The epigones destroy Trotsky’s International, 1940-1953

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The general decimation of cadre before and during the war (including the loss of some 40 per cent of the SWP(US) in the split with the Shachtmanites) was paralleled by a series of opportunist and sectarian deviations that politically weakened the forces of Trotskyism. In the USA the SWP, led by Cannon, distorted Trotsky’s proletarian military policy when faced with the actual entry of the US into the war in late 1941.

The SWP placed their entire emphasis on the tar-Heal compromise involved in this policy (acceptance of bourgeois militarisation programmes, but combined with a fight to place them under workers’ control), but obscured the strategic context that Trotsky always set this policy in - that is a clear and unambiguous struggle for the policy of revolutionary defeatism when confronted with the actuality of imperialist war. Using the pretext of the need to maintain its legality at all costs, Cannon delayed the party from issuing a statement on the war when it broke out.

Only under pressure from oppositionists, largely inspired by the Spanish-Mexican Trotskyist Grandizo Munis, did the SWP issue a statement. It was first published in the January 1942 issue of “Fourth International”, the theoretical organ of the party. It was not published in the party’s newspaper, “The Militant”, despite the wider circulation of that paper. The statement was however unequivocally against the war and raised the banner of internationalism against the mad stampede towards the slaughter. However it did not spell out, at any point, that American Marxists regarded the defeat of the American bourgeoisie’s armies as a lesser evil. It was an internationalist anti-war statement, but, not a Leninist defeatist statement.

The party went even further, suggesting on a number of occasions that fascism, and not the American democratic? imperialists, was the American workers? main enemy. The Transitional Programme had laid down the guiding principles for the FI in the imperialist countries: "In this struggle the basic principle is ?the chief enemy is in your own country? or ?the defeat of your own (imperialist) government is the lesser evil". 13

The FI’s Manifesto on War had stated in 1940: “The Fourth International builds its policy not on the military fortunes of the capitalist states but on the transformation of the imperialist war into a war of the workers against the capitalists”.14 Indeed, Trotsky had had occasion earlier to denounce his Palestinian co-thinkers for deviating from this line.

The SWP, in the heat of war and with prosecutions looming, retreated from the Frs positions. In ?Socialism on Trial? Cannon refused to make clear, in a mass sale pamphlet, that the main enemy was at home: ?Q. Is it true that the party is as equally opposed to Hitler as it is to the capitalist claims of the United States?

A. That is unanswerable. We consider Hitler and Hitlerism the greatest enemy of mankind. We want to wipe it off the face of the earth. The reason we do not support a declaration of war by American arms is
because we do not believe the American capitalists can defeat Hitler and fascism. We think Hitlerism can be destroyed only by conducting a war under the leadership of the workers.15 There are three centrist waverings in this short exchange: 1) Hitler, not the “Sixty families”, becomes the US workers’ greatest enemy;

2) Cannon proposes a war - presumably an invasion of Germany - as the way of defeating Hitler. Trotsky, on the other hand, rightly told the Palestinian group who proposed a similar war: “No, in this way we shall not help the German workers to rouse themselves from their stupor. We must show them in action that revolutionary politics consists in a simultaneous struggle against the respective imperialist governments in all the warring countries. This ‘simultaneity’ must not of course be taken mechanically... For Hitler and Mussolini the success of a socialist revolution in anyone of the advanced countries is infinitely more terrible than the combined armaments of all the imperialist democracies”.16

3) Cannon talks merely of the ‘leadership’ of the workers. This is so vague as to be meaningless. We say, only when the government is our government, a real workers’ government, will we ‘defend the fatherland”. On that there can be no equivocation. Yet the SWP did equivocate. They transformed the revolutionary defeatist slogan of ‘Turn the imperialist war into a civil war’ into the evasive democratic slogan: ‘The real solution is to transform the imperialist war into a war against fascism”.17 This slogan was raised even before the entry of the US into the war.

The significance of this vacillation was that it reflected the SWP’s tendency to submit to national pressures and considerations, allowing them to override internationalist ones. All of Cannon’s justifications for his careful phraseology (in fact policy), are couched in terms of reaching out to the consciousness of the American workers? - as it currently existed. This, in itself correct and commendable desire, was not combined with a recognition of the need for the SWP to i) stand against that consciousness which was in the first phase of the war, chauvinist, ii) to fulfil its internationalist duty as the strongest party of the Trotskyist movement, operating in the best conditions, to speak out to the world working class in clear revolutionary defeatist terms.

While the SWP members in the merchant navy and armed forces made courageous efforts to establish international contacts, the party did not act as an international organising centre for the FI. Nor did it establish such a centre in a neutral European country to liaise with the fragmented European sections. Such a project, though difficult, was not impossible.

As it turned out, the Europeans themselves were able to re-establish contact in 1943, when they held international gatherings in countries occupied by the Nazis. An international centre, in Switzerland for example, would have made this process of regroupment less difficult. The SWP did not act decisively to arrest the organisational dislocation caused by the war. Had they done so some of its ill-effects might have been offset. The SWP further abdicated its responsibilities as leading section of the world movement (which despite its being legally debarred from actual membership of the FI it nevertheless was) when, after the war it willingly ceded leadership to the young and inexperienced Europeans - Pablo and Germain (now Mandel).

As well as the errors of the SWP, the wartime history of the FI saw a number of other sections veer away from a consistent revolutionary line on the war. In France there existed no official section of the FI at the beginning of the war.

