

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST REPRINTS

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No1



OUR TASKS AND METHODS

THE QUESTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL

Publication of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency

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Number One August 1979

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INTRODUCTION

The articles reprinted here should have more than a historical value for those struggling for independent working class politics. 'Our tasks and methods' ('OTAM') and 'The question of the International' were the first serious attempts in the post-war period to explain the weaknesses of the revolutionary movement. These articles sought both to assess the past experiences of what is loosely called the 'revolutionary left' and to demonstrate the way in which these weaknesses were rooted in the material conditions of the period. They thus provide a critique of radical politics in the Marxist sense of the term: they offer a critical assessment of past experiences of struggle from which central political lessons are drawn.

'OTAM' was the product of a major political debate inside the International Socialists (IS, now the Socialist Workers Party — SWP). The comrades on one side of this debate sought to re-establish the Marxist approach on such fundamental questions as the party, the programme, reformism and the crisis. The IS leadership cut short this debate by expelling from the organisation the comrades who had brought these issues into the open.¹ 'OTAM', which was written in response to this debate, was an attempt to use this important political experience to understand the mistakes of the left as a whole.

The main contribution of 'OTAM' to working class politics is that it approaches the problem of building a revolutionary party in a materialist fashion. Rather than discussing party-building in general terms, it relates it to past experiences of the working class and to the specific obstacles facing Marxists today. It isolates two major problems that must be resolved in winning workers to revolutionary communism — the development of a programme and the barrier of reformism.

'OTAM' and the article on the International both draw attention to the problem of developing a programme adequate to today's conditions. They show how the left in the post-war period failed to establish the programmatic basis for defending working class interests. The left did not understand that the defeats suffered by the working class at the hands of fascism and Stalinism had meant the liquidation of Marxism as a living force in the working class. This failure to understand changing material conditions and their effect on working class consciousness took two separate, but inter-related, forms which still persist today. Organisations such as the Workers Revolutionary Party, the Workers Socialist League and the International Spartacist Tendency simply restate the programmatic positions of Lenin and Trotsky. Unable to develop a programme independently, these organisations repeat past positions in the hope that they will work today. This dogmatism leads in practice to the rejection of Marxism as a living science and reduces it to a formula.

The second political trend identified by 'OTAM' regards the repetition of past positions as inadequate for mastering changing material conditions. However, instead of drawing the conclusion that they must develop Marxism and Leninism, these organisations (today's RCG, the International Marxist Group (IMG), and the SWP) reject the past gains of the Bolshevik movement altogether. They substitute vulgar empiricism for Marxism. While the 'realism' of these organisations contrasts with their more dogmatic counterparts,

they are none the less the product of past defeats of the working class and of independent working class politics.

'OTAM' represents a break from the dogmatic/empiricist tradition of the British left. It calls on revolutionaries to develop Marxist theory as part of the process of building a fighting organisation in the working class. Theory is not a cumbersome extra — it constitutes an essential component of programmatic development and cadre training. 'OTAM' draws out the consequences of rebuilding Marxism in the working class. It indicates the questions that need to be resolved theoretically and offers an organisational framework for realising this objective.

The second important contribution of 'OTAM' is on the problem of reformism. It shows that the failure of workers to break from reformism cannot be explained as the result of a series of betrayals, but that it has firm roots in the traditions of the labour movement. As a method of challenging reformism the radical left's customary denunciations of trade union bureaucrats are insufficient. A precondition for defeating reformism is the existence of a vanguard that can give a conscious expression to the day-to-day experiences of the working class. Workers will not spontaneously see reformist politics as the cause of their defeats. This has to be demonstrated in practice by a working class leadership.

The question of class leadership is presented by 'OTAM' in a way that differs fundamentally from its presentation by the organisations of the radical left. Organisations like the SWP and the IMG believe that there is a ready-made vanguard. For such organisations, to be a revolutionary it is sufficient to feel a gut revulsion against capitalism and display class hatred for the bosses. 'The question of the International' shows that, at different times and in different circumstances, various social strata have been presented as a vanguard. For the SWP, shop stewards or rank and file militants may play this role, needing only to be organised in order to become a revolutionary force. The IMG in the past has depicted students, women, blacks, youth and gays as a revolutionary force. 'OTAM' argues against such wishful thinking that a vanguard does not arise spontaneously, but has to be trained around the struggle for a programme.

Class anger and hatred of oppression are essential for building a revolutionary movement. But these spontaneous responses do not yet constitute revolutionary consciousness. The anti-capitalist potential contained within them has to be transformed into independent class politics. The struggle for ideological independence is one of the major pre-requisites for building a working class vanguard.

One of the clearest expressions of the RCG's abandonment of the orientation of 'OTAM' is likewise its rejection of the Leninist concept of the vanguard. Referring to black and Irish workers, the RCG calls on the 'revolutionary movement' to 'consolidate the vanguard which already exists in Britain and is now fighting the British state' (*Revolutionary Communist*, No 9, June 1979, p6). Nobody, whether they are black, white, female or Irish, arrives at class consciousness spontaneously. The RCG is merely following in the footsteps of the radical left which is willing to portray any oppressed stratum as the van-

guard. In doing so it gives up any attempt to provide revolutionary leadership and abandons the struggle to transform the response to an immediate experience into a class conscious understanding of capitalist society.

The political strategy contained in 'OTAM' has contemporary relevance. The absence of a revolutionary vanguard means that the British working class has yet to learn the lessons from five years under a Labour government. Many workers knew that Callaghan and Healey had betrayed their interests. But their disgust with particular Labour leaders in no way undermines the credibility of reformist politics. Many of the same workers who are disillusioned with the Labour leadership look to the left reformists within the party for an alternative. Predictably, the radical left ignores the task of confronting Labourism as a way of training a vanguard. Instead it chooses the easy road of denouncing the Conservative Government, hoping to capitalise on the anti-Tory sentiments that prevail in the labour movement. The working class does not need to be told that the Tory Party is the party of the bosses. Its class hatred has to be directed at the present leadership of the working class in order to defend the proletariat. The radical left's narrow concept of the vanguard means that it adapts to existing militant consciousness and hence can never challenge reformism.

'OTAM' relates the problem of party-building to the issues facing the working class today. It rejects the spurious notion of mass work and demonstrates that before mass agitation can be pursued a vanguard has to be built. This means that revolutionaries must address not the whole of a heterogeneous working class, but those who have begun to doubt their existing leadership and are open to a political alternative to reformism.

Since 'OTAM' was written the RCT has developed this approach further. To build a class leadership, revolutionaries must raise questions that pose the necessity for a break with reformism in the sharpest possible way. How can this be done? Militant opposition to incomes policy, for example, can be conducted from a variety of viewpoints. While revolutionaries assert the need to smash all forms of incomes policy and to direct opposition against the state, class lines may still be unclear. Workers may oppose incomes policy and yet still retain illusions in the Labour left or other reformist tendencies. However, by raising political questions such as opposition to British imperialism's oppression of Ireland, or the demand to smash all immigration controls, it is possible to draw clear class lines in struggle. Unconditional support for the struggle against British imperialism in Ireland or unequivocal rejection of immigration controls implies a direct challenge to the state and to reformist politics. Today the RCT is actively engaged in opposition to the Irish War and racial oppression with the objective of transforming the existing consciousness of the working class. By selecting the issues which most clearly reveal the necessity for a break with reformism our recent work has been a development of 'OTAM'.

'The question of the International' complements and extends the arguments put forward in 'OTAM'. It critically examines the historical evolution of the Marxist movement which Trotsky consolidated, locating the deformations suffered by the various sections of the Fourth International in the material conditions of the post-war period. It shows how the programmatic degeneration of the Fourth International was moulded by these conditions. One of the most significant problems brought to light by the analysis is the inability of the Fourth International to learn from past mistakes. As a result its commitment to communism has been constantly undermined by its programmatic decay.

This process has accelerated during the present crisis. Today, the Fourth International's radical rhetoric barely conceals its opportunism. For example, the British section, the IMG, pursues a political strategy which places it on the left wing of Labourism. The article shows why this degeneration is a *necessary* consequence of an inability to develop a Trotskyist programme.

Since these documents were written the RCT has developed revolutionary politics further. Readers of this reprint and of *Revolutionary Communist Papers* and *Revolutionary Communist Pamphlets* will find that the publications of the RCT contain a cumulative programmatic development based on theoretical work and a critical assessment of working class struggles. We hope that readers who are committed to building a revolutionary movement in Britain and internationally will see in these articles and in the politics of the RCT the way forward to the construction of a working class party. Your next step should be to join the struggle for revolutionary communism.

Political Committee of the RCT
July 1979

The articles below are reprinted from *Revolutionary Communist*. 'Our tasks and methods' is taken from *Revolutionary Communist* No 1, January 1975 and 'The question of the International' from *Revolutionary Communist*, No 2, May 1975.

¹ 'OTAM' was the founding document of the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), formed by a section of those expelled from IS in 1974. In November 1976 the majority of the RCG leadership rejected the orientation of this document, thereby precipitating a split in the organisation. The minority formed the Revolutionary Communist Tendency (RCT), which based itself on the gains expressed in 'OTAM'.

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PAPERS No 1

The first issue of the RCT's theoretical journal contains an analysis of the issues which led to its formation. One article deals with the political degeneration of the RCG which resulted in the split of November 1976. The other, through a critique of the RCG's adaptation to Stalinism, provides a theoretical understanding of the communist parties today.

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Our Tasks and Methods: the founding document of the RCG

This document represents our political starting point. It is a statement that is the outcome of a process of political discussion and clarification. The contradictions of the world economy — and within it, Britain — are deepening: this presents revolutionaries with serious tasks. As the existing political strategies of groups on the left prove inadequate to these tasks, other comrades will be forced to ask the questions we have had to face. We feel this document raises issues which are relevant not just to us, but to the whole revolutionary movement.

Why we formed the RCG

The major problems forced upon the working class by the present crisis of capitalism demand a clear assessment of the tasks of revolutionaries. For us, a revolutionary party is defined by its programme, its assessment of the objective conditions and the strategy it proposes for winning the working class to the struggle for state power. We need to develop such a programme today: to do this we have to build upon the accumulated theoretical gains of the Marxist movement so that we can draw up a balance sheet of developments since the Second World War and develop a scientific understanding of the present period. We believe that none of the groups on the left have carried out this task and, consequently, they find themselves unable to relate to today's conditions. Any revolutionary organisation must be judged by how it measures up to the tasks of today. The first of these is the development of a revolutionary programme.

The development of a revolutionary programme is inseparable from our other tasks. The objective conditions and the pressing problems facing the class demand that we both develop a programme and of necessity intervene in the struggles of the class before such a programme is established. Our general theoretical assessment of the present political situation provides the basis for this work. Because of the worsening crisis, the basic struggles of the working class to defend its conditions are beginning to collide with the barriers of reformist ideology. Under these conditions some sections of the class are beginning to break in a fragmented

way from bourgeois ideology, and are being driven by the pressure of objective events to look for alternative political solutions to the problems they face. These sections constitute a potential vanguard in the working class. If the working class is to play its independent revolutionary role, a vanguard in the class, free from the domination of bourgeois ideology, must be created. The potential vanguard, which is searching for political solutions to the problems facing the class, can become a vanguard capable of leading the struggle to overthrow the bourgeois state only when it is armed with an independent working class programme. Unless this potential vanguard adheres to such a programme, it will be drawn into various centrist currents and be diverted. One of the central tasks of revolutionaries today is to train this potential vanguard around a revolutionary programme, for only through winning this vanguard will it be possible to go on to win the mass of workers.

These tasks, of developing a programme and winning the potential vanguard, must go together with the development of a revolutionary organisation and the training of a revolutionary cadre. Only a democratic centralist organisation of committed revolutionaries can develop such a programme and fight to win the potential vanguard to it. It is to carry out these threefold tasks that we have formed the Revolutionary Communist Group.

Our group began its life as the Revolutionary Opposition in the International Socialists and from its beginning was involved in a political fight to defend the basic principles of Marxist politics. We argued against IS's abandonment of the materialist basis of Marxism, which was signalled in its rejection of the concept of the imperialist epoch.¹ We also showed the political consequences of this — its adaptation to trade union militancy and its utopian socialism. We argued that revolutionaries had to adopt a transitional programme which, on the basis of a struggle to defend existing living standards and conditions, could bring the working class to see the necessity for revolution. The emergence of our group in IS was not accidental. With the accelerating crisis of the 70s, the weakness of localised trade union militancy and economistic politics began to be revealed. IS, having plunged itself most deeply into the currents which adhered to these methods of struggle, was necessarily amongst the first to be confronted by this weakness. Our

1. See the article on 'The International Socialists and Centrism: the Re-emergence of Economism' in this journal for a full discussion of IS's rejection of the concept of the imperialist epoch.

development in response to the crisis within the workers' movement, of which IS was symptomatic — a crisis of leadership which was prompted by the re-emergence of inter-imperialist rivalries and the growing disruptions of world economy — was thus not an isolated phenomenon; on the contrary, as the crisis intensifies, so other groups treading the same path as IS will themselves be racked by internal dissensions and splits.

In order to fight for their politics in IS, the members of the Revolutionary Opposition formed a group, which, because of the restrictions on internal democracy and the factional manoeuvres of the leadership in IS, necessarily had to remain secret. Eventually the witchhunt came to a head and the bulk of the members and supporters of the Revolutionary Opposition were expelled from IS. At this point, the document 'What We Stand For — A Revolutionary Opposition in IS', which summed up the main positions we fought for in IS, was issued. While we stand by the central theses of that document, we feel that it neither followed through the logic of its conclusions, nor clearly spelt out the tasks of revolutionaries in Britain today. Following our expulsion from IS, a debate about the way forward for the Revolutionary Opposition occurred, which eventually led to a split. This resulted in a section of the former Revolutionary Opposition following through the logic of its earlier positions and taking the necessary steps to face up to the tasks confronting revolutionaries by forming the Revolutionary Communist Group in March 1974.

The rest of this document falls into three sections. Firstly, we locate our tasks in the context of the imperialist epoch. Secondly, we explain what our political orientation should be at the present time. Thirdly, we discuss the organisational form we have adopted to enable us to fulfil our tasks.

The tasks of revolutionaries in the imperialist epoch

Though the Revolutionary Opposition stressed, quite correctly, the importance of understanding the nature of the epoch as the transitional epoch, it did not fully draw out the practical consequences of this. This is revealed most clearly in its attitude to the party. The section on 'What kind of party' in the 'What We Stand For' document treats the necessity for the party primarily as the need for a particular form of organisation — democratic centralism. It quite correctly indicated that:

'The IS leadership simply took over what they considered to be "Leninist organisation", while continuing to reject the *central core* of Lenin's conception of the party of which the organisational forms are no more than a secondary expression.'²

But it failed to point out what this central core is. For the authors of the document, Lenin's view of the party is located not in the objective necessities of the imperialist epoch, but in a series of general truisms:

'The party could not just be the organisation of the most advanced and audacious members of the working class. The significance of the party was not just that it organised the class, but that it organised it for a certain strategy on the basis of a clear programme. Given the

uneven and atomised nature of the working class under capitalism, the party has the function of seeking to bring unity, coherence, and direction to the class struggle by organising around a particular strategy, tactics, slogans and demands. It has to seek to generalise the struggles which capitalism works to diversify.'³

This view of the party as 'generalising the struggles and overcoming the divisions in the working class' is all too common on the left. The 'uneven and atomised nature of the working class under capitalism' is hardly a profound observation. We can deduce nothing from it but the difficulty of uniting the class. Were it the case that capitalism worked primarily to diversify the struggles of the working class, there would be no basis for the socialist revolution, and the revolutionary party would be reduced to a utopian sect. In fact, capitalism has developed the productive forces to the point where the material basis for socialism exists. The division of labour has assumed international dimensions, so that the maintenance of the restricted boundaries of the nation state conflicts more and more with capital's requirement for a world market. Capitalism not only establishes the material preconditions for socialism, but gives birth to the revolutionary class capable of overthrowing it. Far from isolating workers from each other, it brings them together in large factories. Far from atomising the working class, it tends, historically, to break down all local and parochial divisions between town and country, between crafts and trades, through eliminating all personal and individual ties between workers and particular employers. This is not to deny, of course, that the capitalist class attempts to work against these tendencies by setting sections of the class against each other (along narrow craft, racial and sexual lines) and workers of one country against those of another: nor to deny that these attempts find support in certain appearances of capitalism which provide a basis for such divisions in the class. But the deficiencies of the everyday struggles of the working class are not simply the result of these divisions.

The central weakness of the spontaneous struggles of the class is not just their lack of unity, but their domination by bourgeois ideology, of which this lack of unity is itself a reflection. The spontaneous struggles of the class focus on the improvement of its conditions of existence within capitalism, upon the achievement of a fair day's wage, rather than on the abolition of capitalism and the wages system. However much trade union consciousness becomes generalised, it remains under the domination of bourgeois ideology. The task of the party is not simply to generalise these struggles, but to redirect the spontaneous revolt of the working class from the path of reforms within capitalism to the fight for state power. Of course unity is important in the class struggle, and the party strives to unite the class; however, it does this not simply by linking up various isolated battles, but by decisively reorienting these towards the struggle for state power. It is this which makes a unified and centralised leadership of the working class essential. If the working class has not achieved the highest degree of unification and organisation, it will be unable to take power from the bourgeoisie. Before the bourgeois revolution, the

2. *What We Stand For — A Revolutionary Opposition in IS*, p55.

3. *ibid.*

bourgeoisie was able to gradually develop a position of economic dominance. The working class has no such opportunity: it must first seize power before being able to abolish private property and lay the basis for a planned economy. The party must weld the proletariat into a tightly organised force against the might of the bourgeois state. Thus it is the task of the party both to bring to the working class a true consciousness of its own interests, and to organise and lead the struggle for state power.

In order to do this the party must set itself the highest theoretical standards: it must wage a constant fight to defend the principles of Marxism and to develop an adequate understanding of the real conditions of society. Without this it will have no compass to guide its activity, but must of necessity respond pragmatically to every new development in the workers' movement, and thus inevitably fall prey to bourgeois ideology. It is simply wrong to see the task of the party as generalising the existing working class struggles. The central tasks of the Leninist party are to independently work out a programme for the working class, to strive to win the mass of the working class away from the domination of bourgeois politics and to organise and lead the struggle for state power.

It is in the imperialist epoch that the necessity for the Leninist party arises. We will discuss the role of the party in the imperialist epoch first at an abstract level, dealing only with the most general tendencies of the epoch. Only later will we go on to deal with the post-war period, where certain features of the imperialist epoch were suppressed, and where it appeared that capitalism could provide long-term improvements in the material conditions of the working class. In the imperialist epoch, which began at the beginning of the twentieth century, capitalism is no longer able to regularly and systematically develop the productive forces. Capitalism, through developing and socialising the productive forces, has laid the material basis for the re-organisation of production on the basis of a planned economy. The further development of the productive forces comes into conflict with the existing social relations of production, and any further systematic development of the productive forces depends on the overthrow of the capitalist relations of production. The level of development of the productive forces shows the possibility of socialism, while the conflict between the development of production and the existing social relations poses, through a deepening social crisis, the necessity for revolution. In the imperialist epoch capitalism suffers from a deep and prolonged crisis: a crisis which can only be successfully resolved if there exists a revolutionary party capable of winning the mass of the class to its programme. The maintenance of capitalism rests not on its material foundations — for these are in decay — but on the immaturity and backwardness of the working class and its leadership. The various sharp political turns and alternations of periods of revolutionary advance with periods of reaction spring, not from changes in the economic base, but from impulses of a purely superstructural character. In this epoch the outcome of the crisis rests on the subjective factor: the understanding, organisation and

determination of the revolutionary party.

This is not to say that the task of the party is to march directly to the seizure of state power, for their will have to be many detours and manoeuvres on that road. It is to say that the party must place at the centre of its programme a strategy for winning the masses to the struggle for power. In the period which preceded the imperialist epoch, the problem of organising the seizure of state power did not occupy a major place in the discussions of either the Marxist or revisionist wings of the Second International. This period was characterised by the gradual organic development and strengthening of the working class movement and the numerical growth of the proletariat in line with the regular development of the productive forces. There were whole periods in which the actions of the party focussed on winning improvements in the conditions of existence of the class and reinforcing the organisation of the proletariat. This was both possible and necessary as the regular development of the productive forces gave capitalism a fundamental stability in this period. The seizure of state power was thus only presented as a necessity in occasional situations where the bourgeois state was particularly weakened and where there was a grave economic crisis — for instance, France in 1871, Russia in 1905. Some sections of the Second International adapted to these circumstances and subordinated their activities to fighting for what was possible within capitalism. They developed what became known as the 'Minimum-Maximum' programme, which effectively divided the activities of the party between the day to day struggle for social reforms within capitalism (the minimum), and making propaganda for socialism (the maximum). The day to day struggle was separated from the final goal and confined within the limits of bourgeois democracy. For these sections, the gradual accumulation of reforms would lead to the growing over of capitalism into socialism, and thus it was unnecessary to prepare and organise the class for the struggle for power.

