



Perspectives and Programme

Sun, 31/10/2004 - 23:00

Contents

- ? Introduction
- ? Are the League?s economic perspectives catastrophist?
- ? Are the League?s political perspectives catastrophist?
- ? What do we mean by a pre-revolutionary period?
- ? Epochs, Periods, Situations.
- ? Should we agitate for the Fifth International in the anticapitalist movement?

Introduction

The opposition platform claims that since our sixth congress in 2003, the League for the Fifth International has made the following related errors:

? The economic and political perspectives adopted at congress were ?catastrophist?. They claim that economically these perspectives predict permanent stagnation similar to the situation described by Trotsky in the opening section of the transitional programme. Politically the perspectives are supposed to be based on a global offensive by the working class which makes the task of the day preparing for the seizure of power

? This perspective they claim has led to ?voluntarist? and sectarian methods of building the League, in which we emphasised sectarian ?party fronts? instead of united front work aimed at the mass reformist labour movement.

? Related to this is a supposed retreat from arguing for our full programme in favour of agitation for ?key slogans? (the new workers? party, social forums, rank and file movement, etc.) which they say also means retreating from the struggle for a revolutionary party and the use of transitional demands.

? The IS has emphasised agitation within the anticapitalist movement for the formation of a Fifth International instead of ?propaganda aimed at a small vanguard of already conscious ?socialist? militants?, aimed at seeking agreement with leftward moving centrists.

? The IS is supposed to have formed a tendency to win a majority for these methods in the British section and then set out to ?micromanage? their implementation.

? Therefore, the opposition says, it is obliged to put forward an alternative perspective to the next IEC. If it is not adopted, they will form a faction to struggle for the leadership of the League at the seventh congress next year.

The IS believes these criticisms are a total misrepresentation of the congress perspectives and what the IS has done to implement them. To assemble what the opposition imagines is a systematic critique, it has sketched out a rough alternative which, if pursued, would mean the abandonment of the work of renewal the sections have been doing since the turn of the century.

The next congress will examine our political perspectives and the implementation of our party building tasks in a critical manner. The two IECs (January and April/May) and the pre-congress discussion in the sections will do just this. We can and should re-discuss and re-analyse our characterisation of globalisation, of the state of the world class

struggle and the workers' organisations, and our own tactics. All we insist on is that the opposition recognises its leading members' responsibility for the development of this analysis and perspective and honestly account for their own desire to abandon it.

Until the June IEC – i.e. until several months after their defeat at the British section's conference – the present leaders of the opposition developed no criticism of the last congress, the IEC's decisions or the IS's actions, either at the IEC meetings or in the national leadership of the British section. We believe that this opposition is in fact just trying to rationalise its perspectives, after the event, following the rejection of its positions at the last Workers Power (Britain) conference, when it tried to reverse WPB's perspectives under the impression of a temporary downturn in the British anti-war and class struggle situation in 2004.

Up to this point even the opposition members who were recent or current IEC or IS members showed little or no interest in participating in the leadership of the League, let alone in leading it. For this reason we characterise this opposition as profoundly national centred, seeking in reality to say to the IS 'keep your nose out of our business.'

The IS never had any desire whatsoever to monopolise the leadership of the League or make it monolithic. Indeed at every IEC we have attempted to persuade the members of the minority to serve on the IS. We have never denied that their refusal to do so weakens the IS.

But we will not lightmindedly hand over the League to an opposition whose leaders have refused to play any serious role in a collective leadership and which, if they flesh out their present suggestions for a perspective, would undermine the League's work.

We urge the opposition to abandon this self destructive course and participate as individuals in drafting the documents of the congress. If they do so we assure them of our cooperation.

Are the League's economic perspectives catastrophist?

'The perspectival method of the IS majority can be characterized as 'catastrophist'. That is, they argue that the period we are in is marked by the imminence of catastrophe – economic and political crisis, inability of capitalism to expand, inability of bourgeois politics to continue containing the class struggle etc. All of this is because globalisation is exhausted and represents only a regime of stagnation and crisis' (Platform of the Opposition, point 7.)

If this is what catastrophism means, then the League is simply not guilty of it. We do not believe in an imminent catastrophe, in an imminent economic and political crisis, of the inability of bourgeois politics to 'contain' the class struggle (which presumably means to prevent revolution), or that globalisation is 'exhausted' or is 'only' a regime of stagnation.

The best the Platform can come up with to prove that the League has followed a catastrophist path is the following quotation from the perspectives of the Sixth Congress:

'With the turn of the century, we have entered a new period. Globalisation – the latest phase of imperialism – has exhausted most of its economic dynamism. It has entered a period of stagnation. US imperialism will try to defend and increase its world dominance. It will try to deepen globalisation under its rule. But it will come up against its inner limits, against the rise of imperialist rivals and, most important of all, against a growing, dynamic workers' resistance and anti-capitalist movement. In short, we are entering a pre-revolutionary period.'