Former members of the POI (official section - dissolved by the International Executive Committee in June 1939), grouped under the name of “the French Committees for the Fourth International”, adopted social-patriotic positions and nationalist demands faced with the German occupation of France. They saw the
national struggle of a section of their own imperialist bourgeoisie as progressive. These concessions by the POI to the nationalism of the petty-bourgeoisie were particularly significant in that, at the beginning of the war, the French proletariat had not yet been infected with the ?anti-boche? chauvinist poison that the PCF was later to propagate.

The other main group was the CCI (which stemmed mainly from Molinier/Frank?s pre-war PCI). This group, while holding fast against the tide of petit-bourgeois nationalism and refusing to support the struggle of the Gaullist section of the French bourgeoisie, fell into abstract propagandism and a sectarian attitude towards those struggles by French workers and peasants which brought them into confrontation with the armed forces of German imperialism.

In France, a Provisional European Secretariat of the FI was set up under Pablo?s leadership in 1943. In February 1944 it organised a conference of European sections. One of the aims this conference gave itself was to secure the unification of the two main French groups. The Conference criticised the nationalist deviation of the POI; but accepted the false contention of the POI that it had been infected by the nationalism of the masses at the start of the war. Furthermore, the Conference also criticised what it saw as the sectarian attitude of the CCI towards the partisan movement i in such a way that they implied that the CCI?s sectarianism was on a par with the nationalist opportunism of the POI. (Indeed centrists such as Mandel still today argue that the principal mistake was not to have fully participated in the Gaullist/Stalinist-led military resistance movements against German imperialism).

There was no attempt to search for the real roots of the CCI?s sectarianism. In a desire to achieve unification, no mention was made, for example, of the CCI?s incorrect perspectives and its confusion over the relationship between party and class. Its attempt to set up ."workers? groups? as embryonic soviets was similar to Molinier/Frank?s centrist position, developed in 1936/36, of Revolutionary Action Groups as embryonic soviets (see Braun?s ?The Mass Paper? in ?The Crisis of the French Section"). Therefore a complete and honest balance sheet of the war period was not drawn up in France.

The German section, the IKD, veered in a Menshevik direction, arguing that the victory of the Nazis had, once again, placed the ?democratic revolution? on the agenda, as against the proletarian revolution.

In Britain the two Trotskyist groups committed similar errors. The Workers? International League (WIL), while it carried out good work in the factories, leading strikes etc, eventually fell in with the line advanced by Cannon. Prior to the fall of France, the WIL maintained a clear defeatist position. In December 1938, the WIL argued that the ?only way to act is to show the German working class that we struggle against our own bosses and by example encourage them to overthrow Hitler". Indeed, foreshadowing the errors later to be committed by the Revolutionary Socialist league (RSL), the other Trotskyist group, the WIL adopted a sectarian approach to practical problems posed by the onset of war. They argued that demands for adequate air-raid shelters for workers was tantamount to aiding the war effort. However, after the fall of France in 1940, the line began to change. With the ?enemy at the door", the WIL began to buckle before chauvinist pressure.

Defeat was no longer an abstract ?lesser evil". It was a real possibility.

The WIL declared, in February 1941, that the task was ?turning the present imperialist war into a real struggle of the workers against Nazism". The WIL linked this more explicitly than the SWP did, with a struggle against the British capitalists. However their slogan was not a consistently revolutionary defeatist one. The smaller official section of the FI, the RSL, maintained a harder defeatist position. However, unlike the CCI, they exhibited definite sectarian tendencies, particularly in their tactical application of this policy.
It would be wrong to give equal weight to sectarianism and opportunism in time of imperialist war. Lenin, during World War 1, was precisely prepared to bloc with sectarians (without endorsing their overall politics) in a bid to rally the most consistently internationalist forces.

We think the FI in its post-war fusions in Britain and France, was wrong to condemn the two errors as though they were of equal weight. The opportunist errors of the POI, the SWP and the WIL reflected the pressure of social chauvinism. Where the sectarian trend did not involve passive abstention from struggle (as it clearly did not in France), it was clearly superior. Also ominous was the failure of the FI or the SWP itself to draw up an honest balance sheet accounting for and correcting the SWP’s war-time errors. In 1944 several of the European sections of the FI regrouped at a conference held inside Nazi-occupied Europe. They adopted the Theses on the Liquidation of World War 2 and the Revolutionary Upsurge.

These testified to the continuing revolutionary potential of the sections of the Fourth International. The theses, written at a time when anti German chauvinism and pro-allied sentiments were growing rapidly in Europe, espoused a defeatist position in the war. They indicated that the reconstruction of the FI on a revolutionary basis was a real possibility. However, severe disorientation over the crucial question of perspectives, obstructed this development from taking final shape.

The aftermath of the Second World War was not as Trotsky had predicted it. Key elements of his perspectives, when he wrote the Transitional Programme, for the period ahead were:

a) a massive revolutionary wave - particularly in Germany, Italy, France, Britain and the USA;

b) the qualitative transformation of the FI into a mass force able to use the Transitional Programme to relate to and win leadership in the revolutionary upsurge;

c) the death agony of capitalism or its survival only on a totalitarian basis;

d) the destruction of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR either by political revolution or by a victorious imperialism;

e) the disintegration of the old leaderships of the working class - the social democrats and the Stalinists, as their material roots disappeared crumbs from the table of imperialism and bureaucratic privilege in the USSR.

