitalism, as well as that of working class leadership cannot be seen in any other than an international context because of the existence of a global economic system, the export of capital and inter-imperialist conflicts.

The crisis of leadership in the 1930s also manifested itself in an uneven fashion, with obvious differences between Germany and Spain on the one hand, and the USA on the other. This is not to get into an argument about which, in a general sense, is the more acute crisis of leadership, 1938 or 1990, only to say that in attempting to distance itself from what it regard as the "action programme" of the Transitional Programme, the LRCI appears to be denying the centrality of the crisis of leadership for the international working class as a whole, despite an earlier statement to the contrary.

What are the practical consequences which flow from this?

Firstly, there are obvious implications for the struggle for international regroupment, and for the struggle for consistent Trotskyism as a struggle fought on an international plane, despite the obvious disparities between any given nation states (for example Austria and Peru, to name two LRCI sections). It is of course obvious that an international tendency's

development is given tremendous impetus if it has sections in countries where the class struggle is at its most ferocious, and it should orient itself to that effect, just as it should seek to avoid being confined to the advanced capitalist countries if it is to remain politically healthy, but this does not deny the international nature of the crisis of leadership and the struggle for consistent Trotskyism, quite the contrary. Where the crisis of leadership is "less acute" does this fundamentally effect the tasks of revolutionaries? In Britain, for example, is there to be no immediate perspective of struggle on the question of leadership, and is the task of revolutionaries simply that of making revolutionary propaganda, and building propaganda groups? Supporters of the LRCI who do have a perspective of international regroupment should consider very carefully the implications for their organisation of the confused anti-internationalism of this whole chapter. Anyone can build a sect. Do they want to build a genuinely internationalist world party of socialist revolution?

THE WORKERS' GOVERNMENT; SOME PROBLEMS

This part of the TM sets out a series of demands, some of which are lifted from the Transitional Programme and put in the context of the 1990s and some of which take up questions which were neglected or just skimmed over by the 1938 programme, or which are the product of post-1945 events. Some of this work is quite valuable and in purely formal terms, there would not appear to much of a quarrel with it. The problem, as ever, lies in the method.

Pages 28 and 29 take up the relationship in the transitional method between agitation and propaganda, talking about the transitional programme and its method as a "school" for educating workers. The relationship between agitation and propaganda is not discussed in as full a way as it should be, or as we understand it in the ITC. The LRCI lacks a real organic understanding of this relationship and this is shown by the section in this chapter on the Workers' Government question.

Page 56 of the TM states that:

"The only consistently revolutionary workers' government is that which exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat" then;

"However, in the transitional period crises arise that that pose the question of power to the proletariat, before it has been won, in its majority to the revolutionary party. In these situations the working class has looked to its existing leadership to enact a programme in its interests while in government."

Surely a correct formulation should be: "won in its majority to SUPPORT the revolutionary party"?

The TM then considers the slogan of the workers' government as it was utilised by the Bolsheviki in relation to the Provisional Government in 1917, that is as a demand that the workers' leaders break with the bourgeois parties in the government, expropriate capitalist holdings, arm the workers' organisations etc. It also deals with the conceptions of the workers' government held by the revolutionary Comintern, and the centrist distortions of the question e.g. by the USFI on Nicaragua. The emphasises that a workers' government is only a real workers' government when in real struggle against the bourgeoisie, and, significantly, that the demand should be used to:

"place demands on workers' leaders, to expose to the rank and file their leaders refusal to break with the bourgeoisie (p57)," and that the slogan is:

"algebraic... the actual composition of such a government cannot be fixed in advance."

The problem with how the TM treats the workers' government question is that it is envisaged as a mobilising demand entirely and only as a way of exposing misleaders and splitting the rank and file from them in an immediately pre-revolutionary situation. This is a contradiction and a negation of the idea of the dual character of the Transitional Programme: its combined agitational and propaganda aspects. It represents a sliding back into a method of seeing the demands as either immediately agitational, or irrelevant.

There is a need to always be orientating to the most advanced elements, however small they might be in number, and however much of a mood of retreat and caution might prevail in the working class as a whole, with the propaganda and educative aspect to our programme, such as the workers' government question. This does not mean that the workers' government is raised in every agitational intervention. That would be absurd. However, it is necessary to raise the question with advanced workers who are breaking from their traditional leaderships because without it, the method and the content of the other demands could not really be fully understood.

An example has been the Poll Tax. This is vital to the strategy of the Government and represents a definite stepping up of the attack on jobs, living standards and democratic rights. It is an all-embracing attack on the working class involving a strengthening of the state forces: the police, the DSS, the courts, and the local state. In other words, for both sides, there is a lot riding on the outcome of the campaign against the poll tax.

Let us assume that a fight against the poll tax based on non-payment and

non-implementation and involving industrial action had begun to make some headway and the Government had begun to lose the initiative. This would call into question the Government's right and ability to rule and would pose a new and possibly decisive stage in the struggle; a struggle which would be gathering momentum all the time. In this event, what would Workers' Power have posed as their crowning demand? A one-day strike against the Poll Tax, something which many sincere reformist workers have grown out of, so to speak. This is a crucially self-limiting demand, chopping the head off their programme. Of course, Workers' Power supporters will say: "the one day strike demand is not the be all and end all of our programme, it would just be a start". The start of what though? A thoughtful and serious worker who has followed all the arguments and understood the questions raised in the course of the struggle deserves something better. Presumably, Workers' Power would say that their demands would change as the struggle developed, and that in time, they would pose the workers' government question, but that is still not good enough. There is a need for the advanced aspects of the programme to be addressed to advanced workers now. Anything less is one-sided; it downplays the subjective factor, the need to engage the most advanced workers, albeit a small, very small, number of workers, in a theoretical struggle at the highest level. The fact that the mood in the working class might be a mood of conservatism, retreat and caution means that such a struggle is all the more necessary. Otherwise, revolutionaries are guilty of starting from the existing consciousness of the working class, not what is necessary.

It is useful in this context to refer to a part of the preconference discussion of the Fourth International in 1938 entitled 'On the Political Backwardness of US Workers' in which Trotsky contributes the following:

"What can a revolutionary party do in this situation. It can give a clear honest picture of the objective situation, of the historic tasks which follow from this situation, irrespective of whether today's workers are ripe for this. Our tasks don't depend on the mentality of the workers, our task is to develop the mentality of the workers. That is what the programme should formulate and present before advanced workers, . . . when we appear with our programme before the working class, we cannot give any guarantees that they will accept our programme. We cannot take responsibility for this. We can only take the responsibility for ourselves. We must tell the workers the truth, then we will win the best elements. Whether these best elements will be capable of guiding the working class to power I don't know. I hope that they will be able to, I cannot give a guarantee. Naturally, if I close my eyes I can write a good rosy programme that everyone will accept. But it will not respond to the situation, and the programme must respond to the situation. I believe this elementary argument to be of the utmost importance. The class consciousness of the proletariat is backward, but consciousness is not such a substance as the factory, mine or railroad. It is more mobile, and under the blows of the objective crisis, . . . it can change rapidly." ('The Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution' Pathfinder Press p157)

PROBLEMS WITH THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST UNITED FRONT

This is one respect in which the 1938 programme is deficient, both in its treatment of semi-colonial and colonial struggles as they stood at the time, but also, of course, because there is nothing on the post war developments. Any serious attempts to develop the transitional programme taking these developments into account is to be welcomed. This section of the TM begins with a fairly pedestrian look at the historical aspects, e.g. the Chinese KMT, and then at the post-war struggles, often led by the national-bourgeoisie, thrust, despite itself into a position of physical confrontation with imperialism. Some of the TM's demands in this section are fine, taking up the land question and then questions of cash-crops, and demanding the right for peasants to grow narcotics on a free and legal basis, taking up the question of ecological catastrophe and calling for the voluntary collectivisation of the land. There is also something on the repudiation of the debt, self-determination for national minorities, and the demand for a constituent assembly with which, on the face of it, it would be difficult to have much disagreement.

It is on the question of the Anti-imperialist United Front that the problems really start. Page 83 of the TM states that: (this is a long quotation, but it is important not to appear to be taking things out of context)

"So long as the bourgeoisie or bourgeois forces have a real mass influence in the anti-imperialist struggle it is necessary for the workers' party to use the tactic of the anti-imperialist united front. This involves striking tactical agreements with non-proletarian forces at both leadership and rank and file level. Such agreements might involve formal alliances or committees. Where this is the case, the fundamental pre-conditions for such blocs are: that the bourgeoisie or pro-bourgeois forces are waging a struggle against imperialism or its agents, that no limitations are placed on the political independence of the revolutionary organisation within this bloc and that there are no bureaucratic exclusions of significant forces struggling against imperialism. It is even possible that this united front may have to be carried out within the base organs of a mass organisation with a popular-frontist character within which distinct class parties may not have emerged. What is vital is that this unity should be aimed at mobilising the broadest anti-imperialist forces for common objectives such as the introduction of democratic rights and the expulsion of the imperialists."