The comrades helpfully rephrase and interpret this for us in the following way:

'that globalisation is a phase of acute imperialist economic and political crisis, that the working class and other movements are moving onto a generalised offensive as a result of this crisis that the task of the hour is building parties and the international in order to prepare for power in the period ahead.' (Emphasis added).

The italicised words and phrases do not appear anywhere in the perspectives. Imminent and acute economic crisis; workers already responding with a generalised offensive; the necessity of 'preparing for power' NOW by building the party/international. All entirely bogus.

The documents passed at the Congress 'the International Perspectives and the Tasks for Building the League' nowhere talk about an acute world economic crisis in the offing. They do talk of 'the structural crisis of over-accumulation gripping world capitalism since the 1970s', but this is simply reiterating an analysis we have held for over ten years. In article after article you can read that globalisation and neoliberalism represent an attempt by the leading forces of the imperialist bourgeoisie to overcome the tendency to stagnation at the core of the system, by means of a neoliberal offensive aimed at the social gains of their own working classes, and the opening up of the semi-colonial and former Stalinist states to the export of capital by their giant corporations.

This includes a relentless attempt to raise absolute and relative surplus value at home (extend working hours and lives and introduce new technology to boost labour productivity) and to relocate production in areas of cheap labour where super-profits can be realised. This process fully explains the long term stagnating real wages in the USA, the assault on workers' 'social wage' in Europe, offshore location and the huge increase in investment in China, the rapid growth of a capitalistically exploited proletariat in China and south east Asia. None of these features have been denied by the IS. On the contrary they are part and parcel of our analysis of globalisation as the latest and highest stage of the imperialist epoch. They are an expression of fundamental features of the epoch.

The International Perspectives do say 'and this is their most angular formulation' that 'Globalisation' the latest phase of imperialism 'has exhausted most of its economic dynamism. It has entered a period of stagnation.'

But subsequent discussion at the IEC clarified this formulation. It made clear that what we are talking about is not a situation of constant stagnation (an impossibility given the continued cyclical movement of capitalism in all periods) but a period that displays a tendency to stagnation.

Certainly the next Congress will re-examine this and other formulations about the global economy and doubtless there will be many differing views. But no-one should doubt that the League today is well aware that the world economy is not stagnant. After all, our most recent set of perspectives (January 2005) make this absolutely explicit:

'The world economy is in the upswing of the business cycle' an upswing that could still last another two years or more. This upswing is uneven and unsynchronised 'especially as between continental Europe and the United States. The sustained fall in the value of the dollar against the Euro acts to depress EU exports and depress the cyclical recovery there. The US has certainly experienced a feverish upswing: the EU a low and slow recovery.'

We believe that the tendency to stagnation is a matter not of dogma but of scientific analysis. This does not mean permanent, unchanging low or no growth but a tendency across cycles to declining growth rates. It is important to our perspectives because we consider that it explains the aggressive and destabilising actions of US imperialism and its allies.

Precisely in order to escape this tendency, imperialism is driven towards the well known countervailing tendencies (intensification of the exploitation of labour, reduction of wages below their value, cheapening the costs of the means of production, foreign trade, etc.) This can be seen on a huge scale precisely in the export of capital to China, India, Eastern Europe, etc. It can be seen by the dominant trends in the international treaties, agreements, programmes and decisions of the IMF, World Bank, WTO, EU and FTAA, etc. It can be seen too in the military actions of the USA designed to seize raw materials and force open markets by pressure and if need be by war.

If there were no stagnation tendencies at the heart of the system 'in US, Western European and Japanese industry' there would be no objective impulse to this huge outflow of capital and the political and military aggressiveness to facilitate and protect it.

This is all part and parcel of our longstanding analysis of globalisation; the Sixth congress documents in no way

contradict it. Contrary to the Opposition Platform's claims, the perspectives we adopted never talk of an imminent catastrophic breakdown. And far from underestimating the hegemonic strength of the USA and the weakness of its rivals as the Opposition claim, we said:

Nevertheless US hegemony is so strong that it can avert any open and direct challenge to its power. Therefore the international bourgeois order while tensions are increasing is not under the immediate threat of breakdown.

If the Opposition call this catastrophism then they are using the term in a way we have never done before. Worse, for them, they will have to convict most of our publications most recently the anticapitalist pamphlet written in summer 2004 of this crime. In the chapter on globalisation (p10) the final crosshead asks 'Has Globalisation Peaked?' The answer the article gives is plainly yes.

Since the OECD accounts for the vast majority of global output and investment clearly the engine of globalisation has stalled.