In the imperialist epoch, however, where there is no possibility of achieving any general and systematic reforms, this necessarily led to the reformist parties sacrificing the interests of the working class to the needs of capital. In the imperialist epoch, the dominance of this reformist leadership in the labour movement and the ideological dependence of the working class on the bourgeoisie become the central pillars of capitalist stability. The whole epoch is characterised by a deep crisis of proletarian leadership: the objective conditions make revolution an imminent necessity, yet the consciousness of the mass of workers and their leadership lags behind the development of the social crisis springing from the objective conditions. The revolutionary party must overcome this crisis by leading the masses from their everyday situation, through their own experience, to the point where they see the bankruptcy of reformism and the necessity to struggle for state power. The party must advance a transitional programme which, starting from the present consciousness of the masses, takes them through struggle to grasp the need to overthrow the capitalist state.

The party does not simply announce its right to leadership and call on the masses to rally round, nor does it stand aside from the struggles in which the class is engaged. It intervenes in all areas of the life of the proletariat, and attempts to draw all sections of the class and its potential allies into a struggle around transitional demands. The transitional programme is based on the premise that in the conditions of decaying capitalism, while even the most basic aspirations of the masses cannot be consistently fulfilled, the working class is by no means convinced of the practical necessity of revolution. The aim of the transitional programme is to outline a strategy for the defence of the existing gains of the class: a strategy which is in conformity with the objective conditions and consequently leads the class to engage in struggles which force it to realise the urgency of revolution. It is important to understand that, though the struggle for transitional demands leads on to the conquest of state power, these demands are defensive in form. It is the fact that the defence of the existing conquests of the class collides with the downward slide of decaying capitalism which lends the transitional demands their educational character and revolutionary significance. Thus the revolutionary party does not simply denounce the reformist leadership for its betrayals: it advances an independent programme for the defence of the basic needs of the class, and thus demonstrates that the reformists are unable to advance an adequate strategy and are unwilling to take up and fight for demands which bring them into conflict with the bourgeois state. In this way, the party fights to win the leadership of the class from the reformists by bringing the consciousness of the class into line with the objective conditions and thus to the brink of the seizure of state power.

Such a transitional programme must be based on a concrete examination of the fundamental tendencies of capitalism in the present period. It must, drawing on the accumulated theoretical gains of the Marxist movement, demonstrate anew that the prerequisites of socialism have been established and that the problems facing the working class pose the necessity of revolution. Trotsky's Transitional Programme of 1938 drew up a balance sheet of the developments of capitalism and the struggles of the class up to that point, and, on the basis of the existing crisis in society, advanced a strategy for the class. In the same way a transitional programme adequate to today's conditions must carry forward this analysis to the present period and show how the struggles of the class must now be developed. In the imperialist epoch, where the world economy dominates the development of national capitals, the laws of motion of capital can only be understood from the standpoint of the world economy. Thus, the strategy, which a national party proposes for the working class in its country, can only be fully adequate to the latter's requirements if it is based on an international programme for world revolution. Such a programme must be constructed by a revolutionary international — a disciplined organisation which is centralised on a world scale and whose sections extend and apply this programme in their particular fields of battle. It is because

of this that the development of a revolutionary party in one country can only proceed along with the development of a revolutionary international. While we cannot as yet say whether this will mean rebuilding, reforming or recreating the Fourth International (and this must clearly be a priority for our group to determine), it is clear that the struggle for a transitional programme is inseparable from the struggle for a revolutionary international.

Our general political orientation

In the previous section we attempted to outline the tasks of revolutionaries in the imperialist epoch; in the rest of this document we intend to discuss what our general political orientation should be, and what precise steps we are taking in establishing an organisation.

Our orientation has to be based on a thoroughgoing materialist analysis of the development of capitalism on a world scale since the Second World War. The political and economic conditions which prevailed in Europe and America after the immediate post-war period threw the Trotskyist organisations and the Fourth International into disarray. The expansion of capitalist production and the stabilisation of political regimes in Western Europe appeared to contradict all their forecasts and hopes, whilst the strengthening of the reformist parties weakened their position in the working class. To this day they have been unable to analyse and comprehend these developments. The Revolutionary Opposition began to undertake and develop an analysis of this process. It is an awareness of the necessity of such an analysis — and of the relevance to this of a scientific understanding of capitalism as developed in *Capital* — which distinguishes us from other organisations on the left. Though this task has yet to be completed, we alone recognise its importance and have begun to set about fulfilling it. We argued that though the period of stabilisation and expansion of capitalism in Western Europe after the war did, indeed, contradict the immediate perspectives of the Fourth International, this did not signify a fundamental change in the character of the epoch, nor did it call into question the theoretical gains of the Fourth International. As early as 1928, Trotsky had conceded the possibility of a new phase of capitalist expansion, though he considered this totally improbable. In *The Third International After Lenin*, he stated:

'Theoretically, to be sure, even a new chapter of general capitalist progress in the most powerful, leading and ruling countries is not to be excluded. But for this capitalism would first have to overcome enormous barriers of a class as well as an interstate character. It would have to strangle the proletarian revolution for a long time; it would have to enslave China completely, overthrow the socialist republic and so forth. We are still a long way from all this. Theoretical possibilities correspond least of all to political probabilities.'⁴

In the years following the Second World War, although capitalism was not restored in the Soviet Union and capitalist property relations were overthrown in China and Eastern Europe, these enormous barriers of a class as well as an

4. Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, Pathfinder Press, 1970, p81.

interstate character were eventually overcome. The defeats of the working class at the hands of fascism and Stalinism raised the class barriers, whilst the dominance of US imperialism over the world economy smashed through the interstate barriers: both ushered in a new period of capitalist accumulation.

By 1939, the criminal policies of the Stalinist and reformist parties had led to immense defeats for the working class throughout the world, and to the triumph of fascism in large parts of Western Europe. The politics of direct class collaboration, initiated during the war, were to lead to the slaughter of some of the best elements of the working class movement under the banner of their own imperialist powers. The Stalinist and reformist parties continued with these policies in the immediate post-war period: in those countries in Western Europe where the normal procedures of bourgeois democracy had been destroyed by the war they participated in the restoration of bourgeois governments, whilst elsewhere they gave full support to governments of capitalist reconstruction. Though the fact that the countries of Eastern Europe remained in Soviet hands — leading eventually to their transformation into bureaucratic workers' states — did represent a real gain, this was accompanied by the strengthening of the grip of Stalinism over the European proletariat and by defeats for the working class in other countries. The catastrophes suffered by the proletariat, and the class collaboration of its leadership, met with little opposition in the labour movement: this laid the basis for raising the rate of exploitation, a necessary condition of a new period of capitalist accumulation. At the same time, the war left the USA in a position of unrivalled supremacy as the leading power of world imperialism. It had suffered least from the war and found it easiest to take advantage of the demand generated by post-war reconstruction. A significant feature of this period was the unprecedented willingness of the US government to provide massive loan and aid capital to the industries and governments of Western Europe, and to restore European production and international trade. Though it was essential both to preserve capitalism in Western Europe and to open foreign markets to American corporations, this aid eventually was to build up Europe as a challenge to the domination of American capital itself.

We should state clearly that credit and aid could not by themselves have led to an increase in investment and an expansion of production unless a newly enlarged market and a rate of profit higher than that in the previous period were possible. The destruction of the war created the first condition. The second was made possible by the introduction in Europe of the new technology which had been developed before and during the war, primarily by the USA. This second condition itself depended upon the 'co-operation' of the working class — a co-operation provided for by a series of defeats of the class, and reinforced by the politics of class collaboration pursued by the Stalinist and reformist parties.

Though capitalism was able to go through a period of renewed accumulation after the war, this was only at the

expense of adopting further 'socialist' forms of the organisation of production. Despite the fact that the immediate tendency towards crisis had disappeared, the basic tendencies of the imperialist epoch — the internationalisation of capital, the concentration and centralisation of capital, increasing state intervention and so on — did not. One key feature of capitalism as it emerged after the post-war period was the increased role played by the state in industry. State intervention proved necessary to the rationalisation and reorganisation of production after the war, in order to maintain those essential industries and services which could no longer be profitably run by private capital. The state passed from simply safeguarding the general conditions of capitalist exploitation to taking an increasing role in production and employment, via nationalisations, subsidies and the expansion of the social services. As this increased role of the state in the national economy has played a large part in maintaining capitalist stability, it is important to understand the limits and contradictions of this intervention. It is this set of contradictions which has dominated the capitalist economy since the fifties and which finds a growing expression today in international inflation. A detailed scientific analysis of this phenomenon is set out in other documents of the RCG.⁵ Here, space only allows us to say that without such an analysis — without in fact a fully materialist understanding of the post-war expansion — it is impossible to grasp the full extent and significance of the problems confronting capital today, and thus the developing international crisis. It is as Marxists that we say that, without understanding this, it is impossible to develop an adequate strategy for the working class.

One further feature of the post-war period should be noted. While the dominance of Stalinism and reformism in the labour movement provided the conditions necessary for the post-war expansion, this itself, together with the growing role of the state, strengthened the basis of reformism in the labour movement. With the new phase of capitalist expansion, it appeared possible for the basic aspirations of the working class to be met within capitalism simply by the gradual extension of the influence of the labour and trade union leaders on the state. The increased role of the state in the economy lent strength to the view that capitalism could wither away through the extension of the 'welfare state', and, of course, the reformists took full advantage of this by pronouncing the birth of the mixed economy and the demise of capitalism. At the same time, the reformist leaders found themselves increasingly drawn into the councils of the state, since the co-operation of the working class was essential if the rationalisations which were needed to increase profitability were to go through.

Today this period is coming to an end. The general trends of the imperialist epoch are reasserting themselves. The objective barriers to further regular capitalist expansion find their expression in increased inter-imperialist rivalries, attempts to restrict the further expansion of state expenditure and mounting inflation. The working class is faced with

5. see D Yaffe, 'The Crisis of Profitability: a Critique of the Glyn-Sutcliffe Thesis', *New Left Review*, 80.

the necessity of adopting an independent programme if its interests are not to be sacrificed to the interests of the bourgeoisie. Sections of the class are beginning to be faced with the limitations of reformism: they will be driven into struggle with their own reformist leaders and will increasingly become open to revolutionary ideas. Yet, today's conditions find the working class politically disarmed and the revolutionary movement in disarray. In the post-war period the objective tendencies of the epoch as a whole did not present themselves directly and could only be grasped through a rigorous theoretical analysis of developments since the war.

The Trotskyist movement did not prove adequate to this task. It is important to see the nature of the task that should have been carried out. The post-war stabilisation of capitalism, the emergence of Stalinist parties as the leading organisations of the class in France and Italy, the growth of the Stalinist states in Eastern Europe, and the renewed strength of reformism, provoked a deep internal crisis for Marxists. The immediate task facing the Trotskyists was to reassess these developments in relation to the previous analyses of Trotsky and to undertake a rigorous examination of the period. This process of theoretical accounting of past positions and of re-evaluation of political strategy in terms of the objective conditions never took place.

The Fourth International failed to analyse the material conditions of the post-war period adequately and failed to develop a political strategy resting on an understanding of these conditions. The result of these failures was the development of two one-sided political tendencies. Some former Trotskyists, such as the IS, simply abandoned the Marxist standpoint in favour of an empirical adaptation to the pressure of bourgeois society: they made persistent attempts to reject and revise the fundamentals of Marxism, and in particular those fundamentals presented in Marx's *Capital*. The usual way these attacks were combatted was by a stale 'orthodoxy', a rigid appeal to dogma. Accordingly, it was maintained that capitalism was as usual in continual crisis, and, indeed, that the more things had changed since Trotsky's writings, the more things had stayed the same. Optimistic predictions about the coming collapse of capitalism were intoned with monotonous regularity. The leader of the Fourth International, M Pablo, wrote in 1949:

'Compromised by the revival of competition, by the antagonism of the participants, the . . . [Marshall] . . . Plan is moving towards its inevitable collapse.'⁶

The ritual chanting of old orthodoxies which flew in the face of reality could only be asserted by putting forward a theory of 'objective processes'. Somehow (and it was never explained how) Trotsky's forecasts would come true automatically. This elevation of objective processes to ahistorical laws is best exemplified in the conception of permanent revolution held by George Clarke, then a prominent leader of the Socialist Workers Party:

'The most heartening and gratifying aspect of the rich and varied

post-war experience has been the positive verification of Trotsky's famous contribution to Marxism, the concept and strategy of permanent revolution. It is not decisive for Marxists that this process is not yet openly recognised by the Yugoslav leaders . . . *What is decisive is the actual process itself.*'⁷

By putting forward a fatalistic theory of collapse, the Fourth International did not have to face the question of revolutionary leadership. Instead the Fourth International took to crystal ball-gazing and the prediction of the inevitable revolution: whether it was 1946 or 1973, the formula was the same.

'The repeated demonstration of the bourgeoisie of its inability to restabilise an economy and political regime of the slightest stability offers to workers new opportunities to go over to ever higher stages of struggle . . .'⁸

Or else:

'For several years, what is on the agenda is neither an ebb in the revolution nor a reconsolidation of imperialism, but on the contrary the continuation of the revolutionary rise, and the multiplication of powerful thrusts of the mass movement going towards the creation of situations of dual power or passing through this threshold.'⁹

The Fourth International has put forward a series of formalistic schemas, each time adapting its simplistic orthodoxy to the course of events.

For Marxists, orthodoxy does not mean the indiscriminate repetition of old formulae. Lenin waged a constant fight against those who 'had learnt by rote certain "slogans", certain answers to tactical questions without having understood the Marxist criteria for these answers'. Lenin warned those who forget that Marxism is not a dogma, but a guide to action: if we lose sight of this fact . . .

'We turn Marxism into something one-sided, distorted and lifeless; we deprive it of its life blood; we undermine its basic theoretical foundation — dialectics. The doctrine of historical development, all embracing and full of contradictions; *we undermine its connection with the definite practical tasks of the epoch.*'¹⁰

For revolutionaries the question of orthodoxy is primarily a question of method, of the need to relate political strategy to the changing material conditions of the epoch. A commitment to revolutionary politics gave the Fourth International a formal conception of the inevitability of socialism. This conception was fought for on the basis of old 'orthodoxies'. What was not understood was the method used to arrive at these orthodox conclusions. Thus the necessity of socialism did not emerge from an analysis of the contradictions of post-war capitalism, but was posed in terms of the 'inevitable' objective process. This one-sided 'orthodoxy' of the Fourth International was an orthodoxy robbed of its dialectical content, an orthodoxy which became easy prey to empirical adaptations and which can easily capitulate to reformism. Its protestations of orthodoxy notwithstanding, a revolutionary organisation unguided by scientific theory can become the victim of impressionism and of social forces quite alien to Marxism. The Fourth International has been no exception to this rule, for its history since the Second World War has been one of adaptation after adaptation: to Titoism in 1948, to petit

9. Draft political resolution of the majority tendency, USFI, October 1973.

10. Lenin, *Collected Works* Volume 17, p39.

6. *Fourth International*, September 1949.

7. *Fourth International*, July-August 1950. (Our emphasis)

8. European Executive Committee, 1946.

bourgeois nationalism in the fifties, to guerillaism in the sixties and recently to economism. The 1973 Draft Political Resolution of the Majority Tendency sums up the inability of the Fourth International to project an independent strategy for the working class. This document states, 'The revolutionary Marxists, while warning the proletariat and the vanguard layers that this revolutionary rise cannot continue indefinitely and that the absence of a radical proletarian solution due to the betrayals of the traditional leadership would end in tiring out the masses . . . should stake everything on the present dynamic of the proletarian struggles, seeking to objectively sharpen its cutting edge, and if possible to make it consciously anti-capitalist.'¹¹

Despite the good intentions of making the struggle anti-capitalist, all that the Fourth International can do is to elaborate a radical version of trade union politics and to 'stake everything on the present dynamic of the proletarian struggles'. Only recently the International Marxist Group was able to state:

'There is only one solution to the crisis of British capitalism — socialist policies . . . The raw material out of which such policies can be made already exists not in the bankrupt reformist plans of the Labour Party, but in the struggles the working class has already launched against the unfolding crisis of British capitalism. Socialist policies are workers' policies . . . they grow out of and are based on the organisations and struggles of the working class and will resolve the crisis in the interest of the working people.'¹²

But where have we heard this before? The Economists in Russia held a similar view:

'We consider the most important phenomenon of Russian life, the one that will mainly *determine the tasks* . . . and the publication activity of the Union, is the *mass working class movement* which has arisen in recent years.'¹³

This was the argument of Rabocheye Dyelo, an Economist group, against whom Lenin polemicised. Once again it is necessary to fight Economism, it becomes essential to fight against the re-emergence of groups like Rabocheye Dyelo and therefore the IMG. 'Workers' policies' are not automatically socialist policies, and socialist policies don't arise out of the trade unions in a spontaneous manner. Scientific socialism and revolutionary strategy develop alongside the class struggle and not out of it. The heightening of the struggle between classes does not automatically lead the working class to revolutionary politics; nor does the growth of the workers' movement make the revolutionary party any less necessary. On the contrary, it is precisely an intensification of the class struggle which demands of the party the highest standards of theoretical accuracy, political clarity, and organisational thoroughness.

Though the IMG has correctly noted the sharpening conflict between classes, having observed this it drops its revolutionary responsibilities and tells the workers that they are on the right road to socialism. As the crisis deepens those groups which do not have a clear programme will be swept off their feet by the spontaneous developments in the working class and in their haste to place themselves at the head of the

movement will throw aside what theoretical baggage they possess. Such groups will become an obstacle to development of a revolutionary vanguard in the class.

There is confusion on the left about what is meant by 'the vanguard' because these groups do not have a political conception of the vanguard of the class. The concept 'vanguard' implies 'leading', 'hegemonic': a section of the class which both recognises the independent interests of the class and is prepared to lead a struggle for a correspondingly independent strategy. If it were true that a vanguard existed in the class, then the fight to develop an independent working class programme would hardly be necessary, since the militant leadership of the class would already be playing a politically independent vanguard role. On the contrary, we would argue that a vanguard will only emerge when a section of the class takes up the fight for a politically independent perspective. In other words, it can only be trained in relation to the development of a revolutionary programme. This is a crucial task for the revolutionary movement: to develop an independent working class programme and train a vanguard around this programme. No other organisation has assessed the importance of these tasks, precisely because of their incorrect conception of the vanguard, confusing it with working class militants who have yet to break from bourgeois ideology.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International, for instance, characterises the vanguard as those workers 'who are outside the control of and act independently of the traditional leadership of the working class movement'. It confuses those who are outside the organisational control of, or act independently of, the trade union bureaucracy and Labour Party, with a vanguard which is breaking with bourgeois ideology. The independent activity of the class if it does not come under the leadership of conscious revolutionaries, can only be dominated by bourgeois ideology. As Lenin put it:

'There can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the workers themselves in the course of their movement.' 'All worship of the spontaneity of the working class, all belittling of the role of conscious social democracy means, quite irrespective of whether he who belittles that role desires it or not, a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology among the workers.'¹⁴

To conceive of a mass vanguard, based on the existing leadership of the class, both overestimates the revolutionary forces and seriously underestimates the tasks of developing a programme and training a cadre. The political weakness of the present leadership of militant trade union struggles was revealed in the unsuccessful battles against the Tory government and their counter-inflation policy. To provide a political answer to the present attacks on the class would require a break from their economistic traditions and trade union schooling. These traditions were mainly fostered in the conditions of the fifties and sixties and the militant struggles of the early seventies, where the leadership of the class was trained in the method of trade union politics and tactics of struggle. Today, these methods of struggle are no longer adequate. The fundamental contradictions of the

11. Draft political resolution of the majority tendency, USFI, October 1973.

12. *IMG Manifesto*, February 1974.

13. Rabocheye Dyelo, cited in Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done', *Collected Works* Volume 5, p389.

14. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 5, p382 and p384.

imperialist epoch are reasserting themselves. The day to day problems facing the class can no longer be solved within the limits of capitalist society: an independent working class programme is needed. Under these conditions all the existing organisations and traditions in the working class movement will be tried and tested by events. Already the working class is being forced up against the barriers of reformist ideology. The throwing up of new tactics, such as the flying picket and the factory occupation, indicates that sections of the class, in an effort to defend their existing conditions, are being driven to cross the bounds of bourgeois legality. Though these tactics are not in themselves revolutionary in that they do not offer an adequate strategy to fight for the political hegemony of the working class against the attacks of the bourgeois state, they show that sections of the class are being driven to collide with the barriers of reformist politics. As the crisis deepens, broader sections of workers will be drawn into struggles to defend their existing conquests; struggles which will force them up against the limitations of purely trade unionist or economic methods. The needs of the mass of workers will come up against their present leaders, who are tied to fighting within the limits of bourgeois society. Under these conditions some workers will be driven to see the limits of the existing leadership of the class and will begin to search for a political alternative. It is from this section of the class which is attempting to go beyond the limits of trade union politics that a new vanguard in the class must be developed. We see this section of the class as a *potential* vanguard in the class. The mass of workers will not break all at once from reformist politics, but certain sections — those least imbued with the old traditions — will begin to break in a fragmented way from reformist politics. An important part of this potential vanguard will come from young workers who are least implicated in the old traditions. Whilst sections of the older workers — the best elements in the trade unions and some who have not previously been involved politically — will have to seek a way around old trade unionist and economic methods of struggle, they will not be in the forefront of the changeover to revolutionary communist politics and methods of struggle which follow from this. They will be open to political solutions, but the example of how to struggle in a political way will have to come from elsewhere — from those workers who do not have to break from the old habits and traditions. Whilst some part of this potential vanguard may be found in the existing left groups, membership of a left organisation is not synonymous with an awareness of the need for a new political strategy. Some workers are attracted to left organisations, such as the CP and IS, on purely trade unionist grounds.

When we speak of a potential vanguard developing in the class, we do not mean to suggest that these workers are already conscious revolutionaries or have broken completely with bourgeois ideology. Their politicisation may have occurred only over isolated issues and their break from reformism only have taken place in a piecemeal fashion. While they are beginning to break from the reformist traditions they have yet to adopt new ones. The revolutionary

party must win these workers to a revolutionary programme and prevent them from falling prey to various centrist currents. It must train them in a political tradition. Only the revolutionary party can develop the programme capable of arming this vanguard; only when the party has trained this potential vanguard in revolutionary politics will it be able to win the mass of workers behind it. To win this potential vanguard to a revolutionary programme is a vital and pressing necessity.

Thus we face combined tasks. We must both develop a programme adequate to today's conditions, and at the same time attempt to win the potential vanguard to the struggle to develop such a programme.

Agitation and propaganda to win the vanguard

We have argued above that one of our central objectives is the training and winning of a revolutionary vanguard. Though the winning of the mass of workers to a revolutionary programme is an urgent task, we do not have the trained cadre necessary to appeal directly to the class as a whole. Both our own weakness and the importance of this section of the class demand that we concentrate our forces on winning the developing vanguard rather than disperse them over the entire class. Of course we have to find a road to the winning of the masses to revolutionary politics, but this road leads through the conquest of the vanguard not over their heads. In order to do this our work must consist in the main part of agitation and propaganda directed towards the vanguard.

When we speak of agitational and propaganda work, we mean something very different from what is generally understood by the rest of the left. For them, propaganda means putting across the general principles of Marxism, the fundamentals, while agitation is something very specific. Often they propose a third category, 'intervention', which is virtually equivalent to calls to action on specific practical demands. For them agitation and propaganda differ not only in form, but in content. This type of distinction is entirely foreign to the Leninist tradition. Both agitation and propaganda are concerned with explaining the Marxist world view and relating it to the problems facing the class as a whole. Both argue for the same strategy.

Lenin distinguishes between agitation and propaganda in the following way:

'The propagandist, dealing with, say, the question of unemployment, must explain the capitalist nature of the crises, the cause of their inevitability in modern society, the necessity for the transformation of this society into a socialist society, etc. In a word he must present "many" ideas, so many indeed that they will be understood as an integral whole only by a (comparatively) few persons. The agitator, however, speaking on the same subject, will take as an illustration a fact that is most glaring and widely known to his audience, say the death of an unemployed worker's family from starvation, the growing impoverishment, etc. and utilising this fact, known to all will direct his efforts to presenting a *single idea* to the "masses", eg the senselessness of the contradiction between the increase of wealth and the increase of poverty; he will strive to *rouse* discontent and indignation among the masses against this crying injustice, leaving a more complete explanation of the contradiction to the propagandist... To single out a third sphere or third function, of practical

activity, and to include in this function "the call upon the masses to take definite concrete actions," is sheer nonsense, because the call as a single act either naturally and inevitably supplements the theoretical treatise, propagandist pamphlet or agitational speech, or represents a purely executive function.¹⁵

Agitation and propaganda are inseparably connected with each other; they are different forms in which Marxists present their views. In propaganda it is possible to explain in more detail, to show how the particular positions held by revolutionaries relate to the Marxist programme, and to explain the analysis which is the basis for the transitional programme. Agitation instead must concentrate on explaining a few ideas, on arousing the indignation of the class and explaining the strategy which Marxists propose. The transitional demands are essentially agitational. Their educational function only really emerges when workers go through the experience of fighting for them.

Propaganda is not a one-way process, a method of transferring Marxist ideas to the advanced sections of the class alone. Through propaganda the party sounds out the consciousness of the vanguard, sees how rapidly the consciousness of the class is moving into line with its objective situation and weighs up its own ability to explain the new developments in the class struggle and the adequacy of its programme. It is in the process of developing our theory, of drawing out its concrete implication, that we test its adequacy, that is its capacity to render the concrete comprehensible. Our theory is thus first tested by its ability to explain external events (the post-war boom, inflation, the Labour victory in the general election). This depends on the existence within the organisation of a disciplined discussion, without clique or personal ties, in which the political consequences of our theory are pursued to their end. Propaganda tests our theory in a different sense. It forces us, in a debate with the vanguard, to bring to our analysis the necessary precision and adequacy. At the same time, through propaganda the party investigates how the consciousness of the class is developing: it finds out whether the class is taking the path our understanding of the objective conditions would lead us to expect. It provides the information to introduce necessary corrections into our general analysis. Agitation, also, is a two-way process. Trotsky explains,

But in order that this dialogue gives the necessary result, the party must estimate correctly the general situation within the country and outline the general course for the immediate struggle. By means of agitation and probing of the masses the party must bring to its concepts the necessary corrections and exactitudes, particularly in everything related to the rhythm of development and the dates for major events.¹⁶

In both agitation and propaganda the party strives to centralise the political experience of the class, to draw its attention to the most burning questions, to weld it together as a class with a unified and consistent response to experience which it gains in common, and to direct the struggles of the class towards a single end, towards the struggle for political hegemony. To do this with regard to the masses

15. *ibid*, p409.

16. Trotsky, *Whither France*, Merit Publishers, 1968, p82.

the party must take up all the vital issues of the day: it must formulate its views on all the struggles of the class. Yet, today, we have neither the political resources nor the necessary experience to be able to regularly work out and present a revolutionary communist position on every question of the day. We must turn our attention only to the most vital questions, the questions of overriding importance, the questions the potential vanguard must have an answer to. To do otherwise would be to fruitlessly divert our energies from the central task of training a cadre from the potential vanguard. This does not mean that we stand aside from the struggles the class is engaged in, for we will only be able to win the potential vanguard when we can convince them through their own experience of the worth of our politics and organisation. But it does mean that we will have to concentrate on the most fundamental questions rather than disperse our efforts over a whole range of issues.

It is not enough however to remain at the level of generalities; a small cadre group such as ours must seek out those areas in which it can intervene to win cadres and develop the potential vanguard. While work in the trade unions will be of decisive importance for us — and our comrades are involved regularly in political work in their trade unions — we do not at present have the resources to mount a campaign of national dimensions in the trade unions. We believe that in Britain's present conditions a group such as ours can best employ its forces in work in international solidarity movements. Firstly, winning the mass of workers to a position of proletarian internationalism is an essential part of winning the class to a revolutionary position, especially in Britain where nationalism and chauvinism are deeply rooted in the labour movement. Secondly, as inter-imperialist rivalries sharpen, the ruling class will redouble its efforts to win the working class to patriotic 'in defence of the nation' ideas. With this will go greater encouragement of chauvinism against workers abroad, and racialism against immigrant labour at home. Thirdly, with the deepening of the crisis, sections of workers are beginning to see the need to respond to the role the British bourgeoisie plays in aiding the oppression of other nations and their workers. For this reason our comrades are concentrating their activities on work in the Troops Out Movement and the Chile Solidarity Campaign. In these movements we will fight for an orientation which is directed at drawing the mass of workers to oppose the policy which its own bourgeoisie pursues with regard to these countries, and, by doing so, we will start to combat reactionary and nationalist tendencies in the labour movement. We will attempt to draw into these movements those layers which, though they follow the leadership of the reformists and the Labour Party, are beginning to see the need for the working class to adopt an internationalist position. We will aim to go through a process of struggle with those who participate in these movements so that we can demonstrate how the Labour Party and the trade union leadership attempt to throw the support of the class behind defence of the national interest and behind the interest of the bourgeoisie, and at the same time we will show the necessity for an independent pro-

gramme. Our participation in these movements is dependent on the demands of the movement, eg self-determination for the Irish people, being consistent with our programme. Within the movement we will put forward our own independent positions and attempt to attract support for our political approach, but the acceptance by the movement as a whole of our positions in full is not a condition for our participation in such movements. We will hope to draw sections of the potential vanguard into work with us in these movements and convince them of the necessity of mounting a campaign in the class on these political questions. Through this we aim to begin to develop a base in the trade unions by taking these issues into the trade union movement as a whole.

Building a cadre group

Only an organisation composed of revolutionary cadres and organised on a democratic centralist basis will be capable of carrying out the tasks of developing a programme and winning the potential vanguard. Thus there is a third aspect to the tasks facing us, the training of a revolutionary cadre and the development of a democratic centralist organisation. For us these organisational questions are in no sense secondary, and are on a par with the other tasks facing the movement.

One of the central contributions of the Bolsheviks to revolutionary theory was their understanding of the significance of organisational questions for the formation of a revolutionary party. Revolutionary organisation is not a mere form which arises automatically with the development of revolutionary theory. The organisational form must be adequate to the tasks of revolutionaries in developing a correct programme and fighting for it in the working class. This task requires an organisation composed of dedicated revolutionaries capable of participating fully in the development of the politics of the organisation. The development and testing of the revolutionary programme demands both full freedom in discussion and the centralised direction of discussion within the organisation by the elected leadership. Fighting for that programme requires both complete centralisation of the experience of the organisation and national direction of its work, combined with the necessary independence and initiative of the membership in implementing the political line of the organisation. Within a democratic centralist organisation there must be the highest degree of specialisation and division of labour. No one individual can contribute to all features of the party's activity; there must be propagandists and agitators trained in particular fields of work. The necessary condition for this degree of specialisation and centralisation within the party is a membership trained to a certain political level, a membership of revolutionary cadres. A cadre must be capable of working out the tactics to be pursued in a particular situation and be able to fully argue for the revolutionary programme. Every member must be systematically trained and educated in Marxist theory. This process of raising and developing the political understanding of inexperienced comrades to that of

political cadres is an essential feature of the revolutionary party. Only if all the members of the party have a firm grounding in revolutionary theory will the party be able to adjust and correct its programme where necessary; only in this way will the party be able to rapidly respond to the changing mood of the masses and at the same time safeguard itself against the pressures of bourgeois ideology. Disputes over organisational questions throughout the history of the movement have been an expression of deep political differences. For instance, the difference between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks after the 1902 Party Congress reflected the fact that their different political aims required different organisational forms for their expression. If the proletariat was to play the leading role in the struggle against the Tsarist autocracy, then the proletarian party had to be a centralised organisation of dedicated revolutionaries. If, on the other hand, the bourgeois democrats were to be the leaders of the struggle against the autocracy and the proletariat was to play a secondary role, there was no necessity for an independent democratic centralist party. Thus the Mensheviks were prepared to dissolve the party into the masses and thus deny the party's independent role in organising and leading the class as a force independent of bourgeois democracy. It is only when political differences take a definite organisational form that their concrete significance can become clear. The most disparate views can coexist peacefully at the level of pure theory. A disciplined cadre organisation is necessary if theoretical issues are to be pursued to their ends and thus resolved: only in this way will a revolutionary programme be developed. An organisation of revolutionary cadres is necessary if the potential vanguard is to be won to such a programme.

In establishing the RCG we have attempted to tailor our organisation to the precise tasks we face. Clearly the basic conditions for membership of the RCG are understanding and accepting our view of the tasks facing the movement and our basic political positions as outlined in the document 'What We Stand For', together with the commitment to work under the discipline of a local cell of the organisation. Yet there will be comrades who are prepared to participate in the development of the politics of the organisation who will not, as yet, be convinced of our politics as a whole. As a way of drawing these comrades into the development of our politics and convincing them of our ability to follow through these ideas, we will have branches which will contain sympathiser members as well as full members. These will be in addition to cadre cells of the organisation which will consist of full members of the group. We hope to be able to draw into our branches a broad group of sympathiser members and through the process of working with them, convince them of the necessity to commit themselves fully to our group.

As one of our central tasks is the development of a programme, all members and sympathisers will have to be involved in the process of developing the theoretical capital of the group. In order to develop a programme adequate to the present period it is necessary to characterise the world political situation as a whole. We must show how, and in

what way, the objective prerequisites of socialism exist. We must demonstrate how developments within world capitalism point to the *possibility* of socialism, and pose, once again, the *necessity* of revolution before the working class as the only solution to its problems. We must establish that what is lacking for this transformation is a leadership of the working class adequate to the political tasks. As a part of our analysis we must show what tendencies within capitalism have given strength to reformism within the working class movement, and similarly what new developments tend to undermine that foundation: we must examine the material basis of reformism, Stalinism and centrism. Only with such an analysis will it be possible to develop a revolutionary strategy and tactics for the coming period. Concretely this means an examination of world economy since the Second World War. It is simply wrong to characterise the post-war period as a partial 'upturn' in capitalism in a period of general capitalist decay. This leads to an *underestimation* of the existing possibilities and an *overestimation* of the revolutionary forces. We must show concretely how, and in what way, capitalist 'equilibrium' was restored after the Second World War and how this is now being undermined. Similarly, we must explain the 'stability' of the deformed and degenerated 'workers' states'. Important questions arise regarding the underdeveloped world: we have to scrutinise its growing integration into the world economy and the contradictory political consequences of this. We have to examine the consequences this period of capitalist growth — in particular the growing role of the state — has in strengthening opportunism and reformism in the working class movement. We need to establish the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism in this process. Finally we must indicate how the defeats of the working class before the Second World War followed by the betrayals and collaboration of the Social Democratic and Stalinist parties after the war have disoriented the revolutionary movement itself. Full accounting of the failures of the Trotskyist movement since the Second World War is an essential precondition for developing our programme. The roots of the weakness of the revolutionary groups must be located in this process.

Such a basis is necessary if the political leadership is to be built that is adequate to the tasks facing the working class. In order to establish priorities we must show how the different levels of abstraction of our theoretical work are related in order to provide a concrete analysis of the present period. Our first task is to relate the general characteristics of the epoch (Section 1, below) to their fundamental theoretical basis (Section 2, below). This work will then have to be concretised to understand the forms which the general tendencies of the epoch have assumed since the Second World War. Through this process of theoretical development we will be able to locate the objective situation since the war and the balance of class forces that has emerged from it (Section 3, below), providing the basis for a concrete political strategy in the coming period. To illustrate this process of our theoretical work: the long term tendency for the undermining of the material basis of reformism in the

transitional epoch (Section 1) must be related to its theoretical basis, the theory of imperialism and the state in the imperialist epoch (Section 2). Through a process of concretisation, an examination of the form that reformism assumes in the post-war period will provide the basis for our concrete political strategy.

1. General characteristics of the epoch

- a. Decay of capitalism, transition to socialism and permanent revolution.
- b. The crisis of the bourgeoisie.
- c. The crisis of working class leadership.

2. Theoretical basis

- a. Imperialism.
- b. The state in the imperialist epoch.
- c. Transition to socialism and planned economy.

3. Specific questions of the post-war period

- a. World economy in the post war period.
 - Workers states
 - Eastern Europe, workers' control, China, Cuba.
 - Advanced capitalist countries
 - internationalisation of capital, post-war boom, inter-imperialist rivalries.
 - Underdeveloped countries
 - industrialisation, wars of national liberation.
- b. The crisis of the bourgeoisie.
 - The European Economic Community.
 - Ireland.
 - Conflict between nation states.
 - The bourgeoisie and the state.
- c. The working class and its leadership.
 - Post-war labour movement
 - revolutionary work in the trade unions, British trade unions, shop stewards movement.
 - Stalinism
 - Communist Parties, Popular Front, wars of national liberation.
 - Reformism and centrism
 - Labour Party and other tendencies in the working class.
 - The Future leadership
 - revolutionary parties and the International, the transitional programme.
- d. The crisis and its reflection amongst other strata.
 - The petit-bourgeoisie, technical intelligentsia.
 - Racism, immigrant labour.
 - Fascism.
 - Women.
 - Youth.

All of our comrades will be involved in work under one of these headings in Section 3 above. Work in working groups on each of these topics will proceed simultaneously; they represent a conceptual not a temporal division of our theoretical work. As positions on particular questions are developed, they will be discussed fully by the membership before becoming public positions of the group.

As part of our struggle to develop a programme we will issue a regular quarterly theoretical journal. We will be unable to complete the tasks facing us without fundamentally raising the political level of debate within the revolutionary movement internationally. The movement in Britain and internationally suffers, above all, from a lack of serious theoretical discussion on the central problems which it faces. Through our journal we aim both to raise the level of debate within the international movement on the crucial programmatic questions, and to provide a clear analysis of the central problems facing the working class in Britain. Only in this way can we hope to win the better elements of the existing left organisations to a recognition of the tasks, and to contribute to the development of a revolutionary International.

In this document we have outlined our view of the crucial tasks facing revolutionaries, of developing a programme, training a cadre, and winning the potential vanguard: we have pointed to the present inadequacy of the revolutionary organisations to meet these tasks. We have indicated the necessity of overcoming the weakness of the revolutionary movement if it is to provide the leadership necessary to the working class in the great events ahead. The objective conditions will thrust the working class into enormous battles in the coming years: it is the presence of a revolutionary leadership which will be the crucial factor in determining the outcome of these battles. The conditions today create tremendous opportunities for the advance of the working class movement: it is up to revolutionaries to seize these opportunities. It is our understanding of this and our ability to measure up to these tasks which justifies the formation of the Revolutionary Communist Group.

Political Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Group. October 1974.

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The Question of the International

In 'Our Tasks and Methods' we noted that the strategy of each national party can only be seen as a part of an international strategy for world revolution. We said:

'We cannot as yet say whether this will mean rebuilding, reforming or recreating the Fourth International. Clearly this must be a priority for our group to determine.'¹

For us a discussion on the Fourth International (FI) has a two-fold purpose. First, we must understand our tradition and learn from the past experience of the Trotskyist movement. Secondly, as a revolutionary organisation, the Revolutionary Communist Group can only develop simultaneously with the development of an International. The question of achieving political clarity in relation to the existing FI is thus a priority for the organisation.

The aim of this document is not to write a historical account of the FI. Rather its goal is to draw out the general theoretical positions of the world Trotskyist movement, to evaluate some of these ideas and to learn from these past discussions. Our orientation is not to go over the specific errors of the past or to put a positive or a negative sign next to every position taken by the FI. An exercise at historically checking old positions against a series of orthodox positions is an approach which is alien to the Marxist tradition. A Marxist analysis attempts to understand past experiences from the standpoint of the latest stage of development and in this way presents general lessons from the point of view of today. We start from our understanding of today to comprehend the past. The hindsight of today – the end of the post-war boom – allows us to give significance to the 'mistakes' of the past. We look at the past with the clarity and insight that the present now gives us in relation to the past. Marx's notes on method are important in this respect.

'Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organisation of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, etc. Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species, however, can be understood only after the higher development is already known. The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient, etc. . . .'²

Marx understood categories from the point of view of the most developed social forms. 'Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape'. From the standpoint of the most developed form of capital, Marx presented the laws of motion of capitalism. It was not a direct historical account of capital. Marx's method of dialectical presenta-

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1. *Our Tasks and Methods*, Draft founding document of the RCG (April 1974).

2. K. Marx, *Grundrisse* p 105 Penguin Books 1973.

tion differs from his inquiry. Marx analysed capitalism historically but his presentation differs from his mode of inquiry. Marx explains the justification of his method of presentation thus:

'It would therefore be unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive. Their sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development.'³

For revolutionaries today, an analysis of the past experiences of the movement is not an exercise in 'revolutionary history' rather it is necessary in relation to understanding the movement today. More specifically an analysis of the FI must provide revolutionaries with the most relevant lessons of the past. This is a prerequisite for re-establishing the tradition of Marx, Lenin and the Left Opposition as a living force in Britain and internationally and for carrying that tradition forward.

The material basis of proletarian internationalism

The material basis of proletarian internationalism was already spelled out by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto.