The problem with this is the specific inclusion of the bourgeoisie in an anti-imperialist united front, although this involvement is conditional, as per the later remark that:

"There is nothing consistently anti-imperialist or revolutionary about the semi-colonial bourgeoisie and no permanent place should be found for it in the anti-imperialist united front"(p83)

This appears to be in odd contradiction to Workers' Powers record of sectarianism to national liberation movements, but it does make sense in the context of Workers' Power and the LRCI's understanding, or rather ~~misunderstanding of the united front as a limited and short-term project. A military bloc with the national bourgeoisie is perfectly possible in the event of an attack by imperialism.~~ For example, revolutionaries in Iraq would have had a de facto military united front with Saddam Hussein for the duration of the Gulf War. Another case in point is a military coup by that

section of the national bourgeoisie and military most closely tied to imperialism (e.g. Bolivia in 1971). This is of course the product of an immediate and exceptional set of circumstances, it is short term, and it is not the same thing as an anti-imperialist united front.

The Anti-Imperialist United Front is a tactical question, but the method it embodies is a strategic one for Trotskyists in semi-colonial countries. Its task is to unify, on a long-term basis all oppressed, non-proletarian forces behind the working class. The Anti-Imperialist United Front can also be the vehicle for putting forward a programme of political demands for the conquest of power by the working class.

Although the situation will often be sufficiently fluid for both these tasks to be correctly posed, they are nonetheless distinct, and the LRCI's problem is that it confuses the two, or runs them together. The results of this method in practical terms could be absolutely disastrous, and worthy of the USFI's worst mistakes. It is therefore a matter of extreme good fortune that the LRCI has not been in a position to put this position into practice in a position of leadership, although a practical demonstration of this method was Workers' Power's Iranian defencist position at the start of the Iran-Iraq war.

STALINISM; BEHIND APPARENT ORTHODOXY, CONFUSION.

The question of Stalinism is broken up into two sections. The first is on the degeneration of the Comintern in the section on the Crisis of Leadership. The second is in the chapter called 'For Proletarian Political Revolution'. The first section makes a big point that Trotsky continued to regard the Comintern as still bureaucratic centrist from after it led the German working class to defeat in 1933 until it adopted the popular front strategic alliance with the bourgeoisie in 1934/35. Despite this, Trotsky:

"declared that the Comintern, having failed to recognise and correct its mistakes was, while still bureaucratic centrist, irreformable and 'dead for the purpose of revolution'. He therefore demanded the building of a new party in Germany and then a new international world-wide, although the Stalinists had not definitively passed over to the camp of the counter-revolution."

This appears to be the analogy used by the LRCI to justify the call for "a new Leninist-Trotskyist international", even though the USFI (and others) have not passed over to counter-revolution, and to justify the characterisation of "inveterate" or "fossilised" centrism (sic) of the USFI and others as comparable to the bureaucratised, though still centrist Comintern of 1933.

This is just a mass of confusion and non-sequiturs. While the Comintern comprised parties with mass working class bases, its centrism was based on the ebb and flow of the class struggle which was still powerfully influenced by the Russian revolution. The defeat of the German working class in 1933 and the refusal of the Comintern to discuss, let alone take responsibility for it was the decisive event which finished off the Comintern and consigned it definitively to counter-revolution, even if this

was not actualised until 1934-35. The Trotskyist-centrist groups such as the USFI and others are not rushing headlong to adopt counter-revolutionary positions. In fact there are many instances of groups evolving in a left-wing direction for a greater or lesser period, thus opening up the possibility of a struggle, to fight with sections and factions of these groups to reassert the Trotskyist programme. The Comintern was moving to the side of the counter-revolution in 1933 and ruthlessly cut off its own left wing. That is, it had driven out not just the Left Opposition but all left critics of its policies. The two situations are just not comparable.

In the chapter on the Proletarian Political Revolution (pp101-102), it is on the national question in the USSR that the LRCI is wearing the asses ears:

"Even where a separatist movement threatens to espouse counter-revolution we continue to defend the right to state independence while maintaining the struggle for proletarian power".

The problem with this is that it fails to stress the necessity for differentiating state independence from counter-revolution, be it threatened or actual. It leaves the door open to liquidation or capitulation to the forces of reaction when they dominate the working class, and it has a real aspect of Stalinophobia. Surely it would have been absolutely obligatory for Trotskyists to oppose German reunification on imperialism's terms rather than capitulating to it, as Workers' Power did with the argument that you had to relate to the mass movement. The same opportunist argument is used to stress democratic demands above transitional demands, even going to the point of preferring the demand for the right to vote to the demand for workers' councils and refusing to counterpose workers' democracy to bourgeois democracy, as Workers' Power did in reply to a question at a Workers' Power public meeting. This is presumably what is behind the wobbles on this question by Workers' Power. For example, on the Soviet military crackdown in Baku in early 1990, the article appearing in the February issue of 'Workers' Power' is confused. It appears to give critical support to the Soviet armed forces providing there were no attacks on civilians, or attacks on civil rights, such as the banning of demonstrations or the imposition of a curfew. Why else were Soviet soldiers sent into Baku? Presumably not to help direct the traffic! It was certainly not to protect the Armenians, who had fled the city, or to protect the USSR against imperialist invasion, of which there was not the remotest possibility at that time. This position appeared to be based on a fairly unsophisticated identification of the defence of the Soviet Union with the existing state boundaries and the Soviet military and bureaucratic apparatus.

How do we square this attitude with the attitude to Lithuania, where the government has far more of a conscious restorationist project than the Azeri Popular Front. In 'Workers' Power' in May 1990 there is the demand: "That the British Government recognises Lithuania and supplies goods requested by Lithuania without conditions."

This can only be read as a criticism of the British Government's reluctance to fund a restorationist republican government in the USSR! Is this an adaptation to British public opinion, which looks more kindly on white European Lithuanians than on Asiatic Muslim Azeris? No members of the LRCI/WP have ever provided a convincing explanation for this liberal muddle-headedness.

Specific

THE 'TROTSKYIST MANIFESTO' AND SPECIAL OPPRESSION

In the past, this is one area where some progress has been made from the economism of the Cliffite tradition, but the making of that progress has served to throw up further contradictions, and to underline the fact that that Workers' Power has not been able to make any fundamental break from economism.

Page 104 of the TM starts with the proposition that here are :

"other systematic, economic, social, legal and political inequalities which specifically affect women, youth, different racial and national groups, lesbians and gay men.

"These specific forms of social oppression are a fundamental feature of class society. Their functions are intimately and inseparably connected to the process of exploitation, but they create an oppression which is not confined to the working class. Women of all classes face discrimination and disadvantage as a result of the particular role they have in the family and their class. But it is working women and likewise working class youth, blacks, lesbians and gay men who face the most intense social oppression." This section then emphasises that the: "working class is the only class with the decisive interest and capacity in overthrowing the system which maintains all forms of social oppression. Only under the leadership of the working class can oppressed sections of the exploited classes be drawn into the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship which is a precondition for the ending of all oppression".

There is a contradiction here. Firstly, the TM recognises that "social(sic) oppression is not confined to the working class" and then it calls for the "oppressed sections of the exploited classes" to be drawn into the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship." There seems to be a confusion as to what the strategy should actually be. For example, in Britain, where there is no peasantry, the LRCI's formulation would mean include only those specially oppressed from the working class.

This is only the start of the confusion. The longer this section of the TM continues, the more incoherent and contradictory it becomes. It is increasingly obvious that the LRCI/WP has no real strategy as far as the struggles of the specially oppressed are concerned. The economism of the leadership is occasionally tempered by the demands of some of the rank and file, and the result is this dogs dinner of a chapter. If members of Workers' Power regard this as cheap name-calling, then we should examine the chapter further.

For example, on p105, there appears to be an attempt to interact the struggles within the labour movement against special oppression with those among the specially oppressed for an orientation to the labour movement, although this is not very well developed;

"the revolutionary vanguard has the task of combatting prejudices within the labour movement and putting the mass organisations of the working class in the forefront of the struggle against social oppression.

"the most class conscious elements of the oppressed will be the vanguard for its own liberation... participation within the overall class struggle can ensure that their interests are actively taken up by the working class".

On the same page there is a statement arguing for the right of the oppressed "to organise and caucus (within the working class movement) in

order for their demands to be taken up by the whole of the class." Page 107 argues first for "united fronts against oppression", so that these movements of the specially oppressed are not left to the Stalinists and petit bourgeois elements. Then there are conditions put on the social composition of the movement of the specially oppressed by advocating a "proletarian movement of the oppressed", and then;

"Our aim is to build communist movements of the oppressed" and then back to the obsession with social composition

"a proletarian movement for lesbian and gay liberation". (p123)

What is it that the LRCI actually wants to build? The TM states quite clearly that it regards special oppression as being cross-class, so why is there an economist obsession with social origin, expressed as "proletarian" movements of the oppressed? Is there no strategy for the specially oppressed as a whole, other than a liberal recognition that it exists?