Is this formulation less 'catastrophist' than the phrase the opposition seizes on to prove our catastrophism, that it has lost most of its dynamism?

The pamphlet then quotes with approval Robert Brenner a US-based Marxist political economist in support of this statement:

Against this background of system-wide stagnation, the impetuous growth of US debt, in combination with a soaring dollar, became the central motor driving the world economy. Simply put, since the early 1980s the system has moved forward by way of the expansion of the US current account deficit, leading to the piling up of ever greater US liabilities to the rest of the world on the one hand, and the increase of over-capacity in the international manufacturing sector on the other. (The Boom and the Bubble, Verso 2002)

The chapter then concludes with a question, 'Will we see a return to the rapid rates of growth in international trade and investment that characterised the 1990s?' Again the answer is no: 'it is very unlikely to reach anything like the scale of 1995-2000.'

It ends with the prediction that 'a sustained and deep recession in the US would turn de-globalisation from a threat to a reality.' De-globalisation 'shrinkage of the world market into regional or even national boundaries' would mean not just stagnation but actual shrinkage of the productive forces.

Is our analysis of globalisation catastrophist? No. But if you think our International Perspectives are catastrophist, then you certainly must convict the above analysis of the same crime. As many comrades will realise the author, Keith H, is signatory and presumably a co-drafter of the Platform of the Opposition. If Keith has changed his mind about the League's long term analysis since joining the tendency that is his absolute right. But to characterise the majority as catastrophist for expressing to the selfsame views he held as late as February of this year will not do.

We can ask Keith H directly. Before your recent change of position, did you believe that 'the period we are in is marked by the imminence of catastrophe - economic and political crisis, inability of capitalism to expand?' Our memories tell us you did not. Nor did we. So why now accuse us of these things simply for holding to what was until recently our common viewpoint?

It should be the first duty of a Marxist who believes she or he has made important errors to undertake some intellectual house-cleaning first. Other people can then bear these errors in mind when assessing any 'new theories' offered and in considering the qualifications of the theorist too.

In summation: our economic analysis remained unchanged from previous congresses: globalisation has not succeeded in fundamentally altering the period of what we have variously described as depressed accumulation or a tendency to stagnation. This is a position that we all accepted up to this year, along with most self-styled Marxist political

economists.

This is a scientific question ? i.e. one to be decided on the basis of serious theoretical work, including evidence. This evidence must not simply cite Chinese growth figures, or US and UK growth figures for half a cycle. Eclectic and impressionistic methods will yield only a ?Marxist? version of the faddish official optimism of the bourgeois ideologists.

And there is another good test of economic perspectives. It is one implicit in every section of Lenin?s book *Imperialism*. How well do economic perspectives explain and account for political developments? Here too we can see whether the catastrophism the opposition claims to have discovered is a reality or a scarecrow.

Are the League?s political perspectives catastrophist?

?Are workers and anticapitalists moving into a generalised offensive?? asks the opposition platform, heavy with irony.

No, they are not. But nowhere have we said they are ? not in the documents of the Sixth Congress, nor in any later resolutions of the IEC or IS.

This is just another fabrication. What we actually talk about is the opposite ? a ?bosses? offensive? against workers? social gains. This offensive has been going on at a global level since the launch of neoliberalism under Thatcher and Reagan.

In the semi-colonial world it used the stranglehold of debt to force through IMF austerity programmes and massive privatisations, multilateral and WTO-led drives for ?free trade?, i.e. opening up to imperialist multinationals. In mainland Europe and Japan it took the form of repeated attempts to introduce free market, neoliberal policies in all spheres. All of these elements of the offensive are in full flow today, with the Lisbon Agenda, with Koizumi?s recent victory on a ?reform? programme, with the Hong Kong conference of the WTO in December, with the USA having gutted the multilateralist alternative at the UN?s 60th Anniversary Assembly.

What we do emphasise, and what the opposition systematically belittle, is the movement of resistance to this offensive: the repeated defensive struggles.

The opposition accuse us of talking up every struggle no matter how minor and talking down every defeat or problem no matter how major. Until we read this charge, the thought of doing either had never even occurred to us. But since we are accused of this, we feel bound to recount the real struggles of the last years to show that talk of worldwide resistance to the bosses? offensive is neither fanciful nor ?catastrophist? but a straightforward statement of truth.

Since the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico 1994, we have seen the emergence of a movement rejecting the new ?neoliberal consensus?. Similar to the period of re-composition in the mid-to-late 1960s, we experienced a radicalisation of youth, a rebirth of anarchism and libertarianism, a focus on direct action and anti-corporate activism.