As we have shown, the Transitional Programme was not a collection of timeless Marxist truisms, it was a manual of action. As such it was necessary to constantly test its demands, tactics and perspectives against reality, and to develop the programme accordingly. The followers of Trotsky repeatedly failed to do this after the war.

Trotsky’s perspective at the beginning of the Second World War was that it would engender revolutionary upheavals as great as or greater than, those succeeding the First World War. Capitalist economy, bourgeois society and its reformist parasites would be thrown into mortal crisis.

Likewise, the Stalinist bureaucracy, if it survived a military debacle at the hands of the imperialist aggressor, would succumb to the political revolution of the proletariat aroused by revolutionary events in the west.

Criticisms can certainly be made of Trotsky’s telescoped timetable for the historic exhaustion of US monopoly capitalism. However, this is an error Marx, Engels and Lenin made before him, and is a risk of error inseparable from revolutionary optimism.
Thus Trotsky considered an earlier error of perspective (at the Third World Congress of the Comintern) in the following way: “We had not predicted a solar eclipse, i.e. an event beyond our will and entirely independent of our actions. Involved is an historical event which can and will occur with our participation. When we spoke of the revolution resulting from the world war, it meant that we were and are striving to utilise the consequences of the world war in order to speed the revolution in every way possible”.20

Trotsky’s perspective was falsified by events after the war. Firstly, by powerful objective factors of the first magnitude. Whilst Britain and France, two of the three ?democratic imperialisms? proved as rotten and prone to instability as Trotsky had observed, this was far from being the case with the United States. The colossal scale and dynamism of its productive forces enabled it to sustain the moribund British Empire and raise French imperialism from the grave - as client or subordinate powers, unable to challenge their Wall St masters.

Likewise in the Russian workers? state, planned economy proved stronger than the sabotage and bungling of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Though Stalin and his clique brought the? workers? state to the edge of the abyss in 1941, the heroic resistance of the proletariat and the rallying to the workers? state of the peasantry and the nationalities, despite Stalin?s crimes, and because of fascist atrocities, gave the USSR victory. This victory, however, strengthened not only the state but also the bonapartist bureaucracy. The advance of American and Russian armies across the European continent placed foreign armies hostile to proletarian revolution amongst the proletariat of France, Italy and Germany. The victory of Stalinism and Anglo-American (democratic) imperialism, strengthened the political forces dependent on these tendencies.

On the one hand, the openly bourgeois parties and social democracy were revivified due to the victory of the ?democracies". On the other hand, the Stalinist parties with the weight of Russian victory and their own partisan struggles were likewise strengthened. Far from these forces facing the loss of their material basis, or suffering political demise and organisational disintegration, they emerged from the war much stronger than they were in the late 1930s.

Moreover, the politics of class collaboration - established via the Popular Front before the war, and having behind it the prestige of the Second and Third Internationals, were not disrupted until 1946/7, when the post-war crisis had been overcome. The whole weight of bourgeois democracy and Stalinism was thrown into the scales against proletarian revolution.

Once the immediate potentially revolutionary situations were weathered, the enormous economic power of the USA was brought to bear in the West through Marshall Aid, and the Kremlin bureaucracy sealed off its East European glacis and began the process of transforming them into degenerate workers? states, having expropriated the proletariat politically in advance. In Germany the working class upsurge was very weak and was suppressed immediately by Allied and Russian military means. In Italy and France the Stalinists demobilised the partisan militias. In Central and Eastern Europe a varied combination of Soviet forces and indigenous Stalinists and their popular frontist allies were able to prevent any revolutionary upsurge from occurring.

Thus not only were the Trotskyists weak and disorganised, but the conditions for them to emerge from the situation of marginalised propaganda groups did not materialise. Instead, the counter-revolutionary social democracy and Stalinist parties grew in strength, isolating the Trotskyists yet again. Thus social democracy and Stalinism exerted tremendous pressure on the tiny and disoriented forces of the Fourth International.
Whilst it was certainly possible to expect renewed political and social crisis with a further capitalist crisis - clearly by 1946/7 a new assessment of perspectives, an accounting for the failure of the previous ones, was necessary. Had this been done, it is unlikely that such a one sided, false perspective would have emerged based on catastrophic crisis, an immediately renewed war and the delayed revolution. The transformation of the Marxist understanding of crises, of war, of revolution from events into long processes was the result of a purblind empiricism which sought at all costs to prolong the ?revolutionary perspective".

The isolated and defeated FI leaders could not face the fact that they were passing from an aborted revolutionary period (1944/5), to a counter-revolutionary period, albeit one of democratic counterrevolution in the principle imperialist countries, rather than bonapartist or fascist reaction. The majority of the old FI leaders simply shut their eyes and held on to ?orthodoxy".

However the new European and then International leadership around Michel Pablo and Ernest Germain began to transform Trotsky?s tactics, strategy and programme in a piecemeal and empirical fashion under the cover of an apparent fidelity to his revolutionary perspectives. To preserve these, ?revolution? became a world objective process which chose here the Stalinist bureaucracy, there the Titoite partisans, elsewhere the Bevanite parliamentarians, as its agents for a whole historic stage. It was only a matter of time before this piecemeal revision was systematised. This Pablo attempted in 1950 - 1951.