The results of this economist confusion can be seen all too clearly in everyday practice. For example, there is Workers' Powers' scandalous behaviour at the 1989 All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation when its members, including a member of the leadership refused to vote for the "Friday" (Black Lesbian and Gay) Group's resolution on the role of the specially oppressed in anti-Poll Tax campaigns. This resolution said quite clearly that racist or homophobic behaviour or the abuse of women should be incompatible with membership. It was the only opposition to the primitive workerism of Militant, and was accordingly opposed by its leadership. Many Militant members were unhappy at not voting for it, and it was supported by Anarcho-Syndicalists, 'Socialist Outlook' and a number of independents in what was a clear left-right split in the conference.

A more recent example, to show how nothing has been learned, is the February 16th 1991 March against Clause 28, in which Workers' Power, was a part of the HOME contingent. Workers' Power members refused to fight for the contingent to raise the question of the Gulf War in its slogans, and instead adopted the liberal and classless "equal rights". They then criticised a R** member for referring to the war, and calling for Victory to Iraq in his platform speech. All this is from the group which accuses the R** of "popular frontism" on the lesbian and gay question! Presumably, the Clause 28 demonstration was not yet ready for "real" politics, just liberalism.

As with everything else, Workers' Power has displayed its brand of sectarianism and opportunism on lesbian and gay struggles. When the opportunity for rapid recruitment had passed, no more work was done, or is being done. The fact that three lesbian and gay members of Workers' Power have now joined the R**, and virtually all the others have left tells its own story of the conservative, moralistic homophobia which prevails in the organisation

and left to RIC

FOR THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL? OR THE FIFTH?

The 'Trotskyist Manifesto' then turns its attention to the question of the International and the the collapse of the Fourth International into centrism in 1948-51. On the struggle to regenerate Trotsky's Fourth International, and the struggle for consistent Trotskyism within those centrist organisations claiming to be Trotskyist, those emerging from the

crisis of the FI share:

"The same incapacity to use the method of Lenin and Trotsky and guide the working class to victory" The SAME incapacity? This is simply not true. Surely supporters of Workers' Power must know this. What about the WSL in Britain, the USFI group in Angola, for example?

Over the past thirty or forty years there have been numerous attempts to reassert the programme of Trotskyism. These attempts have been variable, with some being more successful than others, and on a more advanced political basis. Ultimately, they have all been hampered by a one-sidedness and an inconsistency born out of being based on one national section, or a faction within a section of the centrist international groupings, or their struggle has only been partial, and therefor never carried through. Why we fight for a democratic-centralist international tendency, struggling for consistent Trotskyism is because we recognise that weakness. To say that these groups all share the "same" incapacity to use the method of Lenin and Trotsky can only be to justify the sectarian project of the LRCI. Needless to say, this initial proposition justifies:

* | "The LRCI is the instrument for the creation of a new Leninist-Trotskyist international....
".,our object is therefore the construction of a new world party of socialist revolution; a refounded Leninist-Trotskyist international."

| This last section captures very well much of what is wrong with the method of Workers' Power/LRCI. On the question of the international, as on so many others, there is a passive, conservative, sectarian disinclination to struggle for anything other than the augmentation by ones and twos of their sect. Take the assumption that the struggle for consistent Trotskyism took a long holiday while Workers' Power were still embedded in the IS, or while they had a five-year "holding position" of state capitalism. Take the attitude towards the collapse of the WRP. To those fighting for regroupment, for a real international development, the LRCI simply says, "join up", hence its sectarian smash and grab raids which often net the most sectarian or demoralised elements with the least inclination to carry out any kind of long term struggle, who are not encouraged to struggle and who simply want to "join something"; This is how Workers' Power has attempted to recruit, and this is how the LRCI is busily acquiring its sections.

The LRCI has absolutely no strategy at all for the struggle against the opportunists who have dominated the international currents which claim to embrace Trotskyism. In fact, it lets the opportunist USFI leadership off the hook by leaving it unchallenged in its own baileywick. The LRCI is therefore quite happy to draw a line in the sand between itself and the USFI over which it will not cross. There is only the occasional lecture on "centrism" which Workers' Power understands in the most wooden fashion. The fact that the centrists in the USFI, for example, are capable at times of defending aspects of the Trotskyist programme, albeit inconsistently or inadequately, that rank and file militants might want to struggle against their opportunist misleaders and reassert Trotskyism, the fact that the "Trotskyist" USFI acts as a pole of attraction for the most advanced workers seeking to break from Stalinism, reformism or nationalism is

presumably not important.

The problem for the LRCI is that it is the victim of its own opportunist confusion. It does not actually call for a Fifth International, which would at least have logic on its side. Instead, it remains agnostic (Fourth? Fifth? New?) and therefore totally abstract on what for revolutionaries must be a vitally concrete question, that of internationalism and international regroupment- how this has to be fought for, and on what programmatic basis?

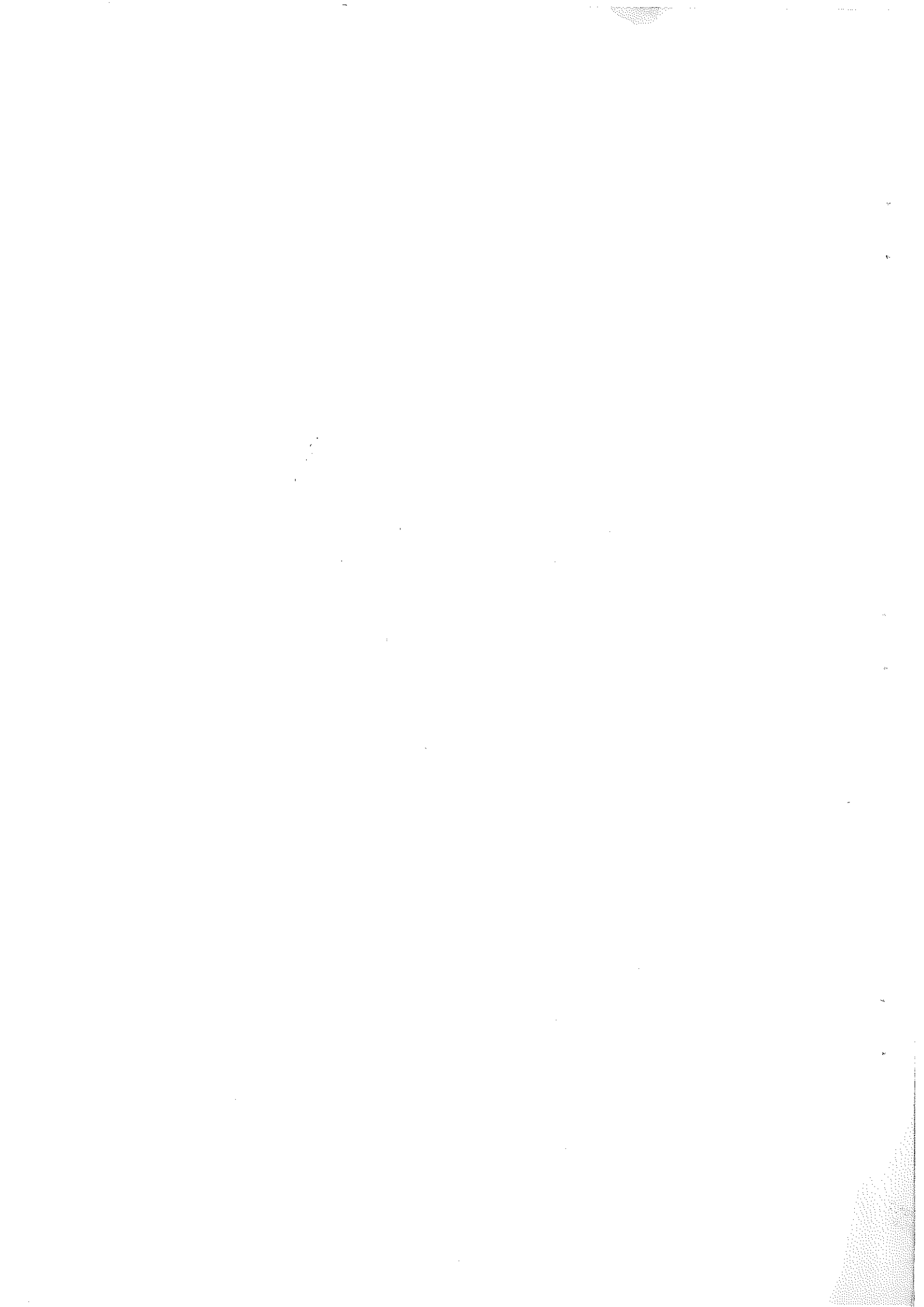
CONCLUSION

In the context of generalised theoretical confusion on the far left, Workers' Power has at times been able to pose as a consistent, programmatically solid defender of Trotskyist orthodoxy. It is becoming harder and harder to carry this off: on special oppression, on Stalinism, on the poll tax, the chickens are coming home to roost. It is on the united front, on real practical struggles that the rot has started to set in. It was forced into the cul de sac of its own opportunist and sectarian approach to the united front. On lesbian and gay work, the opportunities for fast recruitment had passed, so the Trade Unionists Against Section 28 was wound down, Irish solidarity work was also visibly wound down at the start of 1990 (with a few exceptions), and, to a large extent, so as anti-Poll Tax work. Workers' Power was left with its own public events.