The movement erupted onto the world stage at the Seattle protests in 1999. From this point to the autumn of 2001 a whole series of summit sieges held centre stage. REVOLUTION and the League?s section got stuck into the direct action at all the major mobilisations. Then, at the G8 meeting in Genoa, the murder of Carlo Giuliani prompted a mass expression of solidarity from the Italian workers? movement at ?their? demonstration the next day and over the weeks which followed.

This coming together of the workers? and anticapitalist movement was historically significant. In Italy social forums erupted in every town and city to organise this new ?social movement?. The turning of the working class to this movement was a natural and organic product of the attacks of globalisation that suppressed and dismantled workers? rights and social privileges. It was no accident then that the European Social Forum was born in Florence in November 2002. It was overwhelmingly dominated by the organisations, trade union and political, of the Italian labour movement and the radical left. The ban on political parties partly hid this fact but in the evening rallies, on the last day and on the

million strong demonstration, this was obvious.

In the years that followed, the mainland of Europe saw waves of strikes, days of actions and demonstrations. Just as it was social forums in Italy so it was coordinations in France that pulled together these actions. Nor was it simply a matter of Europe. In Latin America indeed things were far more revolutionary. The popular assemblies in Argentina in 2002, the coordinadoras in Bolivia in 2003, and the anti-privatisation forums in South Africa in 2004, all indicated that this resistance was seeking new and more flexible forms of organisation. It was a symptom too of the crisis of leadership caused by the profound rightward move of reformism in all its variants (bourgeois populist, social democratic and Stalinist) in the early and mid-1990s.

The vast majority of the major social democratic parties had signed up to the neoliberal consensus demanded by the capitalists, creating a vacuum and crisis in the political representation of the working class movement.

But do we only point to the 'positives' and refuse to face up to problems, weaknesses, obstacles? Not in the least? This is another misrepresentation of the Opposition. Did we downplay or deny the rise of a new reformism in the worldwide antiglobalisation/anticapitalist movement? No, on the contrary, we predicted it, we analysed it, and, as soon as it started to emerge, we fought it.

We predicted that, if we were successful in drawing the workers' movement into the anticapitalist movement, this would increase the strength of reformism. After all we could not expect that workers would leave their existing leadership at the door. Thus, over the years since the ESF and the World Social Forum got going, as it became more mass in character, we saw a weakening of anarchism and libertarian populism within the movement. This was because:

a) anarchists often rejected the 'authoritarian' character of centralised working class organisations, and isolated themselves from the movement; and

b) the economic crisis and upheaval in Argentina exposed the 'change the world without taking power' approach as hopeless and impractical.

Throughout the development of the World and European Social Forums we have seen a simultaneous broadening of the movement but also a strengthening of reformism within it, because the forces that turned to it brought with them their reformist politics. We predicted this. The centrists failed to challenge them and create a revolutionary pole of attraction offering an alternative strategy. This is what we describe in *A rough guide to the anticapitalist movement* (both in its 2001 and 2004 editions) as the 'past gripping the present', i.e. the degenerate fragments of the first four Internationals are all present within this global movement.

As the September 11 attacks took place, the movement was faced with the task of building a global opposition to the war on terror, a task that reached its climax with the February 15 demonstrations called by the World and European Social Forums. The fact that this mass mobilisation could not translate itself into mass political strike action was an expression of its reformist leadership. This is what the sixth congress characterised as 'a crisis of leadership of the working class movement i.e. a crisis of non-revolutionary leadership'.

In Britain, where the antiwar movement had been so big, its defeat did create a conjunctural downturn in the struggle. It is also true that the fact that Britain's working class had had their neoliberal counterrevolution much earlier meant the workers movement remained in a period of recovery from these defeats, not as in much of Europe, where they were not defeated but were nevertheless on the defensive from attacks. However, the movement did not go away and the European Social Forum brought together 20,000 activists in October 2004.

The G8 in Britain this year has seen a mass demonstration of 200,000 organised by Make Poverty History, who are on the extreme right wing of the anti-globalisation movement, and a conference of 5,000 or so more radical activists, followed on the day the summit opened by 15,000 taking part in the protests organised by the centrists and anarchists. Even the 20,000 who mobilised on 24th September in London indicated a movement confused and disoriented by the London bombings and the centrists' misleadership but far from dead. In the USA however the antiwar movement took

up the issues of racism and poverty exemplified by Hurricane Katrina and produced the biggest demonstrations since before the war began.

In short, the movement in Britain, let alone in the world, has by no means gone away nor been strategically defeated as the opposition suggest. In the UK it is not as strong or as militant or as integrated as the movements in Italy, Spain, France, let alone Latin America. But it is not non-existent. The opposition's refrain 'there is no anticapitalist movement in Britain' or 'there is no organised anticapitalist movement in Britain' are both false. But its level of organisation must rise - which is why the majority have insisted on the importance in the present situation of slogans designed to achieve just that.