The FI developed perspectives for after the war based on a combination of dogmatism and blind optimism. This dogmatism spawned a series of errors which oscillated between sectarianism and opportunism. In time the political vibrations broke up the FI into two factions both equally tainted with these errors. Despite the signs of economic boom in the USA, Cannon insisted that the American revolution was imminent. Furthermore the perspective of a third world war meant that the world tottered on the verge of a permanently pre revolutionary situation. The documents of the 1946 International Congress clearly reveal this tendency in the FI. Thus in ?The New Imperialist Peace and the Building of Parties of the FI", they argued:

"The war has aggravated the disorganisation of capitalist economy and has destroyed the last possibilities of a relatively stable equilibrium in social and international relations". And again: ?If the war did not immediately create in Europe a revolutionary upsurge of the scope and tempo we anticipated, it is nevertheless undeniable that it destroyed capitalist equilibrium on a world scale, thus opening up a long revolutionary period". This ?long revolutionary period? became an ever-expanding one, and as such ceased to have any useful specific meaning.

The potential for rectifying these errors of perspective and of reconstructing the FI on a revolutionary basis existed within the forces of Trotskyism. There were challenges to the leadership?s rigid adherence to Trotsky?s perspectives. In the SWP, for example, Felix Morrow led an opposition that argued: ?Trotsky tried to teach us to understand that it is necessary to make a prognosis but equally necessary to understand that it is impossible to guess the tempos in advance for a prolonged period, and hence one must introduce the necessary correctives into it in the course of experience? . Similarly the British RCP (a product of a 1944 fusion between the RSL and the WIL) argued against the ?New Imperialist Peace? document, that Stalinism had been strengthened and not thrown into mortal crisis. It pointed to the danger of disorientation that the failure to recognise this could lead to. The SWP contended in 1946 that the war was still on. The FI hesitated before calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from occupied territories. Initially, it rejected a British amendment to this effect, though it later corrected its position. The French section argued that the USSR, in 1946, was more threatened than at the darkest hour of the war. Perhaps more astonishing was the answer the Trotskyist ?Neuer Spartakus? gave to the question: ?Why does Stalin rob? Because he lost the war".
Also on the question of the immediacy of imperialism’s own economic crisis, the RCP contended that in a resolution that seeks to orientate our own cadres on immediate economic perspectives - from which the next stage of the class struggle will largely low, and thus our immediate propaganda and tactics - the perspective is clearly false... For the second time in a generation capitalism has been enabled to gain a breathing space. The theory of spontaneous collapse of capitalism is entirely alien to Bolshevism*.25

Both the Morrow and RCP oppositions made correct criticisms of the FI’s line. Neither matured into a Left Opposition, however. This fact is decisive in understanding why later errors were able to go by unchecked. The Morrow opposition drew from its conclusions that a return to the democratic - as opposed to the transitional - programme was necessary in Europe. Further their hostility to the Stalinist counterrevolutionary occupation of Eastern Europe, catapulted them into adopting ?New Class? theories and abandoning defencism altogether.

The SWp? leadership?s insistence that the entry of Soviet troops saw the commencement of a classical dual power situation did little to offset Morrow? 2 ?New Class? tendencies. The end result was that this tendency drifted out of the SWP and into the renegade Shachtman group.

The fate of the RCP was different. As a result of its criticisms of the Frs perspectives and its refusal to accept the ?deep entry? policy into the Labour Party that the International Secretariat favoured, it incurred the enmity of Pablo and Germain. Cannon and the SWP had their own grudge against the Haston/Grant leadership of the RCP dating from the fusion negotiations before the war. Against this leadership the SWP and the IS sponsored a faction, led by Gerry Healy and John Lawrence, who split in 1947 to carry out the deep entry perspective. This effectively wrecked the RCP, weakening and demoralising the old leadership and strengthening the Healy group. With Cannon and Pablo’s blessing the two wings were re-united in 1949, but with the old Minority being given a majority on the leading committees. With a vigour that was later to become his trademark, Healy set about expelling his former opponents and turned the RCP, now called ?The Club”, into a Pablo/Cannon loyal section.

Thus, the critics of the 1946/8 period were removed from the FI by the time it was thrown into a new crisis of perspectives in the early 1950s. In 1951, no force existed which was able to argue for the correction of earlier errors as the basis for avoiding new ones.

Under the leadership of Pablo, and with the approval of Cannon and the SWP, the Second World Congress of the FI in 1948, systematised its erroneous perspectives and tentatively suggested that the imminent world war would be transformed into an ?international civil war? 26. This perspective, put forward as a possibility that did not rule out ?other important factors in the political developments in other countries? 27, was later turned into the over-riding perspective of the FI by Pablo. He used the false positions of the FI to suggest that a war between imperialism and the USSR was imminent and inevitable.

Thus the perspectives document of 1948. which had been used as a justification for a mass party building turn by the FI, later became a tool in Pablo’s hands when he developed the perspective of liquidating Trotskyist factions into social democratic and Stalinist parties. This later abuse of the earlier perspective was absolutely connected to its essential falseness. The optimism about the likely spontaneous transformation of a war into a civil war embodied a key methodological error committed by the post-War FI. Trotsky’s perspectives and prognoses were turned into a prophecy that had to come true in the short term. The collapse of capitalism and the eruption of a revolutionary tide were designated as the inevitable outcomes of an unfolding objective process to which Trotskyists had to relate.