The start of the Gulf crisis provoked a flurry of united front activity, and in a certain capacity, i.e. in opposition to the opportunism of Socialist Organiser and Socialist Outlook on CAWIG we were able to do some useful joint work and achieve a measure of agreement on slogans and practical tasks. Nevertheless, Workers' Power was capable of being alarmingly disorientated. For example, at the start of the crisis it was calling for Self-Determination for Kuwait (objectively pro-imperialist) and Hands off Iraq (liberal, and empty of class content). When the war actually started, the initial, correct, Victory to Iraq was rapidly toned down in favour of Defend Iraq, not necessarily the same thing, or even, as in one case, the pro-imperialist Cease Fire and Stop the War. Who knows where Workers' Power would have ended up if the war had not have ended when it did!

This political disorientation is accompanied by an increasingly sectarian degeneration. The public slander and intimidation of former members who have left as a result of political disagreements and joined another organisation is the mark of a cult, not a serious political organisation. This is combined with a lurch back towards Cliffite economism, and a straight-laced moralism preposterously dressed up as "proletarian morality".

Supporters of Workers' Power who want to build a revolutionary leadership, not a sect, should consider very carefully where the organisation is going. A combination of passive sectarianism and crass economism, the disease of the British revolutionary left, is taking Workers' Power away from consistent Trotskyism. If they want to work towards a real international revolutionary regroupment, rather than build another sect, if they want to fight economism, if they want to fight for the liberation of the specially oppressed, is there any future for them in an up-market version of the SWP?



REPLY TO ND

LRCI defends the Trotskyist method

Introduction

Following the recent split in the International Trotskyist Committee (ITC), its British group, the Revolutionary International League (RIL), has suffered a series of defections. Most of these ex-members are gravitating towards the British USFI section. They are seeking to join the USFI as members of the the International Trotskyist Opposition (ITO).

While he was a member of the RIL ND wrote a critique of the LRCI's founding document, The Trotskyist Manifesto (TM). This critique was never published but it is currently being circulated amongst an audience of USFI supporters and ex-RIL members, although the document has never been submitted to the LRCI. It is a strange method of polemic if those being criticised are not allowed to see the criticism let alone reply to it! It hardly suggests that our critics are full of confidence about their arguments. Having read ND's document we understand why.

The critique is not made from the standpoint of revolutionary Marxism but from the point of view of the RIL's centrist method. The majority of the political positions argued, reflect in one way or another the politics of the old ITC and in particular of its Grisolia wing now in the ITO.

We are therefore taking the opportunity of the circulation of this document to submit a reply to it. We offered ND, who from recent public documents seems to have moved a long way from the RIL's tactical sectarianism, the opportunity to revise his critique before publication. We received no reply. Still, no matter how far ND may have moved from his former opinions they are still being circulated as "an ITO document" to individuals within the USFI. We hope that this can clarify our positions on the international left taking forward a discussion process between the LRCI and the supporters of the International Trotskyist Opposition (ITO) in the USFI.

Programme and method

According to ND the TM is the key to understanding all our errors:

"At the heart of the TM is all that is negative about the LRCI/WP: scholasticism, primitive economism, and most importantly, an apparently irredeemable sectarianism on the fundamental question of international regroupment, manifesting itself as confused agnosticism on what are the tasks in the present period, and on what should be their

programmatic basis."

Let us see if any of these charges have a basis in fact.

The critique starts by attacking the TM for lack of political clarity:

"This is not a new programme but a fudge that sacrifices clarity. It is in fact a very slippery document, diplomatically written, which has something for everybody."

This is strange given that we are attacked later in the document precisely for producing . . . a new programme! This accusation of producing a "fudge" has more to do with a myth, promoted within the RIL at the time, that the LRCI was in crisis, riven with differences etc. We are told by ND that the programme took so long to produce because it had to "meet so many pressures from different political positions internally and from other LRCI sections."

The LRCI, whatever our opponents say, is not a monolithic organisation. What new international tendency could be? Developing our programme was a vital and important stage in welding together, politically, a truly democratic centralist international tendency. Unlike the organisation that ND came from, the line of our organisation is not decided by transatlantic telephone conversations from a guru in Ann Arbor. It is decided in thoroughly democratic Congresses of our tendency after full discussion in all of our sections. Democratic debate that enabled us to resolve differences and cement solid programmatic agreement took time. But it was time well spent. It meant that it was not the LRCI that went into crisis and flew apart but the ITC.

ND gives no evidence for his charges of diplomatic formulations. Where he suggests the TM is confused the confusion turns out to be his, not ours.

We are taken to task for apparently claiming, on the one hand, that the TM is a re-elaborated programme while, according to ND, some of our members say "more modestly and seriously" it is merely a statement of where the LRCI has got so far.

ND's document is riddled with accounts of what our members are supposed to have said, what RIL members say they have said etc. This is a method of polemic the RIL learnt from the Spartacists and it is regurgitated by ND. No one should take such "polemics" seriously.

In this case however ND has got it nearly right. The TM is both a re-elaborated programme and "a summation of the theoretical progress made by WP/LRCI", just as the Transitional Programme itself was for the Fourth International. The TM is a programme for world socialist revolution, but one based on the admittedly limited experience, both historically and in terms of our implantation in the class

CORRECT.

mechanical
 struggle on a world scale, of the LRCI to date. There is no contradiction. Because we understand the programme as a living thing, we recognise that new experience will oblige us to both add and subtract things from the TM.

The events surrounding the collapse of Stalinism are a case in point. The concrete experience of applying our programme in interventions in the USSR, East Germany etc taught us that the bald formulation "We oppose the creation of bourgeois parliamentary institutions in workers' states" (TM p97) was not an adequate guide to action. Our leaflets and focused action programmes in Germany and the CIS had to develop concrete answers to the emergence of bourgeois democratic illusions and institutions beyond what was anticipated in the TM. Comparing our most developed action programme for the collapsing Stalinist states (Action Programme for the CIS *Rabochaya Vlast* No3/*Trotskyist Bulletin* 2) with the TM's section on Stalinism will show any reader how much more concretely actual intervention into the class struggle forced us to relate the defence of the working class gains to the task of overthrowing the bureaucracy. No doubt further and deeper interventions will force us to improve and refine out present action programme.

However, that does not stop us saying now: "here is what we stand for, here is our analysis, here is what we fight for, here is what we believe is necessary to take the class struggle forward to a revolutionary conclusion, here is the TM".

Trotsky said the same thing about the Transitional Programme (TP). He recognised it was "incomplete", he referred to it as the summation of "our collective work to date", he also said it was the programme of the Fourth International (FI), to be advanced in the class struggle as the way forward. There was no contradiction for Trotsky, nor is there for us.

There is only a contradiction if you are gripped by a dogmatic understanding of the Marxist programme. ND makes a few nods in the direction of the need to develop the programme. He says for instance:

"The Programme's updating and development are inseparable from the fight for its method, for consistent Trotskyism."

Absolutely true. But then he draws back in horror when the LRCI does it! Outraged at the LRCI producing such a programme he declares:

"For all the talk about 're-elaboration' of the Transitional Programme, the TM is intended to replace it."

This approach goes to the heart of ND's centrist approach to programme, an approach which also lay at the heart of the ITC and its forerunner the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC). The TILC emblazoned on its banner "The Transitional Programme: Valid Today".

This dogmatism towards the TP has an opportunist purpose clearly revealed in the critique. ND attacks us for emphasising the "action programme" aspect of the TP. By this we mean that the FI's programme was heavily focused towards a particular world conjuncture. While ND cannot deny this entirely (he admits for example that "certainly aspects of it have that character") he wants to de-emphasise it. Thus he says:

"However that is not fundamentally (our emphasis) what the Transitional Programme is. The Transitional Programme is a programme for this epoch, the epoch of imperialism, an epoch of wars and revolution. It is a programme that addresses itself to the crisis of working class leadership, to Stalinism and social democracy and the need to build a world party of socialist revolution."

ND wants to turn the TP "fundamentally" into a set of timeless principles that hold throughout the epoch of imperialism. Some obvious questions reveal the falseness of this approach: Was the crisis of working class leadership the same after the war, when capitalism had stabilised and entered the "long boom" as it was in 1938? When Stalinism did not collapse under the onslaught of fascism but expanded into the whole of Eastern Europe were new tasks

and tactics posed for revolutionaries? When the system of colonial rule was replaced by one of semi-colonial rule, did not this necessitate re-focusing and re-elaborating the programme for the semi-colonial revolution?