'The working men have no country. . . . National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity of the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.'⁴

Marx on a general level had already understood the political consequences of the accumulation of capital on a world scale. In the imperialist epoch the process of capital accumulation leads to the establishment of a world economy which dominates all the national capitals. Imperialism subjugates the world and turns the world economy into a new type of entity. It creates a division of labour, which oversteps national boundaries and establishes an *international division of labour*. In order for this further accumulation to take place, capital must overcome the artificial barriers of the nation state and operate on a world scale. The resulting international division of labour is one of the mightiest developments that capitalism has given to the advancement of the forces of production. The establishment of socialism presupposes a *far superior* development of the forces of production to that existing under capitalism. But capitalism has already found it necessary to go beyond the nation state to develop the forces of production further. If capitalism operates on a world scale it would be ridiculous to turn the clock back and attempt to build socialism within the confines of a single state. The theory of socialism in one country is a reactionary standpoint; the very antithesis of proletarian internationalism.

The impossibility of socialism in one country demonstrates that internationalism is not some moralistic formula but the political expression of the fundamentals of the world economy. It was for this reason that the Bolshevik leadership saw the success of the 1917 revolution as ultimately depending on the actions of the European proletariat.

Just as socialism cannot be built in one country so it is impossible to construct a national revolutionary party with

a national programme and a national strategy. The peculiar forms that the epoch assumes in each nation cannot be starting points for a programme. Revolutionary theory has to be based on a scientific analysis of the world economy, on an understanding of the totality of capitalist relations of production. In political terms this means that only an international programme can provide the basis for a national programme. The vehicle through which these tasks can be realised is the *International*; a democratic centralist world party that combines the particular experience of each of their national sections into a concrete political programme.

An organisation's everyday activity demands an internationalist perspective. Why should a British worker support the resistance against the Chilean junta? What does one say to workers at UCS, who talk about Japanese competition? Only an internationalist standpoint can arm revolutionaries in their fight against reformism. The CP disarms the working class by providing 'national solutions'. 'It is not a question of following a policy of national exclusiveness nor of waving the Union Jack. What is fundamentally at stake is the right of the British people to control our country's affairs. The Common Market is not only a menace to our present interests. It threatens the future of the British people even more.'⁵

The CP's national standpoint is in clear contrast to Marx's dictum: 'The working men have no country'. The CP approach tries to resolve the problems facing the working class by upholding 'the right of the British people to control . . . (their) . . . country's affairs'. By advancing a variant of the national interest argument, the CP becomes incapable of putting forward an independent working class strategy. The capitalist mode of production produces its own appearances, fetishisms and bourgeois ideology. These appearances are strongest in relation to the 'nation' and nationalism. Unless revolutionaries overcome national pressures and appearances consciously, by adopting the standpoint of proletarian internationalism, they will be disarmed by reformism.

The Fourth International

Like the Third International, the FI was founded when the previous International degenerated to the point of actively betraying the interests of the working class. With the degeneration of the Stalinist Comintern, the question of building a new International was again placed on the agenda. Initially the Left Opposition pursued the task of reforming the Comintern. Trotsky wrote:

'It should be added that the degree of degeneration of a revolutionary party cannot, as a rule, be established *a priori* on the basis of symptoms alone. The living verification of events is indispensable.'⁶

The betrayals of the Stalinists in Germany leading to the rise of Hitler provided the 'living verification' that the

3. *ibid* p 107.

4. Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto* p 51 in Marx & Engels *Selected Works* Moscow 1962.

5. J. Woddis, *Time to Change Course* p 29, Communist Party, London 1973.

6. L. Trotsky, 'It is necessary to build Communist parties and an International anew' in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* p 414 Pathfinder 1972.

Comintern had degenerated beyond the point of no return. The absence of any response to the disastrous Stalinist strategy in Germany from the ranks of the Third International demonstrated that the Comintern could not learn from its experience and correct its mistakes in the future. There was no possibility of reforming the Comintern. Trotsky wrote:

'An organisation which was not roused by the thunder of fascism and which submits docilely to such outrageous acts of the bureaucracy demonstrates thereby that it is dead and that nothing can ever revive it. To say this openly and publicly is our direct duty towards the proletariat and its future. In all our subsequent work it is necessary to take as our point of departure the historical collapse of the official Communist International.'⁷

The establishment of the FI was dictated by the need to construct new revolutionary parties independent of the Stalinist and Social Democratic organisations and the need to put revolutionary ideas to a new generation of workers internationally. For Trotsky, as for Lenin, the question of the International was not one of numbers, but of the need to maintain and fight for the revolutionary tradition internationally. Lenin wrote in 1917:

'It is not a question of numbers, but of giving correct expression to the ideas and policies of the truly revolutionary proletariat. The thing is not to 'proclaim' internationalism, but to be able to be an internationalist in deed when times are most trying.'⁸

The FI was founded precisely to face this central task of giving correct expression to the ideas and policies of the truly revolutionary proletariat. Given the bankruptcy of the other Internationals, there can be no question of the correctness of Trotsky's struggle to establish the FI. The setting up of the FI could not be delayed despite the tremendous obstacles facing the Left Opposition – small number of cadres, isolation from the proletariat, the strength of Stalinism and the grave defeats inflicted on the working class by fascism. The smallness of the cadres around Trotsky expressed the general decay of the movement of the working class. The defeats of the working class were also the defeats of working class revolutionary ideas. In this situation the FI and its programme was an important step forward. As Trotsky put it:

'The acceptance of this programme, prepared for and assured by a lengthy previous discussion, or, rather, a whole series of discussions represents our most capital conquests. The FI is now the only international organisation which not only takes clearly into account the driving forces of the imperialist epoch but is armed with a system of demands which are capable of uniting the masses for a revolutionary struggle for power.'⁹

The Transitional Programme, the 'capital conquest' of the FI, was primarily the work of Trotsky himself. This was one of the major weaknesses of the FI. There did not develop an international leadership whose theoretical abilities were adequate to providing the necessary political analyses for the working class movement. In the Manifesto of the FI, Trotsky wrote:

'What characterises a genuine revolutionary organisation is above all the seriousness with which it works out and tests its political line at each turn of events.'¹⁰

On this score the various sections of the FI did not pass the test. In many respects Trotsky had to provide the necessary ideas for the FI himself. The absence of revolutionary theoreticians in the Left Opposition is clearly revealed in the following letter of Trotsky to the National Committee

of the Communist League of America. In this letter, Trotsky is replying to criticisms raised against his collaboration with Field, a former member of the League, who had been expelled from that organisation.

'On the other hand, it seems to me that Comrade Field can be of considerable service to the Left Opposition as a whole because of his expertise in economic and statistical data. We need someone who follows the facts of the world economy thoroughly from day to day and who is in a position to render an account of these facts to himself and to others. I have already for some period of time looked around for such an economic expert in the Left Opposition. But without result. I hardly believe we can find another with the qualifications of Field.'¹¹

The desperate state of the Left Opposition's theoretical leadership is illustrated by the fact that Trotsky was forced to collaborate with someone who had recently been expelled from one of the sections of the Left Opposition. All of the subsequent theoretical gains of the FI – the analysis of Fascism, Soviet Union, Popular Frontism and the Transitional Programme – were the contributions of one man: Trotsky. The defeats of the working class inflicted by fascism and the betrayals of Stalinism also represented a defeat for the ideas and tradition of the working class movement. To those advanced workers and revolutionary intellectuals, who were not disillusioned by these defeats, Stalinism still represented official 'marxism' and the Soviet bureaucracy was still seen as the inheritor of the Bolshevik tradition. The hegemony of Stalinism over advanced workers and the radical intelligentsia spelled the isolation of the Left Opposition from these currents. Those workers and intellectuals who were repulsed by the Stalinised Comintern often rejected Bolshevism altogether. They saw the Comintern as the extension of Bolshevism due to the fact that Stalinism was the representative of official Marxism. The establishment of centrist organisations throughout Europe was an expression of this process of rejecting the Bolshevik tradition.

Even if able leaders and theoreticians could have been found from the small sphere of influence of the FI, the hostile social forces and the need to fight against a general historic current prevented the FI from testing their ideas and programme and hence carrying their revolutionary ideas forward. A tradition and ideas cannot just be spread – they have to be understood and developed in practice. The European working class, disillusioned and hegemonised by Stalinism, could not provide a terrain where the FI could test their ideas. The struggle of the Left Opposition in the twenties, against Stalin, generated some of the most advanced ideas (e.g. the industrialisation debate) yet produced by the working class movement. After the defeat of the Left Opposition, the FI did not have the opportunity to be involved in struggles of such an important character.

7. *ibid* p 420.

8. V. Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution' in *CW* vol. 24 p 82 Progress Publishers 1964.

9. L. Trotsky, 'A Great Achievement' in *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39* p 57 Merit 1969.

10. Trotsky, *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40* p 215 Pathfinder 1973.

11. Trotsky, *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1932* p 256 Pathfinder 1973.

For Trotsky, who had participated in some of the most crucial debates in the revolutionary movement, the Bolshevik tradition was a weapon which he could use to develop and carry the programme of the FI forward. In this respect Trotsky was a unique figure in the FI. The rest of the leadership of the FI was incapable of testing and developing the ideas of the Bolshevik tradition. The conditions of the period did not provide a school for revolutionary struggle where the cadres of the FI could have acquired and assimilated the Bolshevik tradition. Given these hostile historical forces it is not surprising that the FI suffered from serious theoretical weaknesses.

Trotsky understood the negative consequences that the defeats of the working class had for the Bolshevik tradition. He wrote:

'We live in an epoch of the universal liquidation of Marxism in the ruling summits of the labour movement. The most vulgar prejudices now serve as the official doctrines for the political and trade union leaders of the French working class. Contrariwise, the voice of revolutionary realism rings against this artificial sounding board like the voice of "sectarianism". It is all the more insistently necessary to repeat over and over again the fundamental truths of Marxist policies before audiences of advanced workers.'¹²

This 'universal liquidation of Marxism' inevitably influenced the development of the FI. The subsequent theoretical poverty of the movement was not a function merely of the absence of theoreticians of calibre but has to be understood as a consequence of the defeats suffered by the working class—reflecting itself in the lowering of the ideological level of the movement. The fight against the petit-bourgeois opposition inside the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) illustrates the theoretical confusion existing in the FI at that time. All the major theoretical positions in the debate—the characterisation of the opposition, the question of Marxist method, and the analysis of the Finnish and Polish events—were worked out by Trotsky. This fight against the petit-bourgeois opposition also testified to the fact that the SWP membership had not assimilated Marxist theory. Several passages of *In Defence of Marxism* allude to the SWP majority's theoretical shortcomings. 'The character of the differences which have risen to the surface has only confirmed my former fears both in regard to the social composition of the party and in regard to the theoretical education of the cadres. There was nothing that required a change of mind or "artificial" introduction. This is how matters stand in actuality. Let me also add that I feel somewhat abashed over the fact that it is almost necessary to justify coming out in defence of Marxism within one of the sections of the Fourth International.'¹³

In this passage Trotsky is not only polemicising against the petit-bourgeois opposition, but is also taking the SWP to task for neglecting its theoretical education. Trotsky noted tendencies within the SWP to substitute pragmatism for dialectical materialism. He warned the SWP of the negative political consequences of this approach. In the following excerpt from a discussion with the leaders of the SWP, Trotsky concretises some of his misgivings.

'Hansen: Yesterday Comrade Trotsky made some remarks about our adaptation to the so-called progressives in the trade unions, he mentioned the line of the *Northwest Organiser* and also our attitude with the elections and the Stalinists. I wish to point out that this is not something completely new on Comrade Trotsky's part. More than two years ago during the discussions

over the transitional programme, he discussed exactly these same points and had exactly the same position. . . . I am wondering if Comrade Trotsky considers that our party is displaying a conservative tendency, in the sense that we are adapting ourselves to the trade union bureaucracy.

Trotsky: To a certain degree I believe it is so. I cannot observe closely enough to be completely certain. . . . In observing the *North-West Organiser*, I have observed not the slightest change during the whole period. It remains apolitical. This is a dangerous symptom. The complete neglect of work in relation to the Stalinist Party is another dangerous symptom.'¹⁴

Thus even during Trotsky's lifetime, the SWP, the most important section of the FI, was not armed with the necessary revolutionary theory which could prevent the development of opportunistic tendencies. With the death of Trotsky the FI was deprived of its theoretical guide.

During the Second World War, the very existence of the FI was put in question. Despite instances of heroic struggles against fascism, the International could not exist as a viable political force in Europe. Many of the leading cadres were killed, others imprisoned and contact among the various sections was lost. In February 1944, an underground conference was held, which established a European Executive Conference. A period of organisational consolidation followed during which sections were revived in Europe, and in April 1946 a conference in Belgium elected a new Executive Committee and a Secretariat, which was to be the embryo of an international centre.

The tasks facing the FI after the Second World War were enormous. They had to analyse the consequences of the war for world capitalism and for the revolutionary movement. They had to examine the expansion of Stalinism into Eastern Europe and the problem of reformist ideology in the working class. They were obliged to reassess the previous positions of the FI, which saw the war bringing about the destruction of Stalinism and the generation of revolutionary upheavals in the capitalist states. The defeats suffered by the working class as a result of fascism and other forms of capitalist offensive (e.g. New Deal) had to be understood in terms of how they altered the balance of class forces worldwide. These unexpected events had to be assimilated as the starting point of any revolutionary strategy.

Lenin, in another period, responded to a new situation and unexpected events (e.g. the betrayals of the Second International) by putting forward an analysis based on the changing material conditions. Lenin's theory of Imperialism provided the general foundations for a revolutionary strategy. The theory of Imperialism posed the possibility of socialism in terms of the growing concentration and socialisation of capital expressed through monopoly and the growing role of the state. It posed the necessity of socialism in terms of the interest of the working class by showing the necessity of war between imperialist powers. And the theory of imperialism also shows the materialist basis for the crisis of revolutionary leadership through his analysis of the labour aristocracy, giving strength to reformist and opportunist tendencies in the working class movement.

12. Trotsky, *Whither France* pp 5-6 Merit 1968.

13. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism* p 114 Pathfinder 1970.

14. Trotsky, *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40* p 280 Pathfinder 1973.

After the Second World War, it was necessary that the movement was armed with an understanding of new developments. What was required was not an assertion of Lenin's ideas about the labour aristocracy but the use of Lenin's method to provide an analysis of the material basis of reformism in the post-war period. On the basis of this reassessment it was necessary to reorientate the cadres of the FI.

The FI was not able to go through a process of debate and analysis which would have provided an adequate understanding of the post-war situation. Instead of a development of the previous analysis of the FI there was a blind reaffirmation of the old positions. Isolated from the working class, its leading cadres decimated, the FI could do no better than to repeat old orthodoxies. The ideas of Trotsky and the Bolshevik tradition were handed down to the post-war leaders of the FI, who did not have the possibility of relating them to the struggles of the working class – revolutionary theory deprived of political practice was reduced to a series of formulas in the hands of the post-war FI leadership. The understanding of how the pre-war positions of Trotsky were arrived at was lost. The repetition of these old positions led to an unrealistic appraisal of the objective situation. This attitude was summed up in the FI post-war perspective entitled 'The First Phase of the European Revolution'. This optimistic perspective was reproduced in 1947 in the 'Draft Resolution of the International Secretariat of the FI' on the world situation, which substitutes wishful thinking for analysis.

'On the basis of the fundamental crisis of capitalism in the imperialist epoch, the war opened up for the world bourgeoisie a new and long period of unstable equilibrium. This means a period of economic and political difficulties, convulsions and crisis in one country after another, which inevitably set in motion great struggles of the proletariat and colonial masses. As these struggles develop and sharpen they threaten the capitalist system as a whole. . . .'
and

'An analysis of the world economic situation shows that a real revival of capitalist production faces numerous obstacles of an economic and political nature. *The war not only accentuated the death agony of capitalism, but rendered it incapable of restoring the world market and a balanced development of world trade.*'¹⁵

This analysis, which presents an historical crisis 'which inevitably set in motion great struggles of the proletariat' could not lay the basis for a revolutionary strategy. The political perspective of this draft resolution is formulated for spectators waiting for the inevitable.

'In general, the main task facing the Fourth International as a world party in the present period is that of entering the mass movements in the capitalist and colonial countries with greater determination than in the past, in order to advance the socialist and revolutionary solutions, which are more necessary than ever.'¹⁶

The main task of the FI, the entering of mass movements, demonstrates the narrow terms within which the question of revolutionary leadership was posed. A theory of crisis which speaks of 'inevitable struggles' of the proletariat reduces revolutionary politics to a fatalistic formula and ignores the real tasks facing the FI.

Of course, it could be argued that in 1947 it was too early to determine the future course of events and that in any case an erroneous perspective in 1947 may be corrected

with no great harm to the future of the FI. Even if these points are accepted for 1947, it should be noted that the FI did not set itself the task of developing perspectives based on a materialist analysis of changing events. The theory of 'inevitable processes' was not specific to 1947 and we shall find that this fundamentally undialectical approach will become characteristic of future FI analysis. More important for our purposes is to examine the theoretical assumptions of the FI in the forties, rather than to pinpoint the numerous erroneous perspectives that flow from their theory.

The post-war boom and the Fourth International

One of the central tasks facing the FI was to provide a theoretical understanding of post-war capitalism, to analyse capitalist production at a particular stage of the imperialist epoch. This task was never carried out in a scientific fashion and the discussion on the Marshall Plan and post-war capitalism was restricted to descriptive and empirical discourses. These discussions illustrated that the FI lacked an understanding of Marxist science. Pablo's analysis of the Marshall Plan and European capitalism in May 1948 predicted that the plan could have no effect on the crisis of European capitalism. In addition Pablo predicted the outbreak of a crisis in the US during the period 1948-51. These predictions were based on an under-consumptionist theory of crisis, which saw 'the reduction of the market available to European countries for trade' as the main cause of this crisis.¹⁷ By September 1949, Pablo was forced to acknowledge the restoration of the European economy but he still forecast an inevitable crisis due to problems of the market.

'Nevertheless, the first objective of the Marshall Plan, the restoration of Western European economy to its pre-war level has been attained. . . .

But once production was re-established on the 1938 level, the problem of markets and foreign trade made its appearance, and could not be solved with the same relative ease as had the first objective of the Marshall Plan. On the contrary, the revival of production is coupled with the reappearance of competition among European countries and between them and the US. . . .

Comprised by the revival of competition, by the antagonism of the participants and by the developing crisis, the Plan is moving towards its *inevitable collapse* as an instrument capable of re-establishing a European economy, which develops harmoniously and progressively and independent of American credits.'¹⁸

Underlying a mixture of banalities and truisms, e.g. the close connection between US and European capital, is a theory which sees crisis due to the saturation of the market. This was the analysis of Michel Pablo, the secretary of the FI. He was by no means alone in his approach to this question. SWP theoretician John G. Wright's article 'Welfare State and Depression' analyses the attempts of Keynesians to create stability through state intervention.

Wright notes that Keynes provides no solution to capitalist crisis and he correctly states 'that the crises arise from the contradictions of capitalism and the operation of its laws'.

15. See *Fourth International* p 274 Nov-Dec 1947.

16. *ibid* p 282.

17. *FI* p 82 May 1948.

18. *FI* p 227 Sept 1949 (my emp.).

He then proceeds to ignore the laws of capitalist production and locates the crisis of capitalism in consumption.

'To sum up. Much the same situation prevails in production and consumption as we previously noted in the relation between mass incomes and expanding gross output and in the relative share of the mass of the people in national income. In each instance the needs of the people are subordinated to the narrow interests of a plutocratic minority. Such a set-up, as Marx and Engels long ago explained, cannot help but produce disparities, maladjustments and disproportions which culminate in periodic explosions or crises.'¹⁹

The underpinning of capitalist stability is the expansion of profitable production and not effective demand. Wright, who likes to base his analysis on the authority of Marx and Engels, should have studied the texts with greater care. Engels tells us that Wright has explained nothing.

'the underconsumption of the masses, the restriction of the consumption of the masses to what is necessary for their maintenance and reproduction, is not a new phenomenon. It has existed as long as there have been exploiting and exploited classes. . . . The underconsumption of the masses is a necessary condition of all forms of society based on exploitation, consequently also of the capitalist form; but it is the capitalist form of production which first gives rise to the crisis. The underconsumption of the masses is therefore also a pre-requisite condition for crises, and plays in them a role which has long been recognised. But it tells us just as little why crises exist today as why they did not exist before.'²⁰

Wright talks about the contradictions of capitalism, but does not tell us what these contradictions are except by looking at consumption. If 'effective demand' can be maintained as it was during the post-war boom then presumably capitalism could overcome its contradictions. The objective basis for a revolutionary position disappears. The reformist implications of this theory of crisis become more explicit in an article 'Capitalist Choice: War or Crisis' by SWP theoretician Louis T. Gordon. After assuring us that his theory 'has nothing in common with under-consumptionist theories', we are told:

'The very hugeness of the American productive machine constitutes its weakness. Can markets be found to absorb this colossal production?'²¹

There is one solution for American capitalism: 'a full-scale war economy'.