However, whilst capitalist crises and upsurges of working class struggle clearly do arise out of the objective contradictions of capitalism, there is no ?objective process? which resolves such crises. Without the victory of the subjective factor - the revolutionary party - there can be no lasting victories for the working class,
courtesy of the ?objective process? alone.

The FI did not lead the working class in any country in 1948. Furthermore, the revolutionary or pre-revolutionary crises of the immediately post-war period were clearly over. Yet the FI held to its perspectives. At the 1948 FI Congress, the Theses on Stalinism did not describe the events in Eastern Europe (including Yugoslavia) as part of any revolutionary process. This retention of the earlier perspectives was what allowed the FI to maintain its orthodox political standpoint.

As such we stand by the programmatic declarations of the 1948 Congress as well as of the 1938 Congress. However, as the FI leadership?s world view became increasingly at variance with reality, so their orthodoxy became ever more fragile. All that was needed to dislodge the F. from the orthodox positions it held until 19-48 was a sharp twist in world events.

That twist in events came almost immediately after the 1948 Congress. In the summer of 1948 the Tito-Stalin split was made public.

The Yugoslavian Communist Party (YCP) was expelled from the Cominform and was denounced as, variously, ?Trotskyist? and ?Fascist".

Out of the Yugoslav events the FI developed centrist conclusions and positions. They saw in them only a confirmation of their wrong perspectives. Thus, according to the FI leadership, Yugoslavia demonstrated the crisis of Stalinism that they had been predicting since 1944.

Further the whole development was a part of the successful revolutionary upsurge that had always been a key component of their perspectives. The partisan war was now described, post facto, as a ?proletarian revolution? (initially only by Pablo, but, by 1951, by the whole of the FI leadership). The state established by that ?revolution? was a workers? state which was seen to be suffering from merely quantitative deformations, it was not seen as a qualitatively degenerate workers? state. Tito?s parasitic bureaucracy was, correspondingly, not a counterrevolutionary factor but a ?Leninist? friend who needed the FIs advice - not its revolutionary opposition. The Open Letter from the International Secretariat requesting attendance rights at the YCP Congress of July 1948 declared ?We understand exactly the tremendous responsibility weighing upon you, and we consider it our

Michel Pablo, the leader of the FI at the time, used the Yugoslav affair to attack a number of key positions of the Trotskyist movement; on Stalinism, on the revolutionary party, the nature of revolutions and on the tactic of entryism and, through a distortion of this tactic, he attacked the communist premises of the united front tactic. Further, he argued that the process occurring in Yugoslavia (which was genuinely revolutionary according to him), would also take place in the rest of the Eastern European ?buffer zone? as well; indeed, he already saw it taking place in China.29

Pablo?s positions on Yugoslavia were adopted by the FI at its Third World Congress in 1951. They were subscribed to by all the major Sections and leading figures of the FI. There was no revolutionary opposition to Pablo?s centrist position that ?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 which, however, does not exclude its possible re-emergence under certain conditions".30

Essential to Pablo?s position was a revision of the Trotskyist understanding of Stalinism, i.e. that it is invariably a counterrevolutionary force. This does not mean that Stalinism can never carry out progressive measures, even up to the transformation of property relations. What it does mean is that always, under all conditions, the Stalinists will obstruct the working class from taking political power directly into its own
hands and using that power in its own class interests. In place of this appraisal of Stalinism, Pablo argued in his Report to the 1951 Congress that "We have made clear that the CP?s are not exactly reformist parties and that under certain exceptional conditions they possess the possibility of projecting a revolutionary orientation". 31

Pablo combined this revision with an attack on Lenin?s theory of imperialism as the epoch of wars and revolutions. He replaced this with a formula that was ridiculous both as an immediate perspective and as a description of a defining feature of the epoch: "In their stead, it is the conception of Revolution-War, of War-Revolution which is emerging and upon which the perspectives and orientation of revolutionary Marxists in our epoch should rest". 32

Using this theoretical ?rearmament? (i.e. revision) as his pretext, Pablo embarked upon a tactical course which involved the complete liquidation of the Trotskyist programme. This liquidation was necessitated by the organisational and political concessions that were involved in Pablo?s ?entrism sui generis? ("entryism of a special type", based on long-term entry and the hiding of the revolutionary programme). Pablo argued that the imminent War-Revolution left no time to build Trotskyist parties, but that this was no longer a crucial problem because in the coming period a variety of political formations could embark on the struggle for power. The Stalinists, for example, could be forced as parties to project a revolutionary orientation. Entryism was needed in order to generate the necessary pressure. In other formations, such as social democracy or petty bourgeois nationalism, the perspective was one of centrist splits away from the parties. Here entryism was necessary in order to prepare and develop such a split. In both cases the entryism that was to be undertaken was not that advocated by Trotsky, around the time of the ?French Turn", that is entryism conceived of as a united front tactic to win leftward moving workers to the communist programme, a tactic that could not be a long-term one. The entryism ?of a special type? had to be deep and long term, the open fight for the revolutionary programme had to be ?temporarily? abandoned.33

This thorough-going opportunism propelled the FI along a sharp rightward-moving centrist course. In 1951, Pablo characterised the Peronist movement in Argentina as ?anti-capitalist". The Chinese Communist Party soon became, like the YCP, a revolutionary factor.

In Britain, the left reformist Aneurin Bevan became? a "left centrist". In 1952, Pablo instructed the French section to make a deep entry into the PCF, to integrate itself into the working class movement ?as it was".