ND shuts his eyes to all this. Instead he rhetorically asks: "Is a new programme necessary? Has, for example, Stalinism become a new mode of production? Have the 'Trotskyists' crossed class lines as did the degenerate Comintern? The answer is of course no, subject to well known exceptions in the latter case."

Here you have dogmatism *par excellence*. And it has a purpose. If you turn the programme into a series of principles, disconnected from strategy and tactics, you destroy it as a guide to action, as an "action programme". This is precisely the method of centrist Trotskyism. It allows the centrist to adhere to generally agreed "Marxist principles" while having a license for opportunism in the field of strategy and tactics. It allows national sections to adopt completely different strategies and tactics while adhering to a common "programme". It destroys a democratic centralist international. The USFI is the supreme example of this wrong, slippery and diplomatic approach to programme.

Trotsky, in contrast, developed the Transitional Programme in opposition to the minimum/maximum programme of social democracy and the pseudo-revolutionary programme of the Comintern. The epochal character of his achievement, which we recognise and remain fully loyal to, is the method of transitional demands. But this only confirms the nature of the 1938 programme as a revolutionary action programme, what Trotsky called a "manual of action" and "a programme of action".

The FI itself called the Transitional Programme "its programme of action for the immediate period in which we live". It was, for Trotsky, a "programme of revolutionary action" as against the degenerate Comintern's "bare collection of abstract propositions".

Fighting Centrism

There is a further reason for the RIL/ITC approach to programme. It is designed to justify the belief that supposed loyalty to the Transitional Programme of 1938 makes you a special kind of centrist. The 1938 programme is transformed from what it was - a programme for a specific "pre-revolutionary period" - into a talisman.

If you wear this talisman then no matter what centrist crimes you commit, no matter how deeply you have enshrined a centrist method into your entire politics, you are protected from the ultimate betrayal. Thus the degenerate fragments of Trotskyism, according to ND, "actually continue to defend aspects of the Trotskyist programme in practice, albeit inconsistently and inadequately".

The opposite is the case. The centrist FI has a record second to none in trampling on the method of the Transitional Programme "in practice". In relation to Tito and Yugoslavia, Bolivia 1952, the LSSP in Sri Lanka, Algeria, Guerrillism, Castro and Cuba, the Portuguese Revolution, Iran, the FSLN in Nicaragua, Poland and Solinarnosc, the revolutionary crisis in the USSR (to name but the most obvious examples), the post war FI and USFI showed themselves again and again as centrist organisations that abandoned Trotsky's revolutionary programme in practice.

In Britain we only need to point out the USFI's craven and uncritical tailing of every so called "left" in the Labour Party such as Tony Benn (and Ken Livingstone before they "fell out" with him), and their similar line towards the lefts in the trade unions such as Arthur Scargill, to realise that this is an organisation which has broken from Trotskyism, not one that defends it - even partially.

Of course all these policies were carried out while the leaders continued, formally at least, to "adhere", and occasionally even espouse (verbally), their commitment to the "Transitional Programme". Such "loyalty" to the revolu-

tionary programme is typical of centrists. It is a loyalty that has no bearing on practice, on the positions taken in the class struggle, on the programme as applied in life. ND's position obliges him to cover this up. It blunts his purported struggle against centrism. It leads him into excusing centrism by pointing to its formal fidelity to the Transitional Programme. And he calls us scholastic!

This softness on the centrism of the USFI leads directly to ND's criticism of our approach towards it:

"On the question of the International, as on so many others, there is a passive, conservative, sectarian disinclination to struggle for anything other than the augmentation by ones and twos of their sect . . . The LRCI has absolutely no strategy at all for the struggle against the opportunists who have dominated the international currents which claim to embrace Trotskyism. In fact, it lets the opportunist USFI leadership off the hook by leaving it unchallenged in its own baileywick."

What ND really disagrees with us on, apart from our refusal to be diplomatic about the centrists, is that we do not have a long term entry tactic exclusively directed to the USFI.

The entire problem is that for ND this "tactic" is the beginning and end of all party building. He cannot conceive of political life beyond the factional struggles of the USFI.

But is it true that we are "passive, conservative, sectarian" towards oppositions and crises within the centrist organisations? Absolutely not. The example he gives to back up this assertion, our intervention into the crisis of the WRP-FI(IC) in 1985/86, is a complete distortion of our approach to these events. We were one of the first groups to actively intervene. We took up the call for an international conference of those considering themselves Trotskyist, including the USFI as well as the Morenoites, recognising the important international reverberations of the collapse of the FI-IC. We placed no barriers on any groups that claimed to be Trotskyist participating in such a conference.

We produced a contribution to the debates around the WRP implosion, "22 Theses in Defence of Trotskyism", to submit to such a conference with the aim of rallying those forces breaking from centrism towards revolutionary communism. We estimated that the 22 Theses could be a principled basis for a "bloc of four" type regroupment modelled on Trotsky's tactics towards centrist forces in 1933/34. It was the WRP Workers Press leadership which prevented any such conference taking place. All the diplomacy and sophisticated tactics of the ITC did not prevent them being shut out of the organising committee. Nor did it prevent them trying to recruit "the ones and twos". The essential difference is that we conducted our struggle in the open, with documents outlining our political positions, through systematic debates with the membership and leaders of the WRP. We fought for our positions, the ITC constantly manoeuvred in order to avoid such a fight.

ND claims that we are simply interested in "smash and grab raids" against the centrists, that oppositionists are not encouraged to struggle in their organisations but to "join up" to the LRCI. As a result he says we recruit the most "sectarian or demoralised elements with the least inclination to carry out any sort of long term struggle . . . who simply want to 'join something'."

We believe that the fight against centrism needs to be an implacable one, beginning with a preparedness to recognise that the centrists have broken from Trotskyism. This is where we part company from ND. He resolutely rejects that. This means that we pose to those potentially revolutionary forces disgusted at the line of their opportunist leaders a plain truth - their leaders and organisations have proved resistant to regeneration for over forty years; to pursue a revolutionary course means an inevitable organisational break with them.

If ND succeeds in obtaining membership of the British USFI section, for example, he will be formally committed to selling one of the most rancidly opportunist papers on the British left. It might be worth doing so if there were vast

numbers of leftward moving workers and youth inside that organisation, looking for an political lead. Recent events suggest this is not the case.

ND's co-thinkers in the ITO carry through a practice which is based on a perspective of reforming the USFI. They formed a faction inside the USFI only after its recent World Congress secure in the knowledge that there will not be another one for a very long time. Then they reduced the faction back to a "tendency" (which formally does not challenge for leadership) in order to accommodate leftward moving elements from the French JCR Egalité and the British section. They have no perspective whatsoever of breaking from the USFI.

When ND sneers at those who just want to "join something" he exposes everything that is rotten about ITC methods in the USFI. It does not occur to ND for one moment that these might be cadres who want to do something in the class struggle, who are disgusted at the politics and tactics of the USFI sections which they have to carry out every day, whose papers peddle disastrous policies for the workers, be it in Britain or Algeria. These are cadres who want to be part of a revolutionary organisation that intervenes in the class struggle in a revolutionary not a centrist fashion. - ie WP - ???

What is the alternative that ND offers? A long term struggle in the USFI. And around what politics? Around an "opposition" that far from leading a revolutionary fight against the USFI leaders vacillates and compromises, that perpetuates the lie that the USFI leaders "continue to defend aspects of the Trotskyist programme in practice". This is precisely the method of the Grisolia opposition in Italy, a perspective which far from building a revolutionary opposition attempts to embroil healthy opponents of centrism into a life of cohabitation with the centrist leaders.

Yes, the LRCI has an alternative strategy to combat centrism and the centrist leaders. We are building a revolutionary international tendency that intervenes in the international class struggle; that develops its revolutionary positions based on this intervention around our programme. We think this is the best, indeed the only way to address healthy oppositions in the centrist organisations.

And unlike the ITC we have had some success! We intervened actively as an international tendency into the revolutionary crisis in the DDR in 1989. The USFI was virtually invisible, waiting around as usual for an "opposition" to emerge from Stalinism, coaxing it along by gentle criticism and advice. The LRCI in contrast entered the PDS, fought to build a revolutionary tendency, won comrades to our positions. The result: we built a new section, small but a start. The USFI's "section" disintegrated and declined still further.

In France we intervened in the crisis of the JCR-Egalite on a clear position: the French youth and proletariat need a new revolutionary organisation. We argued this not just in theory, but we showed in practice how a revolutionary organisation should intervene against the fascist threat, how we should build a workers' united front. As a result we won youth to our banner, maybe only the much maligned "ones and twos" but again a start.

The RIL/ITC and ND, on the other hand, fought for a much grander, less sectarian, non-conservative perspective.