'American monopolists face this dilemma: either they do not divert into "preparedness" a substantial portion of the economy - and this would mean crisis. Or they embark upon such a war program which would ultimately result in class struggles on an unprecedented scale. Time to reach such a decision is running short. The longer reconversion to a full-fledged war economy is delayed, the harder it would be to avert crisis.'²²

The above ideas lead logically to the theory of Permanent Arms Economy (PAE); the arms expenditure can just mop up excess surplus value without increasing further productive capacity. If the central contradiction of capitalism is the problem of the market, then all you have to do is to mop up excess surplus value by having 'a full-scale war economy', and for the time being at least, capitalism's problems are solved. Unless a theory of crisis can show the limits and contradictions of state induced expenditure there is no reason why capital could not resort to this mechanism every time it needs markets. This analysis provides no objective perspectives for revolutionary strategy and the necessity of socialism is reduced to moral exhortations about war and poverty. This type of analysis,

unrelated to the contradictions of capitalist production and accumulation, will inevitably lead to reformist political consequences. The FI's theory of underconsumptionism said nothing about the post-war period, which could not have been said about any class society.

The analysis of the FI not only failed to provide a scientific understanding of post-war capitalism but also refused to acknowledge the facts. The FI was not ideologically prepared to understand the developments of the post-war period. Given the theoretical confusion of the FI, they could either ignore or adapt to the changing situation. Certain groups like the IS adapted to the new situation and drew the conclusion that Marxist theory had to be revised. The FI ignored reality and took no account of the changes that capitalism was undergoing. The Second World War resulted in the redistribution and concentration of capital under the hegemony of the United States. The destruction caused by the war provided the possibility of utilising new technology and systems engineering techniques. The defeats suffered by the working class and the collaboration of the Communist and Social Democratic parties provided capital with a disciplined workforce. The combination of these factors allowed capitalists to increase the rate of exploitation and to increase the productivity of labour. In effect, a restructuring of capitalist production took place which laid the basis for expanding profitable production and gave strength to reformist ideology.

And Eastern Europe

Given the importance of post-war capitalist developments it comes as a surprise that this question generated such little debate within the FI. Changing conditions, however, could not be ignored in relation to Eastern Europe. In this period, the main debate in the FI centred around the question of Stalinism and Eastern Europe. It was in this area that the political consequences of the FI's inability to grasp the materialist method became most apparent. Despite Trotsky's prediction that the war would either lead to a revolution or the destruction of the Soviet Union, Stalinism emerged from the war stronger than ever before. It spread into Eastern Europe and exercised a decisive influence over large sections of the working class in Western Europe. The response of the FI to this development consisted of a mixture of confusion and Stalinophobia. In November 1947, the International Secretariat noted that the Soviet Union had become

'a workers' state degenerated to the point where all progressive manifestations of the remains of the October conquest are more and more neutralised by the disastrous effects of the Stalinist dictatorship.'²³

The unexpected developments in the post-war period produced a dogmatic response from the FI - the old positions were adhered to, whether it was the death agony of capitalism or the collapse of Stalinism. The counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism had to be emphasised at all costs otherwise there could be no justification for the FI.

19. FI p 171 June 1949.

20. F. Engels, *Anti Duhring* pp 393-94 Moscow 1962.

21. FI p 173 June 1949.

22. *ibid* p 175 (my emp.).

23. See 'Draft Thesis of the International Secretariat of the FI' in FI p 205 Nov-Dec 1947.

Thus Eastern Europe was characterised as capitalist.

'To deny the capitalist nature of these countries amounts to acceptance, in one form or another, of this Stalinist theory. It means seriously to envisage the historic possibility of a destruction of capitalism by "terror from above" without the revolutionary intervention of the masses.' ²⁴

This narrow outlook, which utilises the 'revolutionary intervention of the masses' as a sociological criterion, was in the future to give way to opportunistic adaptation to Stalinism, when the FI empirically deduced that Eastern Europe was not capitalist. The uncomfortable fact that Stalinism continued to exist and even expand into Eastern Europe was faced by the FI in an ostrich-like manner. The movement of Stalinism into Eastern Europe was posed by the FI in terms of whether the Stalinists were revolutionary or not. This confused way of approaching the problem is all the more surprising as Trotsky had already noted that the expansion of Stalinists into Finland and Poland would result in a transformation of the existing relations of production. He wrote:

'This variant is most probable not because the bureaucracy remains true to the socialist programme, but because it is neither desirous nor capable of sharing the power, and the privileges, the latter entails, with the old ruling classes in the occupied territories.' ²⁵

The ability of the Soviet bureaucracy to expand into new areas and transform the relations of production is not to be seen as an invalidation of the counter-revolutionary nature of this regime. As Trotsky wrote:

'The statification of the means of production is . . . a progressive measure. But its progressiveness is relative: its specific weight depends on the sum total of all the other factors. Thus, we must first and foremost establish that the extension of the territory dominated by bureaucratic autocracy and parasitism, cloaked by "socialist" measures, can augment the prestige of the Kremlin, engender illusions concerning the possibility of replacing the proletarian revolution by bourgeois manoeuvres, and so on. This evil far outweighs the progressive content of the Stalinist reforms in Poland.' ²⁶

The negative features of Stalinism far outweigh the progressive reforms in Eastern Europe – but these progressive measures have to be recognised as facts. By the Third World Congress of the FI in 1951, the major transformation that took place in Eastern Europe could no longer be ignored and at the Congress these states were characterised as deformed workers' states.

The discussion of Stalinism in the FI between 1946-50 was characterised by a desperate attempt to cling to old orthodoxies, and the denial of the existence of deformed workers' states in Eastern Europe. Anti-Stalinism, rather than an attempt at a scientific analysis of the situation, was the central feature of this approach. Stalinism could have no future and was inevitably bound to disintegrate.

'The appearance of transitional regimes of the buffer zone type thus merely gives expression to the *interlude* character of the historic period proceeding from 1943 up to the present: an interlude between the low point of the worldwide decline of the proletarian revolution and the new world revolutionary upsurge, which has only been seen in its rough outlines up to the present; an interlude between the Second World War and the final clash between imperialism and the USSR. Only within the framework of this limited interlude do the buffer zones and all the phenomena associated with it appear in their true light as provisional and temporary. And in this framework the real nature of Stalinism appears more pronounced than ever in the

sense indicated by the Fourth International' ²⁷

Above, the temporary nature of the buffer 'state' (Eastern Europe) is asserted in a fatalistic manner. No analysis is offered for concluding an inevitable Third World War. Nor is there a substantive elaboration of the central contradictions of the Stalinist regimes, which would make their downfall likely. Revolutionary wishful thinking replaces revolutionary theory. The FI's prediction about the coming capitalist crisis, as unrelated to the conditions of the post-war period as their analysis of the downfall of Stalinism, ultimately relies on the fate of the working out of an 'objective' process in the form of World War Three.

And Tito

The Tito-Stalin conflict provided the FI with a hopeful sign that Stalinism was on its last legs.

'It is not an exaggeration to anticipate, if the Yugoslav affair evolves favourably, if the Tito regime does not compromise with imperialism but on the contrary develops a more consistent revolutionary line, that we may yet witness the debacle of Stalinism in the years to come on a vast scale. For all these reasons the revolutionary vanguard should be conscious of the immense potentialities of the Yugoslav affair and do the utmost to assist its favourable evolution.' ²⁸

In relation to Tito, the political consequences of the theory of 'objective processes' becomes clear. A Stalinist party, the Yugoslav Communist Party (YCP) can develop 'a more consistent revolutionary line'. All that revolutionaries have to do is to 'assist its favourable evolution', and the YCP can become a revolutionary party. The logic of this mechanistic analysis is vividly spelled out by SWP leader George Clark:

'The most heartening and gratifying aspect of the rich and varied post-war experience has been the positive verification of Trotsky's famous contribution to Marxism, the concept and strategy of Permanent Revolution. It is not decisive for Marxists that this process is not yet openly recognised by the Yugoslav leaders. The consciousness of men, formed by environment, moulded by training, hampered by prejudice and ego, influenced by obscure psychological reflexes – lags notoriously behind events. *What is decisive is the actual process itself.*' ²⁹

The leaders of the YCP may not realise they are revolutionaries but that's what the 'actual process' is making them into. The reduction of the theory of permanent revolution to an objective process implies the negation of revolutionary leadership and the *raison d'être* for a revolutionary party. This was a position that Trotsky always ridiculed.

'The Chinese revolution contains within itself tendencies to become permanent in so far as it contains the possibility of the conquest of power by the proletariat. To speak of the

24. *ibid* p 266.

25. Trotsky *op cit* (1970) p 18.

26. *ibid*.

27. 'The Evolution of the Buffer Countries, Resolution of the Seventh Plenum of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International' April 1949 in *Class, Party and State and the East European Revolution* p 16, SWP 1969.

28. M. Pablo, 'Evolution of Yugoslav Centrism' *FI* p 292 Nov 1949.

29. G. Clarke, 'Leon Trotsky – A New Vindication' *FI* p 103 July-Aug 1950. (my emp.)

permanent revolution without this and outside of it, is like trying to fill the cask of Danaides.

... A necessary condition for this is to carry out consistently a policy which prepares the proletariat in good time for the conquest of power. Now, Lominadze has made of the possibility of a permanent development of the revolution (on the condition that the Communist policy be correct) a scholastic formula guaranteeing at one blow and for all time a revolutionary situation "for many years". *The permanent character of the revolution thus becomes a law placing itself above history, independent of the policy of the leadership and of the material development of revolutionary events.*³⁰

The theory of permanent revolution raised by Clarke into a historical process in effect provides for the transformation of Stalinist parties into revolutionary ones. And this was the conclusion drawn by the Third Congress of the FI in its resolution on the Yugoslav Revolution.

'In Yugoslavia, the first country where the proletariat took power since the degeneration of the USSR, Stalinism no longer exists today as an effective factor in the workers' movement.'³¹

In its analysis of Yugoslavia the FI introduced a corollary concept of the theory of 'objective processes'—this was the role of mass pressure. In the case of Yugoslavia, mass pressure forced the YCP to a non-Stalinist stance.

'The specific policy of the CPY, distinguishing itself from that of all the other Communist parties of Europe, primarily under the pressures of the masses.'³²

The case of Yugoslavia provides a striking illustration of what happens when the material basis of revolutionary theory is abandoned. A commitment to revolutionary politics gave the FI a formal conception of the inevitability of socialism. This conception was fought for on the basis of old orthodoxies. What was not understood was the method used to arrive at these orthodox positions. As shown in our examination of the FI's position, they were incapable of rooting their political strategy in the existing conditions. For Marxist science the FI substituted empiricism.

Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. The FI could not develop an adequate political strategy and programme which could have confronted the question of revolutionary leadership. Instead, as in the case of Yugoslavia, the FI underestimated the question of revolutionary leadership. The one-sided 'orthodoxy' of the FI was an orthodoxy robbed of its dialectical content. This 'orthodoxy' becomes an easy prey to empirical adaptation to 'new events' and capitulates to revisionism. A revolutionary organisation, which is not guided by scientific theory, its protestations of orthodoxy notwithstanding, can become the victim of social pressures and impressionism. The FI was not an exception to this rule. The main forces exercising pressure on the FI were its isolation and its strong desire to overcome this isolation from the working class. The Yugoslav-Soviet conflict provided the FI with the hope that revolutionary events would be unleashed, in which the FI could participate. In the process the FI adapted itself to the Tito regime. Symptomatic of this orientation was an over-exaggerated assessment of the Yugoslav conflict with Stalin.

'The Russian Revolution was the springboard from which the Third International received its historic impulse. The Yugoslav revolution can very well become the springboard from which the FI will launch out to win over the masses.'³³

Once the process of adaptationism to Tito began, the FI

opened itself up to revisionism of all sorts. Mass pressure could force a Stalinist party into a revolutionary party, thus relegating the question of revolutionary leadership to a second principle. To prove that the YCP was not Stalinist, Stalinism was empirically redefined by the FI.

'If Stalinism can be defined as the subordination of the interests of the workers of every country to those of the Soviet bureaucracy, the CPY, beginning in 1941, outlined an orientation which was to lead to the break of 1948 and, because of this fact, ceased to be a Stalinist party in the full meaning of the word.'³⁴

Here, a sociological definition of Stalinism, 'the subordination of the interests of the workers of every country to those of the Soviet bureaucracy', rather than a materialist analysis, leads to opportunist political consequences. Previously we saw how the 'revolutionary intervention of the masses', used as a sociological criterion, led to different political conclusions. By linking Stalinism with the policies of the Soviet bureaucracy, certain currents within the FI could point their finger at the Tito-Stalin conflict and conclude that, in general, Stalinised Communist Parties could be transformed into revolutionary organisations. This idea was clearly argued for by Pablo in 1950.

'Experience has shown in the case of Yugoslavia that, first of all, certain Communist Parties in a favourable conjuncture, when they are linked with a real revolutionary movement of the masses, can detach themselves from the yoke of the Kremlin, and begin to act on their own. Consequently to regard every victory achieved by a Communist Party as synonymous with a victory of Stalinist bureaucracy, is an absurd generalisation.'³⁵

The concept that a Stalinised Communist Party could be transformed into a revolutionary force was to have a disastrous consequence for the FI. The discussion on Yugoslavia is important for understanding the degeneration of revolutionary theory in the FI, for here the political logic of adaptationism becomes most clear. The politics of this position were taken to their logical conclusion by Pablo. The revisionist orientation put forward by Pablo was a direct consequence of the methodology of the FI in the post-war period. The orthodox positions of Trotsky were put forward as an historical schema. Once the objective process was raised to the level of inevitability, the subjective factor, i.e. the question of revolutionary leadership, becomes unimportant. It is almost as if the FI saw its incapacity to provide a revolutionary lead, looked around and discovered that a revolution will take place inevitably and declared that the question of revolutionary leadership will solve itself. As shown below, the political consequence of this approach are liquidationism and opportunism. Pablo's system was the most systematic expression of this trend.

30. Trotsky, *Problems of the Chinese Revolution* p 125 New Park 1969 (my emp.).

31. 'The Yugoslav Revolution' in op. cit. (fn 27) p 57.

32. *ibid* p 56.

33. G. Bloch 'The Test of Yugoslavia', *FI* p 118 July-Aug 1950.

34. 'The Yugoslav Revolution' op. cit. p 58.

35. M. Pablo, 'Yugoslav and the rest of the Buffer Zone' in *International Information Bulletin*, May 1950.

Pablo and the overthrow of one-sided orthodoxy

Up until 1950, the one-sided orthodoxy of the FI prevented the Trotskyist movement from capitulating to outright revisionism. To some extent, the optimism of the Trotskyist leadership gave the FI a revolutionary outlook and kept the orthodox positions intact. However, with the growing stabilisation of capitalism and Stalinism, the mood of the FI was becoming more and more influenced by its isolation from the proletariat, and a general pessimism regarding revolutionary possibilities prevailed. The stage was set for the revisionism of Pablo. Pablo's perspectives were presented in a document 'Where Are We Going?', written in January 1951. In this document, the logic of the fatalism of the FI's analysis comes to the forefront.

'To understand that capitalism is evolving inexorably towards war, because it has no other immediate or long-term outlet . . . is to already determine the fundamental line of the development of the International situation.'³⁶

Thus capital has no choice but to prepare for another war in order to avert its collapse. Pablo concluded from the Korean war that the balance of forces had turned to the disadvantage of imperialism 'and that the internal dislocation and disequilibrium of the capitalist regimes is greater than we supposed'. From this conclusion, Pablo deduced that the weakness of imperialism would inevitably result in revolutions.

'It is the objective reality which will push to the first place the complex dialectic of a revolutionary war.'³⁷

As a result of this 'objective reality', which is characterised by the weakness of imperialism, the war would become:

'... an international civil war, especially in Europe and Asia. These continents would rapidly pass over under the control of the Soviet bureaucracy, of the Communist Parties or of the revolutionary masses.'³⁸

Pablo's concept of 'war-revolution' carries the fatalist logic of the 'objective process' to the furthest. (On this point he is very explicit. 'The objective process is in the final analysis the sole determining factor, overriding all obstacles of a subjective order.'³⁹) Here the concepts of revolutionary leadership and revolutionary programme are overthrown lock, stock and barrel. There is not even any need for international class struggle. Instead revolution comes via the waves of history, an outcome of an objective process, resulting from war. The working class (Pablo's 'revolutionary masses') becomes radicalised as part and parcel of this process. Moreover, as a result of the objective process the Stalinist bureaucracy will find that it has no choice but to overthrow capitalism in Europe.

The political implications of this analysis were made clear by Pablo. First of all, 'the Communist Parties retain the possibility in certain circumstances of roughly outlining a revolutionary orientation'. If Stalinism can retain a revolutionary orientation then why have an FI. And, in fact, Pablo challenges the existence of an independent Trotskyist movement. He argued that it will be impossible for Trotskyists to build a revolutionary movement as the working class is under the influence of Stalinism – therefore Trotskyists should enter these parties. The passive role to which the Trotskyist movement is relegated is further reinforced by Pablo's projection of a series of workers' states arising out of World War Three, which would last for centuries.

'This transformation will probably take an entire historical

period of several centuries and will in the mean time be filled with forms and regimes transitional between capitalism and socialism and necessarily deviating from "pure" forms and norms'.⁴⁰

Above, we have a revision of the whole notion of the imperialist epoch and an abandonment of the transitional programme. The basis of the transitional programme is the epoch of imperialism, which provides the historical conditions for socialist revolution. Pablo's new epoch reduces socialism to the outcome of a mechanistic scheme. It should be noted that the basis of this analysis, which projected the coming collapse of capitalism and the inevitability of World War Three, was not disputed in the Fourth International. The only point of contention was the concept of the objective process forcing the Stalinist bureaucracy to play a revolutionary role, and the political orientation of long-term entry into the CPs which followed from this concept. The Third World Congress of the FI held in 1951 accepted the orientation that Pablo put forward. The liquidationist approach of this orientation was made explicit in the report of the Austrian Commission.

'The activity of our members will be governed by the following directives: (a) not to come out as Trotskyists with our full programme; (b) not to push forward programmatic and principled questions.'⁴¹

A further step in an opportunist direction was taken at the Tenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the FI in February 1952. The Tenth Plenum adopted deep entry into the Stalinist parties as its central perspective. Pablo reported to the Plenum:

'The situation is *pre-revolutionary all over in various degrees and evolving towards the revolution in a relatively brief time. And this process from now on is in general irreversible.*'⁴²

As World War Three was on the agenda and the Communist Parties were to play a revolutionary role, it was necessary for sections of the FI to enter the Stalinist parties in order to pressure those parties in a revolutionary direction. Deep entry into Social Democratic parties was also proposed. Pablo noted:

'We are entering them in order to remain there for a long time banking on the great possibility which exists of seeing these parties, placed under new conditions, develop centrist tendencies which will lead a whole stage of the radicalisation of the masses and of the objectively revolutionary processes in their respective countries.'⁴³

This orientation of deep entry, with its consequences of liquidating the party and abandoning the Transitional Programme, was the impulse for a split in the FI. The French section, the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCI), refused to carry out the tactic of deep entry, a tactic which

36. M. Pablo, 'Ou allons-nous?', *Quatrième Internationale* vol. 9 no. 2 1951 (my translation).

37. *ibid.*

38. *ibid.*

39. *ibid.*

40. *ibid.*

41. 'Minutes of the Third World Congress' in *International Information Bulletin* Dec 1951.

42. M. Pablo, 'Report to the Tenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the FI', Feb 1952 *International Information Bulletin*, June 1952.

43. *ibid.*

they correctly saw as liquidationism. In June 1952, the majority of the PCI was expelled from the FI by Pablo. The SWP and the Healy group in Britain only began fighting Pablo when their organisations were threatened by Pablo's manoeuvres. In 1954 these organisations formed the International Committee (IC) of the FI. It was an organisational recognition of a major split in the FI. The other half of the International was called the International Secretariat (IS) of the FI.

It is important to note that the 1953 split took place over tactical questions and were stimulated by factional and organisational considerations. The sections supporting the International Committee never put forward counter-perspectives to Pablo's orientation, nor did they attempt to draw up a balance sheet to learn from the FI's past experiences. Their sense of orthodoxy warned them of the dangers of deep entry but in no way were they aware of the theoretical issues at stake. This becomes clear from the writings of the SWP leadership, the main force behind the newly-established International Committee. Les Evans wrote that there were no theoretical objections to Pablo's scheme in 'Where Are We Going?'