Such concessions inevitably entailed the abandonment of any fight for principled politics against the leaderships of the parties or movements into which the Trotskyists entered.

By 1953 the Pablo-led International Secretariat (IS) was leading the International into headlong programmatic liquidation: ?entryism sui generis?, the ?revolutionary? nature of Stalinism, the epoch of ?War Revolution?, the subordinate role of the Party; all of these were Pablo?s contribution to the FI?s centrist collapse.

The principal forces who organised the 1953 split with the Pabloled IS - the SWP (US), the PCI (France) and the Healy group in Britain were not a revolutionary ?Left Opposition". The International Committee (IC) that they formed does not constitute a ?continuity? of Trotskyism as against Pabloite revisionism. They failed to break decisively with the liquidationist positions of the 1951 Congress which paved the way for Pablo?s tactical turns. They did not criticise (i.e. including self-criticism) the post-war reconstruction of the FI and the undermining of Trotsky?s programme and method that this involved.

The IC embodied the national isolationism of its three largest components, each of which only opposed Pablo?s bureaucratically centralised drive to implement the perspectives of the 1951 Congress when it
affected them. In the IC itself they rejected democratic centralism outright. Moreover, by not going beyond the framework of a public faction, they refused to wage an intransigent fight against Pablo-Mandel.

The spirit of 1953 therefore, was both too late and too early. Politically it was too late because all the IC groups had already endorsed and re-endorsed the liquidation of the line in the period 1948-51. It was too early in the sense that it came before any fight within the framework of the FI to win a majority at the following congress. Indeed, the decision to move straight to a split pre-empted such a fight. The IC groupings had no distinct and thoroughgoing political alternative to Pablo-Mandel and, therefore, they remained immobilised in a position where factional heat was a substitute for political light.

Despite acceptance of the 1948/51 revisionism, the IC was able, on occasion, to make isolated but valid criticisms of the IS. However, such criticisms, born out of both factional point-scoring and revulsion at IS betrayals, only occasionally went beyond a sterile defence of what they called “orthodoxy”. In reality this was a revisionist melange of catastrophism, Stalinophobia and softness on social democracy - a mixture that Cannon, Bleibtreu-Favre and then Lambert and Healy had long pioneered. An examination of each of these groups’ record before and during the split proves this conclusively.

The SWP had political agreement with Pablo right up to 1953. On Yugoslavia they had fully supported Pablo’s orientation to Tito, and endorsed the 1951 Congress resolution on Yugoslavia. As early as 1948, an SWP NC statement insisted that Tito had been “compelled by the logic of the struggle” and had ceased to be a Stalinist. Thus when the PCI contacted Cannon to help them resist Pablo’s policies and bureaucratic manoeuvres, he had no hesitation in replying: “I think that 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...It is the unanimous opinion of the leading people that the authors of these documents have rendered a great service to the movement for which they deserve appreciation and comradely support, not distrust and denigration”.

This was the same leadership that was to declare in the “Open Letter” of November 1953 (the de facto split document) that this very same leadership was “an uncontrolled, secret, personal faction in the administration of the Fourth International which has abandoned the basic programme of Trotskyism”.

Yet the SWP document “Against Pabloite Revisionism” accepted all of the tenets of Pablo’s positions. The Second World War produced a revolutionary wave of “greater scope, intensity and resistance than the First World War” we are told. This produced “the revolutionary victories in Yugoslavia and China”.

The principled positions against Stalinism that the “Open Letter” took were compatible with the SWP’s centrism. Their opposition to the Stalinists’ betrayal of the French General Strike, their position for the withdrawal of Russian troops from East Germany after the 1953 rising there, and their refusal to accept the post-Stalin liberalisation in the USSR as good coin, were all in themselves principled positions. A revolutionary opposition would have shared these positions.

However such an opposition - unlike the SWP and the IC - would not have pretended that the failure of the IS to hold these positions was the result of the influence of one man - Pablo - as the Open Letter insisted. On the contrary, they would have located these errors in past errors. This the SWP would not do in 1953. These issues, as can be seen by the later unity overtures made by the SWP towards the IS, were merely the pretext for the split.

The real cause was, in fact, an organisational one. The SWP turned against Pablo only as a result of his “interference” in the SWP (via the Cochran-Clarke faction). True to their national-isolationist tradition (revealed previously during the war) the SWP leaders refused to be treated as a “branch office” of the FI;
that is, they refused to undertake a tactical decision that had been agreed by the majority of the leadership of the FI at an International Executive Committee meeting. The breaking point came when Pablo supported the Cochran Clarke faction. The SWP leaders discovered a number of political disagreements and went straight for a split. Prior to this Cannon had believed that his previous support for Pablo would ensure that the SWP would not be subjected to IS discipline. That discipline had been alright for the PCI in France, but not for the SWP. He declared in May 1953:

"But what if Pablo and the IS should come out in support of the minority. If such a thing could occur - and I?m not saying it will; I?m just assuming that the absolutely incredible arrogance of the Cochranites is based on some rumour that they are going to have the support of the IS - if that should occur, it would not oblige us to change our minds about anything. We wouldn?t do so".40

The essence of Pablo?s politics was to be located in his programmatic premises first, his tactical conclusions second, and his organisational methods last. On the SWP?s part, therefore, the split stemmed from national considerations and centred for the most part on organisational questions. It was not a definitive, principled political split, despite Cannon?s oaths to the contrary.