Alas this grand perspective has deprived ND of an organisation. The ITC has split and what is left of the RIL is a real cult, having lost the only two members who by their own account identify with the "WSL/Workers Power tradition" of orientation to the working class. Meanwhile ND and his co-thinker are left in the political half life of the *Socialist Outlook* waiting room.

Fourth or Fifth International?

The difference of method over relating to centrism is reflected in ND's hostility to *The Trotskyist Manifesto's*

insistence on the need for a new, revolutionary international.

ND starts off this section with a deliberate distortion of our position. ND accuses us of saying (p132 of the TM) that all those emerging from the crisis of the FI have:

"The same incapacity to use the methods of Lenin and Trotsky to guide the world working class to victory"

He then quotes the examples of the British WSL and the Angolan USFI section, apparently to disprove this.

Firstly, if ND had used the whole quote rather than a selective part of it, readers would have known that we were referring to the "several international centrist currents which claim its (the FI's) heritage", currents which came out of the break up of the FI. That is we were referring to the USFI, the Morenoite LIT, the Lambertist FI(ICR), etc.

Do we deny the possibility of healthy breaks from centrism emerging within these organisations? Oppositions which are moving leftwards towards revolutionary Trotskyism? We don't deny it. Any revolutionary current has to relate to these oppositions, which is precisely what the LRCI does. We have to collaborate with these oppositions, show that the disagreement with this or that position of the USFI, in this or that country, should be understood in terms of the the whole centrist method of the USFI and its leadership.

The problem with many of these oppositions is that they have never generalised from their experience, never drawn the correct conclusions about the nature of the collapse of the Fourth International into centrism and about the tasks of Trotskyists today. This was certainly the case with the WSL/TILC which WP certainly argued with, attempted to win to a revolutionary perspective through long, patient and fraternal discussions, but whose leaders finally collapsed into the USFI on an uncritical basis with a small fraction of their former organisation.

ND, in contrast, wants to laud every break from centrism, however partial, as proof that the USFI can repeatedly throw up revolutionary oppositions. This is because he, and his allies in the ITO, are part of the problem not the solution. They too have only made a partial break from the politics and method of the USFI, so how can they guide and develop such oppositions towards genuine Trotskyism?

ND attacks the Trotskyist Manifesto for being:

"... a victim of its own opportunist confusion. It does not actually call for a Fifth International, which at least would have logic on its side. Instead it remains agnostic (Fourth, Fifth, New?) and therefore totally abstract on what for revolutionaries must be a vitally concrete question, that of internationalism and international regroupment - how this is to be fought for and on what basis."

It is because it is "a concrete question" that the LRCI does not lay down in advance by what number or title the new world party of socialist revolution will be known. For us this is a question that will be resolved in the international class struggle, in the struggle against centrism and reformism.

We do not discount the possibility that the new International will be built out of the bulk of the thousands of cadres that, at the moment, comprise the various centrist "Fourth Internationals". Certainly it would take mighty class struggles world wide and an intransigent struggle within these currents to achieve this. In which case such an International might well decide it was the refounded Fourth.

This is not the only possibility or even the most likely one. A new International might come into to being, or have to be declared, out of such mighty struggles, drawing in a mass of cadres with little or no links with the existing "FIs", a situation which might leave the banner of the FI in the hands of the centrists, a besmirched and discredited banner before the vanguard. In such circumstances we would not shrink from the task of declaring a new banner against the old - the Fifth against a besmirched and centrist Fourth.

This question will be resolved in struggle, against the centrists and in the class struggle. Does this mean we are "abstract" on what we are fighting for? No. How can we be clearer than by proclaiming our fight for a Leninist-

Trotskyist International? On regroupment, on programme? The LRCI is clear and concrete. ND might disagree with it, but it is neither "passive" nor "abstract" as we have shown.

ND refers to our tactics towards the centrist as "wooden". Our tactics are flexible, but not in the sense that ND wants i.e. opportunist and diplomatic towards the USFI. It is ND who is "wooden" when he focuses all revolutionary possibilities towards developments in the USFI. He declares that: "the USFI acts as a pole of attraction for the most advanced workers breaking from Stalinism, reformism or nationalism".

The USFI is in chronic decline and crisis, its sections weakened and riven with perpetual factionalism of the worst sort. The other major centrist groups claiming to stand in the tradition of the FI are in no better a state. There is nothing in the logic of the class struggle that says that advanced workers will automatically turn to the USFI.

This is why we refuse to draw the distinction that ND does between "centrist Trotskyists" and other centrists with the implication that centrist Trotskyists are qualitatively better. In Britain, for example, the two main centrist organisations, the SWP and *Militant* both stand in effect for a "new" International, not the revival of the Fourth. In ND's schema this puts them beyond the pale.

But the fortunes of these two tendencies as compared to the fortunes of the British USFI expose the uselessness of this schema. The fact that the SWP are not formally loyal to the Transitional Programme does not make them better or worse than the supporters of *Socialist Outlook* or the USFI. The fact that the SWP, and to a lesser extent *Militant*, are considerably more influential in the working class than the dwindling band of USFI supporters makes them far more important targets for revolutionaries. Nor is Britain the only example of this. In many countries across the globe the centrist Trotskyists are of secondary importance compared with other centrist forces. With the "centrist Trotskyist" schema it is impossible to relate to such forces.

But in all cases we follow Trotsky's method of calling centrism by its right name, stigmatising its mistakes and warning the working class not to follow it. Warning, not in a purely literary sense, but by intervening in the class struggle with the objective of demonstrating in practice who is right and who is wrong. By refusing to face up to this necessity ND is bolstering centrism not combating it. It is a sign of his own inadequate break with centrism.

Last but not least ND accuses us of "anti-internationalism" on the question of the crisis of leadership. This is another piece of dogmatism in the service of opportunism.

Dogmatism because it suggests that the Transitional Programme's assertion about the crisis of humanity being reducible to the crisis of proletarian leadership is applicable for all time and for all places. This we are told is the cornerstone of internationalism.

Rubbish. The cornerstone of internationalism is a recognition of the international character of the class struggle and a determination to act on this by building a world party.

For Trotsky the crisis of leadership had a precise meaning. At that point in human history (on the eve of the world war) the entire future of humanity was reduced to the crisis of leadership. Has this situation pertained for every moment of history since 1938. Of course not, because the issue was not world war or revolution, on a world scale. The future of humanity was not at stake in the immediate sense for a long time after the war, nor indeed when we drafted the programme. The crisis of leadership did not pose the alternatives of socialism or barbarism as the immediate ensuing perspective on a world scale.

There is nothing anti-internationalist in recognising this. It does not mean that the crisis of leadership ceases to exist. It means that in certain parts of the globe and at certain times progressively solving the crisis of proletarian leadership does hold out the only hope for that section of humanity: witness Yugoslavia today. It may be that in the developing world historic revolutionary period that has opened up in the 1990s the crisis of humanity will be reduced, perhaps

rev. period.

today itself creates global crisis for imperialism

even more acutely, to the crisis of leadership: But when the TM was written this was clearly not the case.

The TM's position on the crisis of leadership does not mean that we can all take a holiday from struggling to build a new leadership (something ND implies is lodged within our position). The lack of the immediacy in terms of the "fate of humanity" does not mean that it ceases to be a central question. The crisis of leadership is decisive in every struggle. We say that in the TM:

"Today the central problem facing humanity remains: who leads the working class?" (p.19 of the English language edition)

We strive to resolve this crisis. But we were not in the same situation as Trotsky when we observed that the nature of the crisis of leadership had a different character.

But ND's dogmatism is designed to add urgency to the sectarian schema of reforming the Fourth International, more specifically the USFI. Thus, ND tells us that his determination to stand by Trotsky's 1938 position is because of the "central importance of the regeneration of the Fourth International." This justifies the struggle for regroupment, which in turn justifies orienting to the USFI, which in turn justifies liquidationism.

"Primitive Economism"

The charge of "primitive economism" is the second major theme of ND's critique. Only one concrete example of this is given: our abstention on an amendment from RIL supporters at an anti-poll tax conference.

We were right. The struggle against the poll tax involved masses of working class people. In the rarefied atmosphere of the RIL, grappling with the prejudices of the masses is simple - expel anyone who is guilty of homophobia, racism or sexism from the organisations of the working class. This was the substance of the RIL amendment.

In building a mass campaign we take a different approach. If somebody is guilty of systematic racism, homophobia and sexism then yes, they need to be dealt with administratively, as the occasion demands. But this wasn't what the RIL amendment said. It was designed to exclude people because of their prejudices in advance of uniting with such people in struggle against the Tory government. We have a different approach. Backward ideas can and must be fought. Drawing workers into struggle creates the best possible conditions for combating and overcoming the prejudices they have had stuffed into their heads by bourgeois society. The RIL, on the other hand wants to deal with such problems by administrative exclusion. (Note 1)

Economism is, as Lenin defined it, the belief that the economic struggle within the workplace, in and of itself, will spontaneously transform itself into a revolutionary struggle. The task of revolutionaries, according to economism, is to advocate militant trade unionism, pure and simple, and allow the economic struggle to do the rest. The practical consequence of this is the degradation of the revolutionary party to the level of a trade union auxiliary organisation, to leave politics out of the class struggle and the class struggle out of "politics".