'That was not the level on which disagreements developed with Pablo. We never said that his was a theoretical revision of Trotskyism, or that his projection was totally impossible. What we argued was that this schema was not the most likely one. Nor was it the one on which the International should stake its whole political future!'

and

'The key issue on which the split was to occur was the movement's practical orientation towards the Stalinist and Social Democratic parties.'⁴⁴

James Cannon's letter to the PCI (May 29, 1952) makes it clear that the SWP agreed with Pablo's perspective.

'I think the Third World Congress made a correct analysis of the new post-war reality in the world and the unforeseen turns this reality has taken. Proceeding from this analysis, the Congress drew correct conclusions for the orientation of the national Trotskyist parties towards the living movement as it has evolved since the war. . . .

and

'We judge the policy of the International leadership by the line it elaborates in official documents – in the recent period by the documents of the Third World Congress and the Tenth Plenum. We do not see any revisionism there. All we see is an elucidation of the post-war evolution of Stalinism and an outline of new tactics to fight it more effectively. We consider these documents to be completely Trotskyist.'⁴⁵

Cannon would remain blind to revisionism until a Pabloite faction inside the SWP threatened the integrity of that organisation.

Even the leadership of the PCI, who saw the political consequences of Pablo's position the clearest of any of the sections of the FI, failed to struggle against the theoretical basis of Pablo's orientation. The conflict that arose in the FI in the early fifties could have provided an excellent opportunity to reassess past experiences. The drawing-up of a balance sheet of past positions, long overdue, did not take place. Rather the split was seen to occur over organisational matters. The SWP reaction, in particular, had serious anti-internationalist overtones. Cannon stressed the primacy of interference in the SWP by the International leadership as a cause of the split. He wrote:

'We don't consider ourselves an American branch office of an international business firm that receives orders from the boss. That is not us. . . . We conceive of internationalism as *international collaboration*, in the process of which we get the benefit of the opinions of international comrades and they get the benefit of ours; and by comradely discussion and collaboration we work out, if possible, a common line.'⁴⁶

This conception of a federalist international has little to do with a revolutionary international. Most important of all, this focus on organisational questions tended to divert the movement from a discussion of the important issues at stake. Thus, in this way, the revisionist concepts put forward by Pablo could be seen in a narrow sense as Pablo's position rather than as a consequence of the theoretical failures of the FI.

The failure to go beyond a narrow organisational and tactical critique of Pablo meant that the International Committee was unable to learn the lessons of the previous period. In a major document of the SWP 'Against Pabloist Revisionism', the shortcomings of the anti-Pabloist position become clear. This document is particularly important as it provided their central critique of Pabloism. The document correctly draws out the political consequences of Pablo's schema regarding a Third World War. Unfortunately, the document can only deal with Pablo on the level of political consequences and can only conclude that Pabloism 'leads to political conclusions diverging from traditional Trotskyist views.'⁴⁷ In other words, Pablo's scheme is only taken up in relation to 'traditional Trotskyist views'. According to the SWP, if Pablo is correct:

' . . . it will have to be recognised that we have entered upon a qualitatively different epoch in which *all previous political values would have to be re-evaluated*. The political ideas, revolutionary strategy and organisational perspectives of the vanguard would have to be revised to bring them into line with the qualitatively transformed world reality and its main trends of development.'⁴⁸

The fear of 're-evaluating previous political values' shows the narrow and dogmatic perspective of the document. Re-evaluation of political positions is a necessary aspect of revolutionary practice. Political positions are constantly tested to evaluate their adequacy to the class struggle. This is the only way in which 'previous political values' can be further developed. It was precisely this fear of developing adequate positions that prevented the SWP from tackling Pablo in a fundamental manner. Just as Pablo has his reality to prove his political orientation so the SWP leadership fish out their facts in defence of 'orthodoxy'. Pablo

44. L. Evans, 'The Fourth International from Split to Re-unification' in *Towards a History of the Fourth International Part 1: Three Contributions on Postwar Developments* p 11 & p 13 SWP 1973.

45. See *Towards a History of the Fourth International; Part 3 vol. 1: Struggle in the Fourth International. International Committee Documents 1951-54*. SWP, New York 1974.

46. J. Cannon 'Report to majority Caucus Meeting, May 16, 1953' in *Defending the Revolutionary Party and its Perspectives* p 16 SWP, New York 1969.

47. 'Against Pabloist Revisionism' *International Committee Documents 1951-54 Part 3 vol. 3* p 138 SWP New York 1974.

48. *ibid.* p 139 (my emp.).

is attacked on the basis of wrong facts which do not correspond to the SWP's reality.

'... (For Pablo) ... To arrive at these far-reaching conclusions on Stalinism the resolution has to present a picture of the world situation which is not in accord with reality and to take partial and limited changes for decisive and fundamental ones. Thus the resolution states on page 3: The fundamental conditions under which the Soviet bureaucracy and its tight hold over the Communist Parties developed, namely, the ebb of the revolution, the isolation of the Soviet Union, and the backward conditions of its economy – these conditions have disappeared.

Let us examine the post-war world and see to what degree these sweeping assertions conform to the real state of affairs. *We are here dealing with matter of fact.*'⁴⁹

The International Committee erroneously located the revisionism of Pablo not in the abandonment of the Marxist method but on the basis of the wrong facts. The nearest the SWP comes to the question of method is by criticising the manner in which Pablo divides up his schema. The ignorance of the SWP regarding the ABC of Marxist method becomes clear in the passage below:

'... However, its ... (Pablo's International Secretariat's) ... method of analyses misrepresents the real state of affairs and leads to political conclusions diverging from Traditional Trotskyist views.

'... This can be seen, first of all, in its manner of breaking up world historical developments since 1917 into three main periods: the period of revolutionary rise from 1917 to 1923; the period of revolutionary ebb from 1923-43; and the period of revolutionary resurgence on higher level since 1943. The division provides the fundamental framework for the resolution and serves as the starting point for a revision of our conception on the nature and role of the Stalinist bureaucracy.'⁵⁰

Revisionism arises from bad periodisation, which for the SWP is synonymous with method! What we have here is an empiricist critique of Pablo tempered with 'Trotskyist' home truths. The spirit of the document is best summed-up in the fears expressed about the need to re-evaluate 'all previous political values'. It is a spirit which is entirely alien to the Trotskyist tradition.

'Revolutionary thought has nothing in common with idol worship. Programmes and prognoses are tested and corrected in the light of experience, which is the supreme criterion of human reason.'⁵¹

The fear of the SWP of re-evaluating old political positions expressed the dilemma of a movement in disarray. The debate that led to the split can be seen in the following fashion. In the absence of a scientific understanding of the changes that were taking place in the post-war period, there was no comprehension of the difference between the general features of the imperialist epoch (e.g. stagnation and decay) and its specific expressions in the post-war period (boom, renewed strength of reformism). Therefore the positions that were put forward were either too general (e.g. general truths about the crisis of revolutionary leadership) or impressionistic reactions to day-to-day events (e.g. the apparent 'fundamental' difference between Titoism and Stalinism). In practice, there was a division of labour; the general truths were the principles, which had the character of a preamble and the impressionistic reactions were the tactics. It was the day-to-day impressionism which guided the tactics and ultimately the activity of the FI was guided by empiricism.

When the consequences of a particular tactic (deep entry)

overtly clashed with a principle (independent revolutionary party), certain sections of the FI raised the alarm. The way they sought to invalidate the bad tactic was by showing, that it contradicted the general truths. Pabloism was bad because it undermined the transitional programme or it was liquidationist. Rather than getting at the roots of the problem, the International Committee said little more than that Pabloism was bad because of its consequences. The IC failed to take the task of developing a revolutionary strategy seriously and did not counterpose its own general analysis to Pablo's approach. Had they done so they would have discovered that Pablo did not have a monopoly on 'Pabloism'.

The IC had not drawn the key lesson that arose from the split. They had not learned that revolutionary leadership must be located in the existing material conditions – otherwise revolutionary action has no basis and will inevitably lead to revisionism.

After the Split

The split in the FI did not result in political clarification. The response of the SWP to Pablo's revisionism was to fall back on old orthodoxies. In this way the SWP was able to reject the political consequences of Pablo's standpoint. In 1953, the revisionism of Pablo's analysis led the FI to two instances of actual political betrayals of the working class. During the 1953 workers' uprising in East Berlin, although Pablo supported the workers, he put a great emphasis on the concessions that the bureaucracy made to the working class under mass pressure, while ignoring the repression of the revolt. At the same period, Pablo supported the Stalinist position of limiting the French General Strike to trade union demands. The SWP in both cases took a revolutionary position.

During the ten years of the split there was no serious attempt to assimilate the Bolshevik tradition and to learn from past mistakes. In this way, the International Committee's break was not a proper political split from the FI, which could have provided the starting point for re-establishing the Trotskyist tradition. During these ten years, the International Committee was conspicuous by its inactivity on the international level.

Reliance on old formulae could not be a substitute for revolutionary theory. Isolation from the working-class pushed the SWP further along the road to empirical adaptationism. The most striking expression of this adaptationism was the SWP's response to the Cuban revolution. In many respects the SWP greeted Castro the way the FI looked at Tito in the late forties. The publications of the SWP printed the Cuban leaders' speeches uncritically as the organisation wanted a close alliance with the new successful revolutionaries. In response to criticism of this course, Hansen's statement on behalf of the SWP majority reveals the organisation's main orientation of developing a close relationship with Castro.

49. *ibid.* (my emp.).

50. *ibid.* p 138.

51. L. Trotsky, 'Ninety Years of the Communist Manifesto' p 290 in *The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology*, Dell New York 1964.

'The political course of the majority was to accept the Cuban revolution as it is, plunge in fully and completely, attempt to form relations with the revolutionaries and cement these relations if possible. The minority line if adopted, would have kept us at arm's length from the Cuban revolutionaries and by flinging doctrines and texts at them without regard to tactical considerations, we would have driven a wedge deeper and deeper between us and the revolution as it was actually developing.' ⁵²

The SWP, tired of its isolation from the working class, saw in the Cuban Revolution a short-cut to the essential task of party building. Hansen wrote:

'And let me ask in passing: What does this . . . (the Cuban revolution) . . . do to the theory of entrism *sui generis*? Where would the Cuban Trotskyist have been in Cuba? They would have been in the CP, wouldn't they? What they needed was 12 guys to go up on the Sierra Maestre. If you go by that experience that's literally what happened. . . .' ⁵³

For Hansen the opportunist capitulation implied by deep entry is invalidated by the success of Castro. In taking this short cut, the SWP drew closer to Pablo on the question of revolutionary leadership. Hansen observed about the Cuban experience:

'Does this signify that it is impossible for the masses to overthrow a capitalist power in certain countries until the international party appears in full force and completeness? That's the question that faces us. We probably wouldn't even have asked this question if we hadn't already received certain answers. The answers are that in certain countries it is possible. Yugoslavia, China and Cuba. That's the fact sheet. We have to look at it and say that's what it is. I would say that in the light of these three empiric facts, we would have to conclude that it is possible in certain situations in certain countries under certain conditions . . . for the masses to be as far forward as establishing a workers' state.' ⁵⁴

Here the question is posed wrongly. It is possible in certain situations for capitalism to be overthrown by the masses led by a Stalinist or petit bourgeois organisation. But can this leadership continue the revolutionary process, establish a dictatorship of the proletariat and continue the struggle towards building socialism? This they certainly cannot do. Even more important, these organisations cannot be transformed into revolutionary parties in the process, as implied by the SWP. This is what is suggested by Hansen when he wrote of the Cuban leadership.

'By joining in the action of the revolution, they seek to help build a revolutionary socialist party in the very process of the revolution, instead of arguing with the revolutionaries that it would have been better to delay things until the party had first been constructed.' ⁵⁵

The notion that is suggested above is similar to the FI's orientation *vis-à-vis* Tito – building a revolutionary party out of a process. The SWP leadership could raise the alarm when Pablo's adaptation to Stalinism led to the undermining of the concept of the independence of the revolutionary party. Yet ten years later, in different circumstances, the SWP was taking an analogous position *vis-à-vis* Castro. The SWP was ready for unification with the International Secretariat of the FI.

During the ten-year split, the International Secretariat maintained its Pabloist orientation almost intact. The modifications in orientation that occurred were a result of a shift in adaptation to different forces as the empirical reality changed. The objective process was still seen as pushing events in a revolutionary direction. Communist

Parties could still transform themselves in given circumstances:

'This perspective – namely not an organisational disintegration of the mass Communist Parties, but rather a disintegration, molecular for a whole period, of the Stalinist ideas inside these parties, as well as of the bourgeois reactions which extend from the Kremlin down to the ranks of these parties – is essential for determining the forms of intervention by our movement in this process in order to make it evolve in a direction favourable to revolutionary Marxism.' ⁵⁶

The intervention that followed from this analysis was deep entry. The perspectives of the International Secretariat were impressionistic and its analysis remained revisionist. The International Economic and Political Perspectives of the Fifth Congress of the FI in October 1957 smack of the crudest underconsumptionism:

'Assuming that, in the decade now opening before us, capitalism, impelled by the demands of competition, engages in a large-scale programme of automation and atomic energy, it could only aggravate its evolution by more frequent and serious crises, expressing the fundamental contradiction between an enormously increased capacity for production and the inadequate development of the consuming power of the masses.' ⁵⁷

After a banal description of the world, the above document concludes:

'Under these conditions the general conclusions could be formulated thus: the economic and political perspectives should develop in the context of a general situation which could suddenly evolve towards the decisive clash in any really serious alteration in the present relationship of forces.' ⁵⁸

In other words, given this analysis, anything is possible. The Fifth World Congress reaffirmed the tactic of deep entry – and was proud of the fact that it was no longer isolated.

'It is now clear that the turn carried out by the Third Congress has proved to be fundamental for our integration in the real mass movement. This work was a success, a salutary success, which permitted, as the discussion will show, the stabilisation and the progress of all the sections that engaged in it, and which has qualitatively transformed our movement. That is to say, we have not only numerically increased our membership, but changed it qualitatively by the fact that the majority of our members are not isolated in their class but occupy a place in the mass movement.' ⁵⁹

The above passage is the testimony of adaptation to overcome isolation. The membership has changed 'qualitatively' not as a result of the development of a correct programme, of the building of parties and cadres, but because they 'occupy a place in the mass movement'.

52. J. Hansen, 'What the Discussion on Cuba is about' p 16 in *The Nature of the Cuban Revolution*, SWP, New York.

53. J. Hansen, 'Cuban Question: Report for the PC, Jan 14 1961' p 25 in *ibid.*

54. *ibid.* pp 21-22.

55. J. Hansen, 'Cuba – The Acid Test' p 8 in *ibid.*

56. 'Rise and Decline of Stalinism. Resolutions of the Fourth World Congress 1954' p 53 in *Fourth International* (Published by the International Secretariat – to be referred to as FI (IS)) no. 1 1958.

57. See FI (IS) no. 1 1958, p 7.

58. *ibid.* p 12.

59. 'Activity of the International, Report Presented by Comrade Michel Pablo' p 34 in *ibid.*

There is no conception of what the tasks of revolutionaries ought to be. Instead, we have the response of a movement lost in bewilderment, whose first instinctive response and ultimate goal becomes one and the same; to be where the masses are. In Britain the Revolutionary Socialist League is still inside the Labour party 'occupying a place in the mass movement'.

As the predictions of Pablo became more and more unrealistic, especially in relation to World War Three, the International Secretariat turned its orientation towards new possibilities – the colonial revolution. By the late fifties both the SWP and the International Secretariat had essentially similar perspectives. Both sides noted the decline of the revolutionary movement in the West. The SWP's National Convention in 1961 observed that the chief problem facing revolutionaries was how to get the working-class of the advanced capitalist countries moving.⁶⁰

The International Secretariat noted in 1959:

'Marxists had too long cherished the schema of the European revolution, and partly even that of the American revolution, considered as the vanguard of the world revolution, to be able to get used to the posture now presented by the workers' movement in these countries, the de facto rearguard of the world revolution for a number of years already.'⁶¹

The absence of working-class activity in the advanced capitalist countries clearly posed the problem of revolutionary tactics and strategy for the Trotskyist movement. Instead of coming to terms with these essential tasks, the SWP and the International Secretariat looked longingly to events in the Third World. In 1963 the unification between the International Committee and the International Secretariat took place and the United Secretariat of the FI (USFI) was formed. The British section (SLL) and the French section (OCI) of the International Committee refused to take part in this unification. They constituted themselves as the International Committee.

Since the Reunification of the USFI

The text of the Resolution adopted by the Reunification Congress of the FI demonstrates that the reconstituted International had learnt little from the experiences and splits of the past period and represents a restatement of the Pabloist approach. The document contains no criticisms of the past positions of the FI. Instead of a critical reassessment of past errors, the Resolution congratulates the Trotskyist movement. 'In ideas our movement has been very productive, more than justifying its existence by this alone.'⁶²

Let us look at some of these 'productive ideas' contained in the Resolution. As in previous documents there is no explanation for the post-war boom, nor of an understanding of capitalist crisis. The consequence of this is that the document cannot locate the necessity of socialism within the contradictions of imperialism, thus separating the actuality of socialist revolution from its material base. The possibility of socialist revolution in the West is put forward as a hypothesis. The Resolution tries to prove the possibility of revolution in the West by looking into a crystal ball and projecting a number of possible variants. The Resolution assures us that all is not lost for revolutionaries in the West, for the working-class will defend its gains from the boom when a recession comes:

'What both theory and experience do prove is that the most revolutionary consequences follow not so much from the *absolute level* of real wages and living standards as from their *relative short-term fluctuations*. Attempts to lower even slightly hard-won high-level wages, or the widespread fear that such an attempt is in preparation, can under certain conditions touch off great class actions that tend to pass rapidly from the defensive to the offensive stage and put on the agenda struggles of an objectively pre-revolutionary significance around transitional slogans. Such struggles may even lead to revolutionary situations.'⁶³

Note the fatalism expressed in this passage. For some unknown reason there will be 'relative short-term fluctuations' of real wages. Without raising the question of the party and its programme, it is inferred that there will be automatically struggles around 'transitional slogans'. One has the impression that the authors of the Resolution don't really believe what they are saying but feel the impulse to assure their audience that 'Such struggles *may even* lead to revolutionary situations'.

The section of the Resolution dealing with the workers' states fails to deal with the contradictions of bureaucratic planning or even with the relations of production in transitional societies. There is an assumption that the Soviet bureaucracy can go on continuously to develop the forces of production and, as a consequence, a revolutionary strategy for the Soviet Union is abandoned.

'However entrancing the picture of the world-wide consequences of an early victory of the political revolution in the Soviet Union may be, the process may prove to be longer drawn-out than we desire. . . . Consequently, it is advisable to take into account the effect which continuous technological and economic progress of the USSR and the other workers' states can have on the world revolutionary process in the absence of an early victory.'⁶⁴

If revolution is not on the agenda in the West and in the USSR, the FI has discovered pre-revolutionary situations in the colonial world. After correctly noting the importance of the colonial revolution since the Second World War, the Resolution proceeds to adapt itself to the petit bourgeois nationalists of the Third World.

'The crisis of revolutionary leadership exists, of course, in the colonial and semicolonial countries. . . . But in the possible outcome of the struggle a big difference is evident between inadequate leadership in a backward country and similar leadership in an imperialist country: *the enemy facing the working population is immeasurably stronger in the latter*.'⁶⁵

Thus the question of revolutionary leadership in the Third World is not so important after all. There, the masses can go forward on their own accord, according to the theoreticians of the USFI.

60. See 'The World Struggle for Socialism', *International Socialist Review* (ISR) Summer 1961.

61. 'Reflections on International Prospects' in *FI(IS)* p 2 Winter 1957.

62. 'Dynamics of World Revolution Today – Text of Resolution adopted by the Reunification Congress of the Congress of the Fourth International' June 1963, in *ISR* Autumn 1963.

63. *ibid* p 63.

64. *ibid* p 112.

65. *ibid* p 115.

'The situation is different in backward countries. Confronted by ruling classes, rotten to the core and lacking mass support, the revolution draws into struggle the mass of the working population, including the poorest peasants and pauperised petit bourgeoisie, bringing about collapse of the traditional order and its state, and exerting such pressure on centrist working-class parties and similar formations as to bring them to power.'⁶⁶

The fragile structure of states in the Third World no doubt provides considerable opportunities for mass mobilisation. The great poverty of the masses in Latin America, Asia and Africa stimulates class conflict and radical outbursts both among the working class and the peasantry. But it is precisely because of the volatility of the situation that the question of revolutionary leadership is so important. Who is to lead the anti-imperialist movement? The spate of bloody military juntas in the Third World teaches us that mass pressure without revolutionary leadership culminates in disaster for the working people.

The gains of the Cuban revolution notwithstanding, revolutionaries had a duty not to sow illusions in Castroism. The FI took an opportunistic orientation in this respect and put itself forward as a servicing agent for left-wing Castroism.