With the Healy group in Britain the American pattern was followed almost exactly. The lack of serious political differences on the issues at stake was reflected in more than just the fact that Healy, like Pablo, had a portrait of Tito in his office! Healy himself had been Cannon?s man in the RCP from 1944/7. He worked closely with Pablo to destroy the Haston Grant leadership - a process urgently speeded up after Haston had expressed criticisms of the softness shown by Pablo towards Tito. In particular, Healy could make no ?root and branch? criticism of ?entryism sui generis? since he and Lawrence had actually pioneered this from 1947 onwards.

This ?tactic? flowed from a ?perspective? which foresaw the evolution to centrism of the left reformist leaders. Behind them a mass movement would be created which would force the removal of the right-reformist leaders. The task of Trotskyists in all this was to amalgamate with the left and assist in this development. To do this required the public abandonment of the Transitional Programme, the FI and the revolutionary party, and it meant not producing a specifically revolutionary propaganda organ. In their place there was to be a highly secret faction and a public left-centrist grouping publishing a newspaper which would express the politics appropriate to such a formation. This policy was put into practice by Healy after the collapse of the RCP.

The British section was turned into ?The Club", a secret Trotskyist grouping. The broader, public grouping known as the Socialist Fellowship included Labour MPs and union bureaucrats, gathered around the newspaper ?Socialist Outlook". Pablo approved of this tactic and embodied its experience in his ?entryism sui generis? which applied to Stalinist parties as well as to social democrats.41

This new type of entryism was explicitly demarcated and distinguished from that advocated by Trotsky. That had been based on the open building of a revolutionary tendency within a reformist party in circumstances where the evolution of the class struggle and the influx of subjectively revolutionary proletarian elements made it possible to unfurl the banner of the FI, at least temporarily. Trotsky recognised that such an entry would last for a limited period, possibly a mere episode.

When one comes to look at the Healyites? own account of their split with Pabloism, the political questions are less than clear.42
The dispute arose when Lawrence (like Clarke in America) became a direct agent for Pablo and challenged Healy’s leadership. Over the Korean war he pushed a pro-Stalinist position on the Editorial Board of ?Socialist Outlook”, in alliance with the ?centrists? (Healy’s term for left reformists). This breach of discipline and its consequences form the substance of ?The Struggle in the British Section”. 43

No political documents appeared at the time of the split itself. It was an organisational battle in which the number of legal shareholders in ?Socialist Outlook? counted for more than the errors of the 1951 Congress and before.

However, the political differences underlying the split were real enough With the advent of the Korean war in 1950, Pablo saw the realisation of his ?war-revolution? perspective as imminent. The British section made sure that Socialist Outlook followed the Pablo line, with a number of pro-Stalinist articles appearing. Healy and Lawrence coexisted peacefully at this time. However, after the tactical turn towards entryism into Stalinist parties in 1952, Pablo, having succeeded in wrecking the French section, began to foist his tactic on other sections. By 1953, Lawrence, in cahoots with Pablo, was pushing for a much more definite pro-Stalinist orientation in Britain. Healy’s longstanding? and long term orientation to the Bevanites conflicted with this tactical turn. Fearing a Pabloite victory, Healy threw in his lot with Cannon, who feared similar moves in the US. He moved against Lawrence in Britain and, eventually, Pablo internationally.

The PCI in France differed from the SWP and the Healy group insofar as it had waged a limited political fight against Pablo from 1951 onwards. For their efforts, the leadership of the PCI were connived against by Pablo, Healy and Cannon! But the politics that the PCI fought fought on were not revolutionary politics. In June 1951 the PCI leader .Bleibtreu-Favre, supported by Pierre Lambert and the majority of the organisation, produced a response to Pablo?s revisionist document ?Where are we going?”. The French document ?Where is Comrade Pablo going? ? was delayed in its publication by Germain (Ernest Mandel).44, 45

He had duplicitously pretended to oppose Pablo on ?democratic? grounds, but warned Bleibtreu-Favre against provoking Pablo into taking disciplinary measures by putting out the document. Because Bleibtreu-Favre, Lambert and the others supported Germain?s document ?What should be modified and what should be maintained in the Theses of the Second World Congress of the Fourth International on the Question of Stalinism? ? (the famous ?Ten Theses")46, the French accepted his advice. The result was that Pablo, in collaboration with Germain, built up a Pabloite minority faction around Michel Mestre.

Pablo effectively isolated the French majority after refusing to circulate Bleibtreu-Favre?s document before the Third World Congress.

The French were left declaring their support for the ?Ten Theses", which were not voted on at the Congress. In January 1952, Pablo proposed that the PCI should carry out an ?entryism sui generis? tactic in the PCF - then in a leftist phase. The French majority, preferring an orientation to the looser SFIO, opposed this turn on tactical grounds.

After a struggle, in June 1952, Pablo, Germain and Healy (with Cannon?s approval) expelled the majority of the French Central Committee!