Further, "primitive" economism, which we are specifically charged with, "denotes a narrow scope of revolutionary work generally, failure to understand that a good organisation of revolutionaries cannot be built on the basis of such narrow activity, and lastly - and this is the main thing - attempts to justify this narrowness and to elevate it to a special 'theory'".

The scope of our work is far from narrow. We are involved in considerably more than the trade union struggle. We build our organisation in a wide range of activities and on a wide range of political issues, considerably wider than the issues that the RIL preoccupied itself with. Most importantly we have never tried to theoretically justify "narrowness". ND is just bandying with words.

He does try to justify his charge with two attacks on the

TM - one on the question of the role of the class struggle in history and one on our position on social oppression.

The Motor Force of History

On the class struggle ND accuses us of revising Marxism. We say the class struggle is the motor force of history. ND replies:

"As a description of Marxist historical materialism this is simply wrong. The motor force of history is not the class struggle, but the development of the productive forces, and the contradiction between this development and the social relations of production. The class struggle is part of the superstructure, dependent on the economic base, or infrastructure."

Our mistake makes it "easier to understand where its [the LRCI's] economism comes from, and how this can be manifested as strong tendencies towards syndicalism, 'workerism' and trade union rank and filism." Our tactical position on unions in Ireland and our position on special oppression prove our guilt.

It is ND, not the LRCI or the TM, who is guilty of revising Marxism. Ironically the long quote he gives from Engels proves this. ND asserts that the development of the productive forces and the social relations of production are the motor force. That is crude economic determinism. Of course we are the last people to deny the centrality of the economic base as a determining factor in shaping every society. But determining the shape of a society is not the same as driving that society forward to a higher level.

The contradiction between the productive forces and social relations creates the conditions for change but not the change itself. Modes of production have to be changed by the intervention of classes that are a legitimate component of that mode of production but have an interest in advancing to a higher mode. This struggle, the class struggle, is the motor that brings the contradiction to breaking point and makes possible a higher synthesis. Saying anything else means that you lapse into the sort of economic determinism characteristic of the Second International. The collapse of capitalism is inevitable, therefore we will wait for it to happen. This is the logical end point of ND's position. It will go down very well with the USFI for whom the "historical process" has always stood higher than the class struggle and the conscious intervention into it by revolutionaries seeking to direct it towards socialist goals.

In short, only the class struggle makes possible the passage from one mode of production to another in modern class society (and by modern we mean documented class societies from tributary modes of production through to capitalism - this and this alone being the import of Engels' correction to the Communist *Manifesto* that ND attaches such significance to).

Without the class struggle (the forms of which are part of the superstructure, but whose content is an integral part of the social relations of any class society) society cannot move forward. It would be like a car without a motor. In that sense our assertion is completely correct. We are astounded that any Marxist could think otherwise. After all we didn't invent this idea. Marx and Engels refer to it in the *Communist Manifesto*. In *The Class Struggles in France* Marx remarks that:

"Revolutions are the locomotives of history."

Against the "objective historians" of his day Marx, in his 1869 Preface to *The Eighteenth Brumaire* of Louis Napoleon, explained that "the class struggle [he emphasised this, not us] in France created circumstances and conditions which allowed a mediocre and grotesque individual to play the hero's role", noting in this case how the locomotive could work in reverse (counter-revolution). And in his famous work on Bonaparte, far from suggesting that bourgeois society came into being merely as a result of the contradiction between the productive forces and the social relations of production, Marx observed:

"But unheroic as bourgeois society is, it still required heroism, self-sacrifice, terror, civil war, and battles in which whole nations were engaged, to bring it into the world."

In a letter to Weydemeyer Marx insists his "discovery" was "that class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat". For his part Engels, in a letter to Lavrov in 1875 states that he continues to "regard previous history as a series of class struggles". Lenin, writing after the death of both of the founders of Marxism, repeats that modern society (by which he means capitalism) has "shown even more strikingly (though sometimes in a very one-sided, 'peaceful' and 'constitutional' form) the class struggle as the mainspring of events." (*Karl Marx*).

We list these various examples from Marx, Engels and Lenin to show that we are not saying anything particularly new when we assert that the class struggle is the motor force of history. Indeed, only if you understand the class struggle in its narrowest economic form, as ND apparently does, can you suggest that this tenet of historical materialism is somehow a root cause of economism. We understand the three dimensions of the class struggle - the economic, the political and the theoretical - as products of the contradiction between the productive forces and the social relations, but special products in that without them society would not move forward. Quite simply, history would not have progressed one step forward without the struggle between the contending classes. In that sense the class struggle is the motor force of history.

Social Oppression

Why is this relevant to social oppression - the oppression of women, of gay men and lesbians, youth and black people? In the first place you have to understand the social basis of oppression. This oppression is rooted in class society and is necessary for the maintenance of certain key structures in class society (the family and the nation state). That is why we refer to social oppression rather than "special oppression". The distinction is that the term social oppression expresses a phenomenon that can be understood in social, and class terms. "Special" oppression signifies no such thing. On the contrary, as a term, and as a concept acted on by the RIL/ITC, it dislocates the question of oppression from the class struggle.

Unless you understand the role of the class struggle in the fight against social oppression you end up with the grossly opportunist practice of the RIL/ITC. For them, and clearly ND held to their line when he wrote his critique, "special oppression" is separate from the class struggle. He objects to our central argument that only proletarian leadership can guarantee the liberation of the socially oppressed. He declares our commitment to "proletarian movements of the oppressed" as "an economist obsession with social origin". He asks:

"Is there no strategy for the specially oppressed as a whole, other than a liberal recognition that it exists?"

The answer to all of this is simple - without the victory of the working class, without the socialist revolution, there will be no liberation for the socially oppressed. That is not economist. It flows from a central tenet of Marxism - namely that the working class is the only consistently revolutionary class in capitalist society because it alone has no stake in capitalist society. To deny this, and to suggest that there is some "special" strategy for the oppressed as a whole is to abandon Marxism.

The "specially oppressed" as a whole consists of different layers and strata, different classes. Sections of the "specially oppressed" have a substantial stake in capitalist society. As a result of this their interest in liquidating their oppression is subordinated to their fundamental class interests - ruling class women, ruling class gay men, black capitalists in the USA, the youth who attend Eton and Harrow, to give just a few examples. This is why we reject the RIL position of fighting for a "strategic alliance" be-

tween the working class and the specially oppressed. This can only mean calling for a cross class movement embracing our class enemies, because it fails to draw the class line amongst the socially oppressed.

Does this mean that we are saying social origin determines our entire strategy? Are we being "workerist"? Let's get things in proportion: being determines consciousness, so social origin is not an insignificant question. Most people whose social origin lies within the classes who have a material stake in class society - the bourgeoisie and sections of the petit bourgeoisie - are unlikely to come over to the social revolution simply because of their gender, sexuality or colour. A minority will.

Will those who do break with their class be welcomed into the proletarian movement of the oppressed? Yes. The decisive character of a proletarian movement is not whether or not all the gay men or women in it are workers by social origin, but whether or not it is based on proletarian politics, on the politics of class struggle. In other words, "proletarian" defines the class interest such a movement serves. There is nothing economic about that. Nor does that have any bearing on tactical decisions a party may take about particular campaigns. That is why ND's digression into tactics over Clause 25 is so pointless. (Note 2)

For the RIL/ITC the struggles of lesbians and gay men, for example, become decisive - regardless of who leads them, regardless of their class content - because these layers are the real "vanguard". The entire practice of the ITC was based on elevating the centrality of the struggles of the oppressed. It was a method that led the US ITC section, the Revolutionary Workers League, to hail the Los Angeles riots as the "beginning of the US revolution". Because it was a revolt, primarily of black people, specially oppressed people, it was spontaneously revolutionary.

This nonsense flows directly from the ITC's refusal to analyse the socially oppressed and their struggles from a working class standpoint. The ITC wrote:

"Lesbians and gay men are potentially among the most militant and committed revolutionary fighters, because capitalism's anti-lesbian/gay bigotry means they have less to lose and more to gain by capitalism's overthrow."

What utter rubbish. The *class position* of lesbians and gay men can be decisive in realising or thwarting such potential and militancy. *Working class* lesbians and gay men do have little to lose and are potentially militant and revolutionary.

But this flows from the combination of their class position and their social oppression. It is not an automatic potential lodged within all lesbians and gay men regardless of their social position inside class society. Moreover the RIL/ITC position glosses over the backwardness than can manifest itself in the communities of the socially oppressed. What about the misogyny that exists inside the male gay community, the sexism of some black men, the backwardness many women suffer from as a result of their social position.