'The appearance of more workers' states through further development of colonial revolution, particularly in countries like Algeria, would help strengthen and enrich the international current of Castroism, give it longer range perspectives and help bring it closer to understanding the necessity for a new revolutionary Marxist International of mass parties. Fulfilment of this historic possibility depends in part on the role which the FI plays in the colonial revolution and the capacity of sections of the FI to help win fresh victories.'⁶⁷

The FI, having learned little from its flirtation with Tito, proceeds to find a short cut to Castro. The last word on the opportunism of the Reunification Resolution should be left to Farrell Dobbs and Joseph Hansen of the SWP.

'The Cuban revolution was marked by the predominance of action over conscious revolutionary theory; but in its course, as was inevitable, consciousness began asserting its rights and the Cubans themselves turned increasingly to the revolutionary classics in search of the meaning of what they had accomplished. This road leads in the final analysis to Trotskyism.'⁶⁸

The documents of the 1965 congress of the FI reflect many of the old confusions of the Reunification Resolution. In particular there is a very uncritical attitude towards the petit bourgeois nationalism of the Third World. The resolution on Africa describes Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Egypt, Zanzibar and the Algerian revolution as leading to the break-up of the colonial and neo-colonial system. It seems that the FI has taken the rhetoric of the African nationalists for reality. Behind the apparent anti-imperialist rhetoric of the leaders of Mali, Ghana, Guinea etc was a parasitic bureaucracy, which had no perspective of challenging world capital. The resolution on Africa argues:

'The theoretical amplifications carried out by our movement on the basis of certain experiences and the Cuban revolution are likewise pertinent in relation to Africa, particularly with regard to the dynamics of the revolutionary process, the fundamental motor forces, the special role of the poor peasant and the nature of the leadership, which, under the pressure of objectively powerful factors and in conjunction with mass movements, can take a far-reaching anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist course despite their empiricism, their bureaucratic deformation and their non-proletarian origin.'⁶⁹

This adaptation to petit-bourgeois nationalism was to have grave political consequences for the FI. In Latin America, the USFI capitulated to guerillaism and sections of the FI subordinated themselves to Castroist guerilla organisations. A recent document recalls this opportunist orientation.

'Concretely: we supported the position of the International and we were preparing the party for the civil war that Cuba, with its OLAS, was preparing to immediately open through the continent. For us, the Cubans' intention of starting up a continental civil war merited our support. . . .'⁷⁰

This opportunistic orientation was to be given a more concrete expression in the documents of the 9th World Congress of the FI in 1969. The resolutions in this document demonstrate the ability of the USFI to adapt to new realities. May '68 in France and the radicalisation of students provided the FI with a new focus for its adaptationism – youth. It is worth looking at the 1969 documents in some detail for many of the points raised there have a direct relevance for the discussion today.

The analysis of capitalism in the document is poor – after 24 years the FI has still not understood the post-war boom. The boom is seen in terms of 'technological renovation' and 'arms spending', rather than seeing the war as allowing the restructuring of capital under US hegemony leading to the restoration of profitability. The contradiction of capitalism is located in over-production. And state intervention is seen as saving capital 'against a recurrence of grave periodic crises of over-production.'⁷¹ According to the document this is no longer possible and reviving the boom 'would require a new hike in military spending which even the American economy can no longer contain'⁷². The document fails to locate arms expenditure in a Marxist framework and like the various under-consumptionist theories implies that lack of effective demand is the cause of capitalist crises.

'To sum up: the enormous productive capacity built up in these countries is coming into conflict more and more with the need of capital realisation.'⁷³

The document fails to understand that the contradictions of capital can only be (temporarily) overcome by increasing the productivity of labour. To understand the crisis facing world capitalism it is necessary to pinpoint the barriers to further increases in labour productivity, and to elaborate the contradictory effects (inflation, monetary crisis) of state intervention, which attempts to secure for private capital adequate conditions for accumulation. The analysis of the document proves inadequate to this task and the 'coming crisis' is asserted rather than demonstrated. Not surprisingly, this type of analysis ultimately de-

66. *ibid* p 115.

67. *ibid* p 121.

68. F. Dobbs & J. Hansen, 'Reunification of the Fourth International' p 135 in *ISR* Autumn 1963.

69. 'Documents of the 1965 World Congress of the Fourth International' p 64 in *ISR* Spring 1966.

70. N. Moreno, 'A Scandalous Document – A Reply to Germain' p 36 *International Internal Discussion Bulletin* (IIDB) Jan 1974.

71. 'Documents: World Congress of the Fourth International' p 673 in *Intercontinental Press* July 14 1969.

72. *ibid* p 674.

73. *ibid*.

depends on giving the objective processes the final say. This comes out most strikingly in the document's conception of permanent revolution.

'The fundamental dynamics of the Latin American revolution is the dynamics of permanent revolution, in the same sense that the revolution is developing into socialist revolution without intermediary stages or dividing lines . . . the perspective of the permanent revolution is no longer only a historical tendency but a reality in this stage of the class struggle.'⁷⁴

As noted previously (see above), in another context, permanent revolution is reduced to an ahistorical process, where the question of revolutionary leadership resolves itself.

The 'New Youth Vanguard' was the prime choice of the FI for its adaptationism in 1969. Impressed by May 1968, the USFI endowed students with revolutionary consciousness.

'All these . . . (student) . . . movements, despite their social composition and their political and theoretical contradictions, have developed an *anti-capitalist and revolutionary consciousness on a broad scale*.'⁷⁵

The attraction of the 'New Youth Vanguard' for the USFI was that, in order to reach this stratum, one did not have to go through the traditional reformist and Stalinist organisations. In a real sense, the idealisation of the 'new vanguard' by the FI reflects the FI's inability to deal with the question of reformism and hence to relate to the working class. The opportunistic turn to the 'New Youth Vanguard' is clearly expressed in several passages of the section of the document called 'The Construction of a New Revolutionary Leadership'.

'During these years, an enormous improvement has occurred in the conditions under which revolutionary Marxists have stubbornly pursued their work of building a new revolutionary leadership. . . . Concretely, this fundamental improvement has resulted from the confluence of the Vietnam war, the Cuban revolutionary leaders' turn towards building new revolutionary forces in Latin America and the almost universal emergence of a new youth vanguard. In the historical sense, these factors reflect a more fundamental change - a major reinforcement of those social layers moving in a broad and continuous way toward world socialist revolution. For the first time since the 1945-48 period, if not for the first time since its origin, the international Trotskyist movement has been able to move out of its relative isolation in a large way.'⁷⁶

'Propelled by popular currents' is a striking admission of the FI's opportunism and lack of a decisive independent orientation. Of course, it is crucial that revolutionaries have a positive orientation towards youth and win the most advanced section of this stratum to revolutionary ideas. But it is questionable to rank rebellious youth as revolutionaries and to substitute their activities for the activities of the working-class. This was the trap into which the FI fell.

'The revolutionary upsurge of May 1968 confirmed both the qualitative change in the relationships between the new vanguard and the traditional organisations as well as the considerably expanded opportunities for work by the revolutionary Marxists within this vanguard. Since its origin, our movement has never had the opportunity for such impact on revolutionary events in any imperialist country comparable to what the JCR had in May 1968.'⁷⁷

Undoubtedly, it was necessary for revolutionaries to take

advantage of the radicalisation of students. But this had to be done by presenting revolutionary ideas to the students rather than the FI taking on the colouration of the student milieu. The opportunist adaptation to youth was paralleled by a similar approach to guerrillaism. After noting that the 'colonial revolution has suffered a series of spectacular reverses', the Resolution on Latin America demonstrates the FI's incapacity to learn from past mistakes. According to the Resolution a pre-revolutionary situation existed in Latin America.

'These conditions and tendencies as a whole, which in the last analysis reflect the economic and social tendencies . . . create not only a continent-wide structural instability but more precisely a pre-revolutionary situation which is taking the form of both more or less rapid ripening of profound social and political explosions (Brazil, Mexico, Chile) the outbreak of real revolutionary crises (Uruguay), and the emergence of a state of civil war in certain countries (Guatemala and particularly Bolivia).'⁷⁸

The resolution underestimates the strength of the national bourgeoisie and imperialism in Latin America and it ignores the problem of reformism among the working-class. The resolution consequently develops an ultra-left perspective for Latin America and elevates the tactic of armed struggle to a strategy; the gun replaces the programme.

'The fundamental perspective, the only realistic perspective for Latin America is that of an armed struggle which may last for long years. This is why the technical preparation cannot be conceived merely as one of the aspects of the revolutionary work, but as the fundamental aspect on a continental scale.'⁷⁹

The adaptation of the FI to armed struggle, explicitly stated in the 1969 documents, like the previous adaptations to Tito, to Stalinism, to Cuba and to students was the result of an empirical readjustment to the pressures of isolation. Formal Trotskyism always fell victim to these pressures and 1969 was no exception to this tendency. The thoughts of Livio Maitan (one of the leaders of the USFI) on the Draft Resolution on Latin America well encapsulate the thinking behind the documents of the 9th World Congress.

'There are, in fact, several countries where we at present have possibilities for an important breakthrough (youth movement in France, anti-war movement and youth movement in the US, South Africa, within a certain time) and we must unquestionably make an effort in the direction of India, but we must place everything above all on a sector of Latin America and you know very well which one. We must exploit the preparatory period of the congress to convince the entire movement to operate in practice, everyday with this perspective. Permit me to express myself a little paradoxically: it is necessary to understand and to explain that at the present stage the International will be built around Bolivia.'⁸⁰

Rather than a revolutionary international that has a clear

74. *ibid* p 718.

75. *ibid* p 683.

76. *ibid* p 686.

77. *ibid* p 687.

78. *ibid* p 717.

79. *ibid* p 720.

80. L. Maitan, 'An Insufficient Document' 15, 5, 68 pp 15-16 in *International Information Bulletin, Discussion on Latin America 1968-71*.

conception of the tasks facing the FI, Maitan presents a shopping list with a view to finding an 'important breakthrough'; this is the source of opportunism, the disease which has infected the FI since 1948. The adaptation to guerrillaism was an issue which gave rise to political differences within the FI. The SWP, through a number of tragic experiences, saw the political consequences of fetishising armed struggle. In 1968, they put forward a counter resolution on Latin America, which was defeated at the 9th World Congress. The present-day differences between the majority and the minority in the USFI are an outcome of this debate.

The political consequences of guerrillaism were drawn out by J. Hansen and Peng Shu Tse, and the latter was the first comrade to state that the adaptation to guerrillaism implied the abandonment of the Transitional Programme. The SWP's criticism of the Resolution on Latin America was only formally correct. Their general analysis of the Third World in general and of Latin America in particular was the same as the majority's position. Hansen made this clear in his report on the World Congress:

'There was general agreement on the first part of the resolution which describes the conditions in Latin America as being pre-revolutionary, almost revolutionary, or at least of explosive proportions over the entire continent. This situation has existed, in my opinion, in Latin America for about ten years or more, so that there was nothing new in this, beyond recording how difficult it is becoming for the oligarchies in Latin America and their American backers to keep the lid on the situation.

The differences arose over what conclusions should be drawn from this general situation in the way of advancing the revolution.'⁸¹

The SWP's response to guerrillaism was an empiricist one. They saw the political consequences of this orientation and froze in horror. The discussion they initiated was not a full-scale attempt to criticise the inadequate analysis of the documents and its general opportunistic approach. They were not in a position to do this for they failed to recognise their own previous adaptation to Castroism. As the debate unfolded in the FI, the SWP did raise new points as it attempted to spell out the consequences of guerrillaism. In 1970 Hansen wrote:

'Fostering an ultraleft course in Latin America would surely be paralleled by permissiveness towards ultra leftism, if not worse, in the imperialist centres. In fact, there is evidence that this has already been occurring in the quite different context of conditions in Britain.'⁸²

By focussing the discussion on the question of guerrillaism and only broadening the debate through empirical additions of issues, by refusing to assess its own past position and to rectify past errors, the minority in the International disarmed itself against the criticism of the majority. Maitan could write for the majority:

'The orientation expressed in the world congress document had already been outlined rather precisely at least as far back as the beginning of the second half of 1967. . . .

At the world congress, the minority made no substantial criticism of the analysis of the situation in Latin America. . . .'⁸³

The minority's criticism (now called the Leninist-Trotskyist tendency) is developed from an indefensible position. Even as the debate broadens to include Europe and the national question, the minority perpetuates a myth about a 'turn' in the 1969 World Congress. Presumably every-

thing was all right up until then, and the SWP has a record beyond reproach. This position, in which all the woes of the FI are reduced to the 1969 'turn' is argued most clearly by J. Hansen in *The Underlying Differences in Method*. When Hansen ventures into the field of methodology the inadequacy of the minority's position becomes striking. Hansen states:

'Let us consider a bit further the method used by the majority of the United Secretariat. In essence it consists of drawing tactical prescriptions from broad analytical projections that in themselves may be correct but that do not correspond to current concrete situations.'⁸⁴

What does this mean? How can analytical projections be correct which do not respond to the current concrete situation? Hansen goes on to elaborate:

'It is clear that one of the problems facing our movement, a problem lying at the heart of the current dispute, is the existence of a dangerous gap between theory and practice. Despite a correct analysis of the main economic, social and political trends in Latin America, the Ninth World Congress, through incorrect methodology, projected a course of action that led the official sections of the FI in Bolivia and Argentina into catastrophes.'⁸⁵

So in other words you have a correct analysis but bad tactics. For Hansen, methodology becomes the way tactics are arrived at and ultimately methodology becomes a tactical question itself. Hansen talks about a dangerous gap between theory and practice, yet he himself isolates theory from practice.

'In dropping from long-range analysis to the question of immediate party tasks, a qualitative change appears; we move from strategy to the level of tactics. . . .

For our movement, it should be part of the ABC's that decisions on a tactical level must be left to the leadership of parties integrated into the national scene. There is no other way to bring revolutionary practice into proper correspondence with concrete reality. It is obvious that revolutionary experience and continuity of leadership play a key role in this. . . . There is no substitute. Revolutions cannot be guided from afar.'⁸⁶

This is common sense pragmatism, which has nothing to do with dialectics. For Hansen what is concrete is really abstract; it is the realities of national life. The material basis of internationalism is abandoned and it is not surprising that in other documents the minority seems to be arguing for a federalist International. The concrete political strategy is derived from a combination of abstractions that corresponds to the tendencies of the objective conditions. In order to develop a concrete political orientation, it is necessary to correlate a number of abstractions into one. This correlation of abstractions is not done arbit-

81. J. Hansen, 'Report on World Congress' 4.6.69 p 45 *ibid*.

82. J. Hansen, 'A Contribution to the Discussion on Revolutionary Strategy in Latin America' June 1970 p 65 in *ibid*.

83. L. Maitan, 'Once Again on the Revolutionary Perspectives in Latin America. Defence of an Orientation and a Method' Sept 1970 p 73 in *ibid*.

84. *IIDB* July 1974 p 31.

85. *ibid* p 33.

86. *ibid* p 32.

rarily but in correspondence to the laws of movement of a given phenomenon. Trotsky criticised Hansen's 'concrete reality' in his polemic against the petit bourgeois opposition in the SWP.

'To those enamoured with 'concrete political questions' Lenin invariably explained that our politics is not of conjunctural but of principled character; that tactics are subordinate to strategy.'⁸⁷

The formalism of the minority's criticism is best exemplified by their idealist method. Instead of criticising the majority for being unable to locate their political strategy in the material conditions, they argue that tactics should be unrelated to one's analysis. The SWP today, like the petit-bourgeois opposition:

'split sociology from dialectical materialism. They split politics from sociology. In the sphere of politics they split our tasks in Finland from our position on Poland. History becomes transformed into a series of exceptional incidents; politics becomes transformed into a series of improvisations. We have here, in the full sense of the term, the disintegration of politics into its constituent elements.'⁸⁸

Hansen fails to see the relationship between revolutionary theory and practice. His criticism of the majority's European Perspectives Document smacks of the same idealist method that we noted previously.

'The European Perspectives Document includes material that is valid. For instance, I find the general analyses of the economic, social and political crisis of European (and international) capitalism to be acceptable. . . .

The main methodological error it makes . . . is to prescribe uniform tactics on a continental scale for the Trotskyist movement, whereas tactics by their nature, as we have seen, must correspond to highly concrete national situations.'⁸⁹

Again method becomes tactics. Obviously tactical questions are developed in relation to the political problems and tasks facing a political organisation. But the tactics flow from a general analysis. Moreover, tactics are subordinated to a strategy derived from a concrete international analysis and not just from national considerations. The tactic of the united front was developed at the Third Congress of the Comintern not just for one nation but for the whole of Europe. Trotsky and Lenin were not reluctant to advise and correct 'national leaderships' about tactical questions.

The minority refused to make an assessment of the theoretical capital of the FI and its response to guerrillaism was an empirical one. In fact, in the process of its criticism of the majority, the minority showed that it was incapable of understanding the method of scientific marxism. It is not at all surprising that the minority restricted its polemic to question of tactics, for had they initiated a thorough accounting, they would have had to recognise their own shortcomings.

A comparison of recent perspective documents of the majority and the minority (Leninist-Trotskyist) tendency of the USFI is quite revealing. The Draft Political Resolution of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction repeats a number of formal truths but as a perspective document is totally inadequate. Most of the document takes the form of a journalistic review of current events. The economic analysis is crude and thus there is little understanding of the changing objective situation in the world economy. As in previous documents there is no theory of crisis. Rather, there is a notion of crises which remains on the level of

bourgeois journalistic platitudes. The energy crisis and shortages of raw materials are not seen as the phenomenal expression of movements within the world economy – appearance is taken for reality. Instead of a scientific analysis of capitalist crisis we get moralistic outbursts.

'The energy crisis is but a single example of what is happening to the world capitalist system. The beef shortages in the United States and Argentina should be recalled, as should the sudden power brownouts and blackouts, the disruption of telephone services and deterioration of postal systems in various countries.'⁹⁰

This type of analysis offers no basis for developing a concrete political strategy. There is no understanding of capitalism or the question of crisis, and the possibility of socialism is posed in terms of 'breakdowns' reminiscent of the old theory of 'objective processes'.

'The energy crisis, it should be stressed, is best a single striking current example of what is happening within the capitalist system . . . its growing susceptibility to sudden shocks and breakdowns . . . and of the new openings that are appearing for initiatives in action to be urged for adoption by the labour movement.'⁹¹

The section of the document called 'Chief Features of the World Political Situation' concludes with the following remarkable observation.

'The combination among the masses generally of heightened expectations, discontent with things as they are, and awareness of the possibility of going beyond capitalism constitutes one of the chief features of the world political situation today. What the masses do not yet see clearly is the correct path to take. They are still far from having resolved the crisis of political leadership.'⁹²

The question of revolutionary leadership is passed to the 'masses'. Presumably, the role of the FI is to write banal reviews about telephone services breaking down. The L/T faction is not aware of their theoretical shortcomings. As far as they are concerned they have the programme and it is just a question of getting more cadres.

'The maturity of objective conditions for the socialist revolution is matched qualitatively by the programme of the FI (which is brought up to date in correspondence with changes in objective conditions) It is the quantitative side that requires concentrated attention in the immediate period ahead. What is required is multiplication of the forces adhering to the programme of the FI.'⁹³

For the minority, the 'key objective at this stage . . . still remains that of accumulation of cadres'.⁹⁴ No more needs to be said about a document that says so little. The task they have set for the FI – the 'accumulation of cadres' – fails to consider the central task of developing a programme adequate to the needs of the working-class in today's conditions.

The Draft Political Resolution of the Majority Tendency certainly says more than the document of the L/T Faction. The problem with the Majority document is that it is the child of the previous discussions in the FI. Many of the

87. Trotsky, op cit (1970) p 80.

88. *ibid* p 91.

89. *IIDB* July 1974 p 36.

90. 'Draft Political Resolution of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction' *IIDB* Jan 1974 pp. 4-5.

91. *ibid* p 5.

93. *ibid* p 25.

92. *ibid*.

94. *ibid*.

past mistakes, an eagerness to look for short cuts, and empirical adaption are still with the majority of the USFI. The document at least begins an attempt to analyse the contradictions of world imperialism. It notes some of the contradictions of inter-imperialist rivalry but stops half-way and fails to provide a theory of crisis. We are back to square one – an 'objective process' whereby capitalist crisis is going to lead to the 'creation of situations of dual power'.