Internationally, the World Social Forum has got bigger in each of the last four years, reflecting this broadening and increasingly mass character of the movement. But of course, here too, the acute crisis of leadership presents itself. The PT-dominated international council of the WSF does all it can to block the WSF becoming an organising centre of resistance to neoliberalism and war. Two similar but still reformist challenges to the PT have emerged out of the World and European Social Forums to address this programmatic impasse. The 'Consensus of Porto Alegre' and the 'Charter for Another Europe' are both very reformist in essence.

In Latin America the alternatives are far more radical but also more populist. We have seen successive revolutionary crises in Bolivia (2000, 2003, 2005). In Venezuela Chavez's calls for 'socialism', his hosting of next year's WSF of the Americas, his calls on the WSF to 'develop a strategy for power', his call for 'a new International' have had a radicalising effect, for all his social democratic politics and Bonapartism.

The French No Campaign and the German Linkspartei (along with Rifondazione Comunista) are developing a reformist political alternative out of the movement. Its programme is very limited and very timid indeed compared to the left reformism of the 1970s and 1980s, but it has also attracted real forces in the vanguard of the working class.

Unlike the 1970s and 1980s, however, these political alternatives have, in Europe and Brazil, forced real ruptures with social democracy. The gaining of a Respect MP, and the expulsion of the RMT and disaffiliation of the FBU from Labour; the formation of the Linkspartei; the split in the French PS, and the electoral gains of LO/LCR; the formation of P-Sol. They arise from both the strength of the movement from below (to force left leaders to break with the parties of government), and the weakness of the vanguard of that movement (to complete the break with reformism). They are profoundly dialectical phenomena.

In short the political ferment and debate of the new century is taking place within and around this movement. We will neither adapt to its politics nor turn our back on it.

We will do what we have been doing since 2002: fight within this movement for a revolutionary strategy that can bring the working class to power. This is what the sixth congress meant when it says our task is to prepare the working class for power. This perspective was embedded in our programme From Protest to Power, passed by the sixth congress and accepted by everyone at the time.

When the opposition suggest that we are calling on workers to prepare for an imminent struggle for power, this, like their claim of economic catastrophism, is nonsense. Where, when have we ever said such things outside of a revolutionary situation like in Bolivia? Preparing the working class for power means arguing for it as a necessity in the major struggles of today, the need to end of the rule of capital, to halt the neoliberal onslaught. In short, we are fighting for the radical, working class, youthful forces within this movement to adopt our action programme. We have never for a minute suggested that the Bernard Cassens or Chico Whitakers will do so. In fact we said the opposite.

We should continue to challenge this neo-social democratic reformism by putting forward a revolutionary action programme, fighting for the mass militant action that can turn this globalised offensive of the bosses into working class offensive against them and fighting for this movement to build new working class parties as party of a new world party of social revolution.

What do we mean by a pre-revolutionary period?

?We are sure that the comrades will say that we are exaggerating their characterisation and that the term ?pre-revolutionary period? is not the same as saying that we are either in a pre-revolutionary situation or revolutionary situation. But this is to play with words. The key to understanding the IS error is not their distinction between ?period? and ?situation?. The error is their use of the term ?pre-revolutionary??. (Platform of the Opposition)

Does this represent honest confusion on the part of the comrades? Alas no. It is an attempt to deliberately confuse. Precisely because of the success of our work over the last three or four years, many new comrades will not know of the discussions we had on these issues in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed as late as 2003 we discussed this question at the congress in commission.

In fact Martin and Michael drafted a background paper for the draft programme discussion analysing what the various terms we were using meant. The following is its definition of pre-revolutionary period:

?A pre-revolutionary period has as its basic objective prerequisite conditions: (a) the economic base of capitalism no longer gives space for an overall improvement of the living conditions and security (employment, real wages, social welfare) of the exploited classes and where they are regularly threatened with actual decline; (b) the ruling class is divided as to how to deal with this, some seeking a solution by a severe attack on the exploited classes and/or their capitalist rivals, others to shift things in their favour by class collaboration or multilateral agreements. Its basic subjective condition is (c) that at the same time potential forces for the challenge of capitalist rule enter the [fray?]. The dynamic of economic and political clashes and challenges intensify and lead to repeated upsetting of the former class equilibrium ? such as strike waves, the threat of war, actual wars and revolutions. Last but not least is (d) the role played by the crisis of proletarian leadership.?

It is far from ?playing with words? to distinguish periods from situations; this is something our tendency has always sought to do. It is worth clarifying what we mean by epochs, periods and situations here, to avoid confusion and answer the opposition?s misrepresentation.

First, on the longest scale, we are living in a revolutionary epoch: the imperialist epoch of wars and revolutions. Capitalism has reached a stage of development in which the contradictions between the forces of production (socialised labour) and the relations of production (private ownership) pose a deadly threat to the further development of humanity.