However much we would sympathise with the PCI as a victim of bureaucratic methods, their struggle was, in the end, a vacillating, politically incorrect one. First, by supporting what we have described elsewhere as Mandel?s ?Orthodox Revisionism,,4 ~ Finding the idea that Stalinist parties had led what the FI regarded as healthy revolutions to victory in Yugoslavia and China, unpalatable from an ?orthodox? standpoint, Mandel revised the Trotskyist position on Stalinism.
It had a dual character - a good side and a bad side. The pressure of the masses could serve to allow the good side to win out. Thus: The Yugoslav and Chinese examples have demonstrated that, placed in certain exceptional conditions, entire Communist Parties can modify their political line and lead the struggle of the masses up to the conquest of power, while passing beyond the objectives of the Kremlin. Under such conditions these parties cease to be Stalinist in the classical sense of the words.48

Bleibtreu-Favre’s document expressed an identical view, particularly with regard to the Chinese bureaucracy. They bitterly attacked the Chinese Trotskyists for failing to enter the CCP (which was imprisoning Trotskyists at the time) quickly enough. In other words, the French accepted Pablo’s analysis of Yugoslavia and China. What they could not accept was that these states were dominated by Stalinist parties. It was for this reason that they, like everybody else in the FI, were prepared to endorse the 1951 Congress position on Yugoslavia, a position that liquidated the programme of Trotskyism.

Criticising Pablo’s objections, the French introduced their own.

China, they argued, proved that The reality of the class struggle will prove more powerful than the Kremlin apparatus, despite the non existence of a revolutionary party.49 The reason was because the CPs were subordinated to the Kremlin. If they went against the Kremlin then they could not be Stalinist: In any event it is absurd to speak of a Stalinist party in China, and still more absurd to foster belief in even the resemblance of a victory of Stalinism in China? .50

Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinism as contradictory but predominantly counter-revolutionary even when it breaks up along social patriotic lines was junked. The PCI leadership capitulated to Stalinist parties and then, to save their souls, conveniently concluded that these parties were not Stalinist at all.

In 1951 the centrist positions of the Third World Congress on Stalinism, on Yugoslavia, and general perspectives (the impending civil war perspective) proved, beyond doubt, that a programmatic collapse of the Fourth International had taken place. The fact that no section voted against the Yugoslav resolution - the cornerstone of all the errors - is a fact of enormous significance.

The FI as a whole had collapsed into centrism. From this point on, the task facing Trotskyists was the refoundation of a Leninist-Trotskyist International on the basis of a re-elaborated programme of revolutionary communism. Manoeuvres to replace the leadership of the FI were entirely insufficient. The programmatic basis of the FI had to be changed. The manner by which this could have been done in the early 1950s is a matter of tactical speculation. What is decisive for us is that it was not done. The historical continuity of Trotskyism was shattered - as was evidenced by Pablo’s use of the Congress documents at the Tenth Plenum of the International Executive Committee in February 1952, to usher in entrism sui generis? The opposition in America, Britain and France that did emerge in 1952-3 was subjectively committed to opposing Pablo. However, they have to be judged not by their impulse but by their politics. Their orthodoxy was both sterile and based on post-war revisionism, prompted by the Yugoslav events. It was not authentic Trotskyism.

Thus we cannot view either component of the 1953 split as the continuators of Trotskyism. Both were centrist.

The IC, itself developing in a rightward direction (e.g. Healy’s work in the Labour Party) was distinguished from the IS by the pace of its development. It recoiled from the most blatant expressions of liquidationism issuing from the IS, but not from the right-centrist documents that underpinned that liquidationism. Therefore the IC did not constitute a left centrist alternative to the IS.
The IS was a right-ward moving centrist group using the 1951 positions to draw what were entirely logical conclusions. The correct positions on East Germany and Hungary taken by the IC may have determined the tactics of a Left Opposition if it had existed. It could not have determined its estimate of the IC.

Disorientation after the war led to a programmatic collapse of the FI. After the CI's programmatic collapse, Trotsky's Left Opposition maintained a reform perspective because the CI contained within it a mass movement. After the FIs programmatic collapse, and the failure of an Opposition to materialise, the FI was left without a programme and had never contained a mass vanguard within it.

The FI, unlike the CI, was in an essential sense its programme. That is why we say that after 1951, whatever the tactics that may have been employed, authentic Trotskyists had to elaborate a new programme and thus build the International anew.

**FOOTNOTES**

13. L Trotsky, ibid, p.131.
22. ibid., p. 175.
24. All examples given are quoted from RCP Conference Documents (September 1946), pp. 6-7.
25. ibid., p. l0.
27. ibid.
31. Fourth International (New York, November/December 1951) (original emphasis).
32. M. Pablo, ?Where Are We Going?? in International Secretariat Documents 19511954 (New York, 1974) Vol1. p. 7 (original emphasis).
33. See the advice to the Austrian section ?not to push forward programmatic and principled questions? (International Information Bulletin, New York, December 1951).
34. Theories abound as to whether Bleibtreu-Favre (or Favre-Bleibtreu - the name has been printed both ways) was one or two people. Further, it seems that Favre is a pen-name of Pierre Lambert. We do not know the truth behind this mystery. Nor do we care - the politics pioneered by Bleibtreu-Favre provided the ?(incorrect) basis for the Lambert group.
38. ibid., pp. 138-152, 39. ibid., p. 139.
41. For a more detailed treatment of this period, see Workers Power 7,39 and 40.
42. Trotskyism versus Revisionism (London 1974-5) Six volumes.
43. ibid., Vol. 2, pp 72-84.
44. See footnote 34.
47. See Workers Power & Irish Workers Group The Degenerated Revolution (London,1982), pp.90-93.
50. ibid., p. 16.

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