All of these things militate against the "specially oppressed" automatically becoming a vanguard. To say this is not to deny that from these groups, precisely because of their oppression, can come important class fighters and a significant part of the vanguard. Out of struggles against their oppression the best elements can and must be won to revolutionary politics. It demonstrates the centrality for the revolutionary party of orienting to these struggles, of winning the socially oppressed to a proletarian, revolutionary socialist perspective. If this is economism, then Marx, Engels, Kollontai, Zetkin, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky were every bit as guilty of it as the LRCL.

Other Points

ND's main point is to prove that we are a sectarian and economist group. He does criticise a number of other aspects of the TM. Most of these are secondary to the central thrust of his argument.

• On the anti-imperialist united front, for example, it is ND who is being scholastic. He believes that a bloc with the national bourgeoisie in certain circumstances is permissible but is not to be called the anti-imperialist united front. He is welcome to call it by any name he chooses. For us it involves unity in action against a common enemy with no mixing of banners and with the aim of breaking the masses from their misleaders. That is the method of the united front as spelled out by the healthy Comintern.

The real problem he has is that he believes the united front is a much broader, longer term tactic. This is revealed when he claims that the anti-imperialist united front "can also be the vehicle for putting forward a programme of political demands for the conquest of power by the working class." Not true. The united front can never be the substitute for the party - though it has to be said that every united front the RIL/ITC ever intervened in was considered to be the vehicle, not for common action, but for common propaganda with a long list of political demands which properly speaking is the task of the party.

• On Stalinism we are attacked for supporting self-determination even where there is a threat of restoration. ND tells us that the problem in the TM is that "it fails to stress the necessity for differentiating state independence from counter revolution, be it threatened or actual". There then follows a series of arguments taken from the Workers International League/Leninist Trotskyist Tendency (WIL/LTT) critique of WP and the LRCL. For comrades who want to see the detailed replies to the originators of these positions they should refer to the relevant issues of Workers Power.

• ND declares we should have opposed "German reunification on imperialism's terms rather than capitulating to it, as Workers Power did." We did oppose imperialist re-unification; we stood for the "Revolutionary re-unification of Germany" i.e. for a workers' council German Workers Republic (see *Trotskyist International* No.4).

We also opposed the "imperialist anchluss" as it came about and raised revolutionary and democratic demands in these events. ND in fact wanted to join the bankrupt Green and "autonomist" left who were completely marginalised with their hopeless and liberal cries of "Never Again Germany". What a strategy!

• This revolutionary pickpocket repeats the charges of the WIL/LTT that we were wrong both on the Baltics for supporting their rights for self-determination and on the Azeris for opposing it! For good measure he throws in the innuendo that this difference of position was something to do the Azeris being Muslims while the Balts were white Christians.

For the record we opposed the break up of the Soviet Union, argued against it. When the vast majority of the workers in the Baltic states, including a high proportion of the Russian workers there, clearly demonstrated their support for independence we supported it, fought for a Soviet Lithuania, Estonia etc., and defended the workers' demonstrations against the murderous attacks of the black berets. PRACTICE??

Does this fail to distinguish "state independence from counter-revolution". No, it is a revolutionary method of fighting counter revolution, the method of Lenin and Trotsky on the national question, clearly argued for in the ABC of Communism, the commentary on the Bolsheviks' programme. Far from handing the leadership of the struggle for independence over to the restorationist nationalists, the counter-revolutionaries, the tactic allows the revolutionaries to fight alongside the workers for independence, but for an independent Soviet state.

ND on the other hand would do what? Stand with the Black Berets, with the Stalinists to crush the movement? Or abstain, wring his hands and go home? He does not tell us.

One thing is clear. After a very short period of state independence the ability of nationalist demagogues like Landsbergis to manipulate the masses' anti Stalinism to

the ends of his fast track restorationist programme has diminished. Most commentators report the virtual absence of the "national" question from the current struggles of the Lithuanian masses, as they focus on the social deprivation thrown up by the stalled restoration programme. As a result the Lithuanian masses have voted in a state capitalist restorationist President with Stalinist credentials.

Azerbaijan presented a different situation. The insurrection led by the Azeri Popular Front took place after bloody pogroms against the Armenian minority in Baku. Its aim was to seize power to pursue an all out war against the Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh. This was the clear aim and slogan of the movement. It had support and arms coming from Iran. It did not even, at the time, call for the separation of Azerbaijan from the USSR. It was a movement in defence of the right of Azeri nationalists to carry out pogroms. Without taking any responsibility for the brutality with which KGB troops put down the rising (they largely failed to stop the pogroms and attacked innocent Azeris) we had to give critical support to the armed forces of the workers' state against a pogromist, religious obscurantist uprising.

• On the workers' government ND is again being scholastic about when it can be raised agitational and when propagandistically. His implication appears to be that we are only prepared to raise it agitational. This is a desperate scraping around for criticisms. He should look at our election coverage, our propaganda during the miners' strike and a host of other occasions to see that we are quite capable of raising the slogan at a propaganda level as a means of trying to break advanced workers from reformism. Frankly we need to be enlightened about ND's real criticism here. If he can explain to us what he means by our lack of "an organic understanding" of the relationship between propaganda and agitation we may be able to take the discussion forward. But we are genuinely unclear about what "an organic" understanding is.

• ND attacks out characterisation of South Africa and makes an interesting point about our characterisation of Portugal as imperialist. We are in a process of trying to analyse the exact structure of imperialist exploitation developing within the EC, and there may be a case for saying that Portugal has become a semi colony. Certainly Ireland is a semi colony and our provisional position is that Greece is one. But the case ND makes from Lenin's comments on Portugal is hard to sustain. It could be said equally that Belgium had become a mere tool of Anglo French imperialism at the outbreak of World War One. But it remained a small *imperialist* country.

More importantly we reject ND's solution to the problem of analysing the character of countries like Portugal: labelling them "countries of intermediate capitalist development". It is not a question of trying to pigeonhole countries into two broad categories: "imperialist" and "semicolonial". Transitional categories are not excluded from Marxism. But we have to try to understand the passage from quantity into quality in the transitions taking place in modern states. With Iraq, for example, centrists like the *Leninist* group in Britain tried to avoid defending Iraq on the grounds that it was an intermediate kind of state, in the process of becoming a minor imperialism. We pointed out that what was stopping it becoming a minor imperialism was a structure of economic and military domination held in place by the major imperialisms - its semi-colonial status.

Despite all this we would be the first to admit that fully understanding the changing structure of the imperialist world economy is an ongoing theoretical task we have by no means completed.

Conclusion

ND's critique is a weak attempt to justify the bankrupt strategy of the RIL/ITC. He has left this organisation, but he is clinging on to its schema of reforming centrist

Trotskyism, specifically the USFI.

This explains why his document is being circulated now. It is an attempt to warn USFI dissidents to stay away from the LRCI. It is a failed attempt because it is a critique written from the standpoint of somebody who has no programmatic mooring, somebody who believes that agreement on a programme written in 1938 is a sufficient basis for regroupment in 1993.

It is a centrist critique. Centrism is incapable of developing a programme for the current period so it denounces the revolutionaries who confront and execute this task for their arrogance.

Centrism is incapable of building revolutionary parties and a new revolutionary International, so it denounces the revolutionaries who actively seek to do this as sectarians and conservatives.

Centrism is embarrassed about winning people to its banner, so it attacks revolutionaries seeking to recruit people to their organisation as "passive".

Centrism, in a nutshell, has nothing to offer dissidents in the USFI other than more of the same, perhaps with a left gloss to salve consciences.

For those who wish to break from centrism ND's critique, the ITO and the RIL/ITC tradition offer nothing. The LRCI, on the basis of *The Trotskyist Manifesto*, offers an opportunity to begin afresh, to intervene in the class struggle on a revolutionary basis, to join in the real struggle for a new world party of socialist revolution. And like every previous revolutionary party we are not at all ashamed to say to revolutionaries: join us.★

Notes

(1) This is ND's only example. Of course he adds the fact that we "slandered" somebody they recruited from us, one CB. CB was and is a thief. Saying so is not slander. The RIL knew he was a thief, who stole a computer from one of our branches, and covered up for him for the brief period he was one of their members. The proof of this? In a document he co-authored before leaving the RIL ND reveals the full story:

"The CC of the RIL decided that after initial protests and exposure of the way the WP were using the issue of the computer and CB, we would hand back that computer to WP, as it stood in the way of a serious political intervention and debate, **WHATEVER THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF THE DISPUTE ITSELF**. CB however sold the computer, Leland [the leader of the RWL] came over, told him it was OK and recruited him to the RIL then and there" (emphasis in original).

(ND and GD *Regenerate the Fourth International, Regenerate the ITC* an account of the RIL/RWL's internal life available to those with strong stomachs from ND himself.)

(2) We took a decision on this campaign, prompted by our lesbian and gay fraction, that WP alone would be unable to sustain the campaign if it failed to draw in wider forces. Organisations serious about building parties are frequently required to take such tactical decisions. To make out this is a crowning proof of our economism is nonsense.■