Revolutionary periods are typical phases in the imperialist epoch. They consist of a series of revolutionary situations, where the capitalist economy suffers severe breakdown, the ruling class is divided as to how to deal with this, and the working class is unable and unwilling to continue to submit to its continued exploitation under such conditions. For such a revolutionary situation to actually become a revolution requires revolutionary action by the masses and the emergence of a leadership capable of taking them to power.

Obviously such revolutionary periods and situations are not ever present in the imperialist epoch. If the working class and its allies do not find a revolutionary leadership, then the situation will either return into a non-revolutionary one or a counterrevolutionary one (?dictatorial? or ?democratic?). If many such defeats are suffered, as was the case between 1923 and 1939, then even the most profoundly revolutionary period will be ended. Severe destruction of productive forces, strategic defeats of the working class, the establishment of a new division of the world amongst the imperialist powers can then allow a sustained period of the expansion of the productive forces (e.g. 1945 ? 1970).

This then opens space for a counter-revolutionary period, in which class rule can be stabilised and countervailing tendencies allow capitalist expansion for some time. These countervailing tendencies will, in the end, only lead to renewed sharpening of the fundamental contradictions when the tendency to breakdown makes itself felt sharply again. But this may not immediately lead to a revolutionary period. A transitional period between a non-revolutionary period and an openly revolutionary one is possible, even probable.

Such periods are transitional and pre-revolutionary periods, still marked by past defeats of the working class and

popular masses and by the survival of the pre-existing imperialist order, even though its economic, political and social foundations are being undermined. Does this mean that such periods are inevitably followed by a revolutionary period? Not at all. It means only that they have the potential to be so. But if the working class and its allies in the other exploited classes do not actively and consciously realise this potential, another strategic defeat could be inflicted on them which may open up a counterrevolutionary period

A globalised bosses' offensive (neoliberal globalisation) motivated by their objective need to raise profit rates, a political expression of this (wars to grab resources and open up markets, formation of blocs and counter-blocs, federal EU, and so on), consequent increasing economic and political instability, the emergence of new or renewed social and workers' movements offering international resistance to neoliberalism: these are the fundamental traits of the current world period.

When the opposition platform talks about a period of transition we agree. But it is wrong to counterpose this concept of a transitional period to a pre-revolutionary one. To do so is simply to avoid the question ? what are we in transition to? We answer from non-revolutionary situations to an increasing number of pre-revolutionary situations and from some pre-revolutionary situations to revolutionary ones. The outcome is not determined in advance but by the course of working class struggle and our ability to intersect with it and influence it.

To shrug one's shoulders like a post-modernist academic will not do. The working class needs and deserves an answer from Marxists. Of course our prediction will not have the force of natural scientific law. It will not be ?inevitable? if for no other reason that the defeats or victories of the working class and poor peasants will in large measure condition its development. We are aware that we have a perspective that is conditional, provisional and falsifiable. It must also be alternate ? it must state what will happen if key objective and subjective elements do not materialise.

But if it is to be of any practical use it has to say what is probable, what is the most likely course of development, which holds the most potential. On the basis of this the working class, its mass organisations and the revolutionary vanguard can plan their actions. On this basis revolutionaries must focus all their willpower and capacities to achieve this potential. That is not voluntarism ? or, if it is, then Lenin and Trotsky were the biggest voluntarists ever. Indeed that is what they were regularly accused of.

If the opposition comrades have a perspective based on a further one or two cycles at least of ?long wave? upswing, which mean greater stability for capitalism, lower levels of class struggle (except for a few ?exceptions? like Bolivia, Argentina, Venezuela, etc) then let them argue it at the congress. We simply disagree.

Bill's document ?1992 ? today: a new upward long wave?, which erroneously claims to be an expression of Trotsky's method in his 1923 article, The capitalist curve of development, does make this prediction of increased stability.

It claims, correctly, that the theory of long waves of capitalist development, ?each consisting of generally three cycles, either up or down? means that, if we started a new upward phase from 1992 to today, this would give us at least another ten years upward swing ? and, on the average of the long cycles that Bill quotes, this would last until 2013 or at the latest 2020.

Now of course if we can predict a long boom of 1950s and 1960s length and scale we want to know about it. The truth is always revolutionary.

But empirically there is no evidence of this beyond partial i.e. 7 to 11 year cyclical upturns, i.e. the trade cycle. In short there is no proof of this prediction.

What is more the long cycles theory of Kondratiev ? pragmatically adopted by the centrist Ernest Mandel to bolster his objectivist perspectives ? is not the same as Trotsky's. Kondratiev was not a Marxist (in fact he was a populist). And Trotsky's article is in fact a rejection of the cyclical character of the periods observable in the history of capitalism.