'For several years, what is on the agenda is neither such an ebb in revolution, nor such a reconsolidation of imperialism but on the contrary the continuation of the revolutionary rise, the multiplication of powerful thrusts of the mass movement going towards the creation of situations of dual power, or passing through this threshold.'⁹⁵

Given the 'continuation of the revolutionary rise', the role of the FI becomes self-evident: to lead the mass movement towards revolution. The question of how this is to be done, primarily the question of revolutionary leadership, is left in abeyance. The only perspective that is put forward is one of making the existing struggles more anti-capitalist, rather than counter-posing a revolutionary strategy to economist politics. The Majority document states:

'The revolutionary Marxists, while warning the proletariat and the vanguard layers that this revolutionary rise cannot continue indefinitely, and that the absence of a radical proletarian solution to the crisis, due to the betrayal of the traditional leadership would end in tiring out the masses and permitting a capitalist counter-attack to assert itself, should stake everything on the present dynamic of the proletarian struggles, seeking to objectively sharpen its cutting edge and, if possible, to make it consciously anti-capitalist, to stimulate all forms of organisation of struggles that allow the proletariat to enter the path of creating organs of self-organisation of the soviet type.'⁹⁶

The resurgence of proletarian struggles in Europe is noted in the Majority document. This is a reality which cannot be denied, but the assertion of this fact in no way solves the problem of winning the vanguard of the working-class to revolutionary politics. To formulate one's strategy in terms of organising struggles that will lead to the creation of soviets fails to answer today's questions. The Majority's conception of the 'mass vanguard' is an empirical formula, which ignores the central question of reformism.

'The appearance on a world scale of a new vanguard of a mass character for the first time since the creation of the Communist International constitutes one of the principal features of the new rise of the world revolution since 1960. . . .

This new mass vanguard can be characterised in the most succinct fashion as the totality of forces acting independently of and to the left of traditional bureaucratic leadership of the mass movement. What is involved is both a social and a political phenomenon, with the new vanguard including the radicalised layers, those that have gone into action, of the youth, the working class, women, the majority of which is unorganised, but an organised fraction of which is part of or follows the far left organisations, Trotskyist, Maoist, centrist, Mao-spontaneist, etc.'⁹⁷

The document fails to appreciate that forces that exist 'independently' of the traditional bureaucratic leadership of the working-class are not necessarily independent of reformist ideology. Their road to revolutionary politics is still a long one. Moreover, the 'mass-vanguard' is a socio-

logical mish-mash of workers, students, youth and women – their only common characteristic is that they 'have gone into action'. The Majority might find it useful to orient itself to those who have 'gone into action'. But revolutionary communists have to have more than an empirical recognition of who has gone into action in order to develop a political strategy. Layers of the working-class and other strata 'go into action' for different reasons and with aims that are often contradictory. Revolutionary agitation and propaganda has the double task of fighting reformism and various forms of petit-bourgeois ideology. This can only be done by understanding the material basis for the contradictions in social relations that have given rise to the activities of the so-called mass-vanguard. For the majority, the mass-vanguard:

'results from the coincidence of the resurgence of revolutionary struggles on an international scale since the Cuban revolution, and the deepening crisis of imperialism and of the traditional workers' parties.'⁹⁸

This tells us very little of political consequence. The majority is true to form in adapting to the 'mass vanguard'. The mass vanguard's general feature is going into action. Therefore, in order to win this mass vanguard, the FI will have to be action-orientated.

'But this offensive will not profit our movement on a large scale, i.e. will not end up in a considerable strengthening of our organisations, unless it is not confined to the ideological arena and is accompanied by initiatives in action that make it possible to galvanise, unite and strengthen the whole vanguard against the reformist and Stalinist apparatuses in the mass struggle.'⁹⁹

'Initiatives in action' or as the Majority like to put it, 'posing the question of power' fail to deal with the question of revolutionary leadership. The FI may:

'stake everything on the present dynamic of proletarian struggles . . . to stimulate all the forms of organisation of struggles that allow the proletariat to enter the path of creating organs of self-organisation of the soviet type.'¹⁰⁰

But who is going to lead these struggles and what about the question of revolutionary leadership? In adapting themselves to action, the Majority tendency ultimately bow to spontaneism. This is the position put forward by Pierre Frank.

'Our strategy is to seek out through our actions the slogans, the demands of the masses, that also have the greatest support in the vanguard, that are capable of leading to mass actions of the broad vanguard. In this way large masses could be influenced who will not be won to us through propaganda because they only move forward through the experience that they go through, that they live through.'¹⁰¹

Livio Maitan can always be relied on to draw out the political consequences of the Majority's position. In his document, 'Introduction to the Discussion on Workers'

95. 'The Draft Political Resolution of the Majority Tendency', *IIDB* Oct 1973 p 3.

96. *ibid* p 3.

97. *ibid* p 11.

98. *ibid* p 16.

99. *ibid* p 17.

100. *ibid* p 3.

101. P. Frank, 'Two Ways of Constructing the Revolutionary Marxist Party and Engaging it in Action', *IIDB* Aug 1973 p 8.

Struggles in Capitalist Europe', he even outlines a hierarchy of struggles that the FI could initiate. The spontaneist thrust of this approach is well illustrated by the following example.

'In countries where the working-class has not yet emerged from a long period of stagnation or is only just beginning to do so (Austria, Netherlands) the revolutionary vanguard will have to develop or exploit any initiative that may help to break the status quo, even if such a move is initiated in a marginal or backward sector and has spontaneist or some other deviations.'¹⁰²

In America this is called 'getting a piece of the action'. It has little to do with revolutionary politics: it is adapting to the moods of 'reality'. The resurgence of traditional forms of proletarian activity has as its mirror image the re-emergence of traditional forms of opportunism. Lenin showed clearly in *What is to be Done* how, at the turn of the century, the Economists adapted themselves to the upsurge of the activity of the Russian working-class. Today, the IMG, the British section of the USFI, repeat the approach of the old Economists. Indeed, the headlines of their paper, the *Red Weekly*, could have been lifted straight from *Rabocheye Dyelo*, the publication of the Russian Economists. Thus, on December 14, 1973, the *Red Weekly* acclaims: **WORKERS CAN SOLVE CRISIS**. 'A central aim, then, must be to push forward, extend, and unify all industrial struggles into a *general strike* to bring down the Tories. In the course of such a strike the labour movement could put many of these plans and policies into practice, and challenge the right of the ruling classes to rule. The co-ordination of such measures on a national scale would place us firmly on the road to the only solution to the present crisis – a socialist planned economy!'¹⁰³

Here is the old conception that trade union struggles consistently extended would transform themselves into revolutionary politics. If the 'workers can solve crisis' why have a FI? Or perhaps revolutionaries can find a part-time job, 'co-ordinating strikes on a national scale'. Lenin's words about *Rabochaya Mysl* take up the IMG.

'Thus we see that *Rabochaya Mysl* does not so much deny the political struggle as it bows to its spontaneity, to its unconsciousness. While fully recognising the political struggle (better: the political desires and demands of the workers), which arises spontaneously from the working-class movement itself it absolutely refused *independently to work out* a specifically *Social Democratic politics* corresponding to the general tasks of socialism and the present-day conditions in Russia.'¹⁰⁴

We have arrived on the contemporary scene. The USFI, like the Economists at the turn of the century, confronted with the re-emergence of working-class activity, fails even to pose the question of revolutionary leadership. The USFI has not learned the many lessons of the working-class movement. Lenin used to describe the Economists as theoretically 'primitive' – this characterisation adequately sums up the ideas of the Majority and Minority tendencies of the USFI.

The Other International Tendencies

As noted previously, a number of the sections of the International Committee refused to accept unification with the International Secretariat in 1963. The two most important sections who carried on with the International Committee were the French OCI and the British SLL. Both of these organisations emphasised the need for an assess-

ment of the split before re-unification could take place. In many respects the two organisations appeared to understand the need to develop revolutionary theory internationally in order to prove adequate to the struggles of the working class. Tim Wolforth, of the sympathising American section of the International Committee, wrote well:

'The American Marxists of the future must begin their work on understanding the history of this 40-year struggle for Marxism in the US. The main lesson of this history is the need for American Marxists, no matter how few in number, to begin their qualitative theoretical development through an understanding of the Marxist method.'¹⁰⁵

The Resolution of the International Committee in preparation for the international conference in 1966 repeated the same point.

'The next phase in the building of the FI must, on the contrary, be accompanied by a most serious theoretical discussion in all sections of policies and theory of the movement, past and present.'¹⁰⁶

In their analysis of the history of the FI, the SLL and the OCI made a number of relevant criticisms, especially of the inability of the USFI to take the question of revolutionary leadership seriously. However, their approach took the same form as that of the SWP's 1953-54 critique of Pablo. It was the counterposition of 'Trotskyist' positions against the political consequences of revisionism. In 1957, the SLL proposed reunification along the following lines.

'The 13th Congress of the British Section of the Fourth International considers that the International unification of tendencies claiming to be Trotskyist, with the International Committee of the Fourth International (orthodox Trotskyist) must be based upon fundamental agreement on the principles and programme of the FI as elaborated by the late Leon Trotsky and the 1938 Founding Conference of the FI. This means the rejection of all forms of revisionism of the State Capitalist, Schactmanite, and Pabloite-Deutscher varieties, and the acceptance of the principle that it is necessary to build sections of the FI in all countries in the world dedicated respectively to the overthrow of Imperialism, and the political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracies. Any form of organisational unity without basic political agreement would only lead to a further series of splits which would greatly hamper our international growth and development.'¹⁰⁷

The above approach, listing all that's holy and all the sins of revisionism sees unity as common adherence to formally correct positions. There is little understanding of the necessity of going beyond position-mongering and initiating a struggle for unity on the basis of a struggle for the clarification of revolutionary strategy. The SLL didn't locate the roots of revisionism on the level of method but on the level of its political consequences. For this

102. *IIDB* Nov 1974 p 17.

103. *Red Weekly*, 14.12.73.

104. Lenin, 'What is to be Done' p 387 *CW* vol. 5 Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow 1961.

105. T. Wolforth, 'The Struggle for Marxism in the US' in *Fourth International* (published by the IC) Aug 1965.

106. *ibid* p 62.

107. 'Resolution of the 13th Congress of the British Section, June 1957' p 37 in vol 3 *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, New Park Publications, London 1974.

reason the SLL's arguments against the opportunistic reunification proposals were only formally correct. The SLL wrote to the National Committee of the SWP in 1961:

'The greatest danger confronting the revolutionary movement is liquidationism, flowing from a capitulation either to the strength of imperialism or of the bureaucratic apparatuses in the Labour movement or both.'¹⁰⁸

Liquidationism was only one possible consequence of the failure of the FI to assimilate the materialist method. The International Committee never initiated a fundamental critique of the Pabloite perspective. This would have meant putting forward an adequate analysis of events since Second World War based on the materialist method. They never took up this task. Instead the International Committee reacted one-sidedly to the political positions of the USFI. While the USFI ignored the question of revolutionary leadership, the International Committee reduced all problems to the question of leadership unrelated to changing material conditions. Their manifesto stated:

'Trotsky's prediction has been completely confirmed: the second imperialist world war opened an unparalleled revolutionary crisis, a crisis which still continues, despite the ebb and flow of the world class struggle. Only the absence of revolutionary leadership allowed capitalism to survive. . . .'¹⁰⁹

The Manifesto fails to note the forms that the imperialist epoch assumes in the post-war period. Everything is reduced to the question of revolutionary leadership. But although the imperialist epoch is characterised by the objective possibility of socialism, the forms that the epoch assumes at any one time do not appear to the working-class in this way. During the fifties the post-war boom appeared to have overcome the contradictions of capitalism. Revolutionaries have to do more than state that 'Trotsky's prediction has been completely confirmed'—they must demonstrate how the necessity of socialism arises from the contradictions of the epoch. The idealist conception of revolutionary leadership of the International Committee is a result of the failure to appreciate the importance of changing material conditions. While the USFI was never tired of empirically finding new realities, the hallmark of the International Committee (especially of the SLL) was to deny that anything has changed in the world since Trotsky put pen to paper.

'It is on the basis of the revolutionary crisis opened by the Second World War that the present phase of the class struggle is developing. The deepening of the crisis of imperialism has destroyed beyond recall the equilibrium between the classes upon which the Kremlin rested.'¹¹⁰

The idealist approach of the SLL/International Committee was a function of their inability to root their programme within the changing material conditions of the post-war period. The post-war period is understood in terms of the betrayals of Stalinism. Recently an International Committee document stated:

'The post-war betrayals of international Stalinism had made possible the restoration of capitalist order in Europe, and thereby on a world scale. Despite the gigantic contradiction between the productive forces and the capitalist mode of production, manifested in the Second World War, capitalism was able to survive, *but only because of these betrayals*.'¹¹¹

The above statement contains a one-sided recognition of the consequences of the betrayals of Stalinism. As it stands, it is an idealist analysis, which fails to understand

that the working-class is a significant factor in the objective conditions. The defeats of the working class, the altering of the balance of class forces world-wide, have led to changes in the objective conditions. It is precisely an understanding of these new objective conditions, which found their expression in a capitalist boom that needs to be developed. The gigantic contradiction between the productive forces and the capitalist mode of production' does not manifest itself concretely in the same way and at all times and certainly requires an analysis that goes beyond the 'betrayal' argument. As we said before, in the absence of a thorough grasp of the Marxist method the movement responded to changing conditions by either adapting or ignoring reality. The USFI adapted to it and the International Committee ignored it.

The more the world changes the more it is the same for the International Committee. Whether it is the height of a boom or the middle of the energy crisis, everything is reduced to revolutionary leadership. And if you see yourself as the revolutionary leadership then everything else becomes an obstacle. Sectarianism becomes a distinguishing feature of the International Committee. The Reunification of 1963 is denounced in the following way.

'Under the cover of international "unification" the politics of the national sections are left to adapt themselves to service the direct agents of imperialism in their own countries.'¹¹²

In the same way the WRP (SLL) holds separate May Day rallies and refuses to work with other organisations over practical issues which defend the interests of the working class.

In 1971 the International Committee split down the middle with the OCI and the WRP (SLL) going their separate ways. The split seemed to have little political basis and the explanations offered by the two organisations add little to our understanding of the reasons behind the split. The SLL/WRP maintains a rump International Committee which engages in little international work. The OCI has formed an Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the FI.

The International Committee's response to the 1963 reunification contained a healthy mistrust of those sections of the Trotskyist movement that had consistently adapted to non-revolutionary milieus. It failed to provide a perspective which would have counterposed a revolutionary strategy to the impressionistic reviews of the USFI documents. Indeed, all it could do was to close their eyes to a changing world and repeat how correct Trotsky's predictions were. Often its position was a one-sided response to the USFI's adaptationism. This was most striking in the case of Cuba—in response to adaptation to Castroism the SLL in particular failed to see the gains

108. 'Letter of the NC of the SLL to the NC of the SWP' Jan 21, 1961 in p 48 *ibid*.

109. *FI(IC)* p 122 Aug 1966.

110. *ibid*.

111. 'Perspectives Resolution of the International Committee, Fourth Conference, 1972' p 11 in vol 1 *Trotskyism versus Revisionism* (my emp.).

112. 'Resolution of the International Committee in Preparation for the International Conference in 1966' p '9 in *FI(IC)*, Aug 1965.

of the Cuban revolution. The SLL did not consider Cuba to be a workers' state or at least that the relations of production have been fundamentally altered.

'Castro's is a bonapartist regime still resting on bourgeois state foundations.'¹¹³

or

'The regime, however, is a variety of capitalist state power. The Castro regime did not create a qualitatively new and different type of state from the Batista regime.'¹¹⁴

In order to justify their sectarian position on Cuba, the SLL put forward the following outrageous proposition, 'The defence of Cuba against imperialism is a tactic.'¹¹⁵

The position, which argues that support for an anti-imperialist struggle is a tactic speaks for itself. It would be a mistake to see the problem of the WRP as one of being sectarian, just as it is an error to see the problem of the USFI as that of opportunism. Opportunism and sectarianism are the consequences of a political practice that is not based on revolutionary theory. The 'I would like to join the WRP' box in every issue of the Workers' Press clearly testifies to the fact that opportunism is the other side of the coin to sectarianism.

The Revolutionary Communist Group and the FI

In 1938 Trotsky could say:

'The Fourth International has already arisen out of great events: the greatest defeats of the proletariat in history.'¹¹⁶

These defeats were to have a catastrophic effect on the revolutionary movement. The subsequent degeneration of the movement cannot be explained in terms of the faults of individuals but as an outcome of unfavourable material conditions. If Trotsky's observations regarding the 'universal liquidation of Marxism' are to be taken seriously, then we can begin to understand the difficulties that the FI faced. There is little point in simply denouncing past errors. The use of terms such as Pabloist or liquidationist hides the central lesson of the past – that revolutionary politics unrelated to the material basis of society will inevitably lead to adaptation to Tito, Castro, the mass vanguard or to the sectarian posturing of the SLL. The FI was not ideologically prepared to develop a programme adequate to the post-war conditions.

Today, the various internationalist tendencies are still paying the price of the past defeats of the working-class. They have not recognised the inadequacy of their political positions. There are no short cuts on this question. The collapse of the majority tendency of the USFI into economist politics illustrates the deficiencies of the world Trotskyist movement. The important issue for us is not the characterisation of any Internationalist tendency as 'betrayers' or the representatives of 'mainstream Trotskyism'. Rather it is necessary for us to warn these comrades that without a materialist basis for revolutionary strategy the USFI and other tendencies will inevitably prove inadequate to the coming struggles.

The Bolshevik tradition has to be re-established internationally. The Fourth International has to be rebuilt on the foundations laid by Trotsky. The prerequisite for this is not to take an abstract position in relation to the existing international organisations but to seek ideological and programmatic clarity through international discussion. This was the way Lenin saw the building of a revolutionary

international.

'The International consists in the coming together (first ideologically, then in due time organisationally as well) of people who, in these grave days, are capable of defending socialist internationalism in deed.'¹¹⁷

It is quite common to hear comrades say, why don't you fight for your ideas inside the International? The manner in which this point is posed fails to take the reality of the situation into account. The RCG was established outside any of the International tendencies. Unlike the Left Opposition, which was inside the Third International and struggled for its ideas from that starting point, the RCG begins its struggle for proletarian internationalism from a different basis. As a result of our evolution, we have to relate to the FI to see if there is a principled basis for unity. Moreover, there now exist a number of International groups some of which contain tendencies with major differences. Those comrades who tell us to join the FI in order to change it put forward a false conception of unity. Joining the FI is far from an imperative next step. Lenin wrote in this respect:

'... unity cannot be decreed, it cannot be brought about by a decision, say, of a meeting of representatives; it must be worked for. In the first place, it is necessary to work for solid ideological unity which should eliminate discordance and confusion. . . .

This ideological unity must be consolidated by a Party programme. . . . Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation, otherwise, our unity will be purely fictitious, it will conceal the prevailing confusion and hinder its radical elimination. . . .'¹¹⁸

Ideological struggle will prepare the way for real unity. The inadequate ideological level of the movement expresses itself in sham unity. The inadequate programmatic positions of the USFI lead to a situation where this tendency is forced to defend its positions *organisationally* rather than politically. Sentimental appeals to the tradition of the FI replace a political defence of the organisation. That the unity of the USFI is 'purely fictitious' becomes manifest even in their own publications. One of the most cynical documents to appear in a publication of the USFI is J. Hansen's 'Good Grounds for Revolutionary Optimism'. It is written as an introduction to the documents of the latest congress of the USFI. After outlining some of the differences between the LTF and the IMT, Hansen has a section called 'Broad Area of Agreement'. The 'Broad Area of Agreement' shows the dead-end of sham unity.

'Despite the intensity of the debate on certain questions, all the delegates agreed on some basic issues. For instance, all of them supported the view that the contradictions of the capitalist system are deepening at a rapid rate. . . . Everyone agreed that the deepening of the contradictions of

113. *ibid* p 28.

114. 'Trotskyism Betrayed', p 258 in *Trotskyism versus Revisionism* vol 3.

115. *ibid* p 260.

116. L. Trotsky, *The Transitional Programme* p 44 Merit, New York 1970.

117. V. Lenin, 'Dead Chauvinism and Living Socialism' p 99 in *CW* vol 21 Progress, Moscow 1964.

118. V. Lenin, 'Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra' p 354 *CW* vol 4 Progress, Moscow 1964.

the capitalist system impels the proletariat and its allies into action. . . . The delegates agreed on the forecast that the ruling class everywhere will resort to violent means as a counter to the explosive social pressures, and that the working-class must prepare its own answer if it is to avoid undergoing fresh experiences with fascism or murderous military regimes.' 119

And Hansen's list of platitudes goes on. The 'Broad Area of Agreement' is certainly very broad – virtually anybody on the non-Stalinist left can agree with them. An International will not be built on Hansen's 'broad area of agreement'.

The struggle to build an International today, above all, means a willingness to struggle for ideological clarity. This means engaging in a struggle for ideas and a willingness to listen and learn from the experiences of comrades in other tendencies in Britain and internationally. We hope that the comrades of the FI will recognise the urgency of seeking ideological clarity internationally and will contribute to this vital debate. In the coming period the seriousness of a revolutionary organisation will be determined by the way in which it struggles to rebuild the Bolshevik tradition internationally.

Frank Richards, March 1975.

119. See p 1719 *Intercontinental Press* Dec 23, 1974.

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