We strongly advise comrades to read Trotsky's article. But for those who do not have it to hand we will quote its

decisive passage at length:

?But capitalism is not characterised solely by the periodic recurrence of cycles, otherwise what would occur would be a complex repetition and not dynamic development. Trade-industrial cycles are of a different character in different periods. The chief difference between them is determined by quantitative interrelations between the crisis and the boom period within each given cycle. If the boom restores with a surplus the destruction or constriction during the preceding crisis, then capitalist development moves upward. If the crisis, which signals destruction, or at all events contraction of productive forces, surpasses in its intensity the corresponding boom, then we get as a result a decline in economy. Finally, if the crisis and boom approximate each others force, then we get a temporary and stagnating equilibrium in economy. This is the schema in the rough.

?We observe in history that homogeneous cycles are grouped in a series. Entire epochs of capitalist development exist when a number of cycles is characterised by sharply delineated booms and weak, short-lived crises. As a result we have a sharply rising movement of the basic curve of capitalist development. There are epochs of stagnation when this curve, while passing through partial cyclical oscillations, remains on approximately the same level for decades. And finally, during certain historical periods the basic curve, while passing as always through cyclical oscillations, dips downward as a whole, signalling the decline of productive forces.

?It is already possible to refute in advance Professor Kondratiev's attempt to invest epochs labelled by him as major cycles with the same 'rigidly lawful rhythm' that is observable in minor cycles; it is an obviously false generalisation from a formal analogy.

?The periodic recurrence of minor cycles is conditioned by the internal dynamics of capitalist forces and manifests itself always and everywhere once the market comes into existence. As regards the large segments of the capitalist curve of development (fifty years) which Professor Kondratiev incautiously proposes to designate also as cycles, their character and duration are determined not by the internal interplay of capitalist forces but by those external conditions through whose channel capitalist development flows. The acquisition by capitalism of new countries and continents, the discovery of new natural resources, and, in the wake of these, such major facts of 'superstructural' order as wars and revolutions, determine the character and the replacement of ascending, stagnating or declining epochs of capitalist development.?

It is thus quite clear that Trotsky is dealing with what one can call longer periods of world economy and politics. He is explicitly refuting the economic-cyclical character of these 'curves'; they are not 'major cycles', because they do not depend on the internal logic of capitalist forces. They can be set in train, or broken by 'external conditions', in particular 'such major facts of 'superstructural' order as wars and revolutions'. For Trotsky, therefore, these curves are not determined in advance, but subject to the class struggle. The question facing Bill and the tendency is, do they, contrary to Trotsky, believe that long curves 'or waves' of capitalist development determine the class struggle?

Moreover Trotsky is offering a three type schema. A cyclical view such as that apparently adopted by Bill allows only two axes or curves 'up and down. Trotsky on the other hand recognises, upward curves, downward curves, and 'stagnation' curves remaining on approximately the same level.

Our perspectives do not analyse the period as a ceaseless and uninterrupted downward curve of world economy or upward curve of class struggle. Rather we characterise it as what Trotsky calls an 'epoch of stagnation when this curve, while passing through partial cyclical oscillations, remains on approximately the same level for decades'.

Of course we are more than willing to debate the empirical data 'though this will require much more serious work than sending articles from the Economist or OECD reports around or even counterposing GDP graphs since these do not easily identify rising and declining profit rates, the qualitative differences between imperialist and semi-colonial countries, the ups and downs of the trade cycle, etc. We are likewise willing to re-discuss methodological issues related to the Kondratiev long cycles and the unpardonable theoretical concessions Ernest Mandel made to this theory.

But in reality what we wish to do, and will do, is to deepen our analysis of the globalisation period of the imperialist epoch in order to foresee what its first major crisis will be like and what the great revolutionary upheavals of the twenty-first century will involve. Far from underestimating the rise of capitalism in China, this will be one of the important issues in the discussion before congress. So will the current trend to a decline in economic growth in Britain and long period of stagnation of growth rates in Europe. And far from being simply an economic discussion it will focus too on the enormous effects on the class struggle in Europe, North America and Japan, and last but not least the coming revolutionary explosion in China itself.

Epochs, Periods, Situations

We have often observed that the classical Marxists used these terms somewhat interchangeably and that you have to be careful and look at the context to make sure whether time spans of months, a few years, or a decade or even decades are being talked about. We could try to reduce this to set of definitions but would in all probability fall into sheer pedantry. But let us at least clear up what we were talking about at our congress since the opposition has tried to throw sand in people's eyes on this question.

What does our characterisation of the period we are living through mean in political terms? We say quite clearly that we are now in a period not just of the slow, organic recovery from the defeats of the 1980s and early 1990s that characterised the years 1995 to 2000 but of a more pronounced recomposition of the fighting forces of the working class, a growing resistance to globalisation and the USA's new world order.

Certainly it does not mean, as the opposition claim, that we think the whole world is in a simultaneous pre-revolutionary 'political situation' such as Trotsky described in the opening sections of the Transitional Programme, where he said that 'without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind.' That catastrophe 'i.e. the Second World War' began only one year after Trotsky wrote these words.

The sixth congress of the League was explicit that we were not talking about a situation (a few months, at most year or two), but a longer period, maybe a decade or more, whose duration would be determined by 'objective' factors, economic crises, inter-imperialist rivalry, wars of occupation, but also by subjective ones, revolutionary upsurges and, critically, what steps the working class took to resolve its crisis of leadership.

Nor did we imagine that we should discount major unevenness in the world: Britain and America's early neoliberal revolution compared to Germany, France and Italy's oft delayed and still incomplete neoliberal 'reforms'; the weakened and right wing led unions in the USA and Britain compared to relatively unbroken unions in continental Europe; the existence of new forms of mobilising bodies in Italy and France and their absence or weakness in Germany and Britain; the new populist plebeian class alliances in Latin America and Africa. Our perspective has to be based on the combined and uneven development of the period.

Our perspectives certainly held that overall we were witnessing a rising tide of resistance to neoliberalism and imperialist war. They referred to the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations in Argentina, Bolivia, Venezuela, to the then ongoing second Palestinian Intifada, to general strikes in South Africa, to the Italian workers fightback against Berlusconi and the unprecedented antiwar mobilisations of 2002-03. The background documents on world political perspectives submitted to the 2004 IECs and to the last IEC (June 2005) have added to these the French and Spanish strike waves. The tempo of their emergence has risen and fallen but it has not disappeared. The French No campaign and the emergence of the Linkspartei in Germany 'integrally linked to the anti-neoliberal reformist forces represented in the ESF' have also put stumbling blocks in the road of 'reform.' The recent one day general strikes in France, Belgium, India and South Africa all bear witness to the fact that there has been no permanent downturn in this wave of struggle, though downturns in individual countries are both possible and inevitable after defeats or major upsurges.

But, while workers and peasants are resisting the neoliberal offensive, they are nonetheless defending themselves, not engaging in a generalised offensive. The opposition's claim that we are saying the latter is another misrepresentation.

Our central point is that this will be impossible unless the working class creates an international organisation to coordinate and lead it.

This is why the League characterises this period as a pre-revolutionary i.e. one where the crisis of leadership of the working class and its allies is the main obstacle to its transformation into a new revolutionary period.

A transformation of this period into a world revolutionary one is far from inevitable ? because this cannot remain an objective process alone, a spontaneous, semi-conscious one. It must become a conscious revolutionary movement. A series of strategic defeats for the most militant or well organised working class or popular movements could see a new counterrevolutionary or at least non-revolutionary period open up. But it is far from inevitable that the present crisis of leadership will block any further development towards revolutionary situations. Economic recession, either national, regional or global, military reverses for the world superpower in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran would make this more likely. Such events would in turn improve the conditions for taking real steps to overcoming the crisis of leadership.

Those are the conditions that we seek to address in our programme, in slogans addressed to the crisis of leadership and to the arenas we work in, in the methods we use.

So what does the opposition say about these perspectives? As before it grossly misrepresents them by wrenching phrases out of context and putting construction on them that they will not bear. Then on the basis of such doctored quotes they go on to accuse us of abandoning positions that are explicitly argued for in the very documents they are misquoting from.

Should we agitate for the Fifth International within the anticapitalist movement?

The opposition platform tells us, quoting from the Congress Perspectives:

?But neither the ESF nor the marches against the war were purely a ?mass and proletarian form? of ?a new mass international taking shape?.

But here is the whole paragraph they are quoting from:

?Important elements of a new mass international are taking shape. This process was expressed first in the wave of co-ordinated international protests against capitalist globalisation. It assumed mass and proletarian form in vast marches against imperialist war. And it achieved a political expression in the Social Forum in Florence, the largest and most extensive assembly of international working class and anticapitalist movements since the 1920s, in a wave of international solidarity with the Palestinian people, and in a worldwide explosion of anger against US imperialism.?

Clearly what we are talking about is the huge international movements ? not the structures, let alone the existing reformist leaders ? of the ESF or WSF.

The platform sneers ? ?The ESF is not the International in waiting.? Whoever said it was? But the ESF and all its similar and parallel gatherings are huge forums where internationalist, anti-war, anticorporate and anticapitalist militants gather.

Should we really not address these large numbers of militants with our call for a Fifth International?

Mockery of the statement that the call for the Fifth International can become ?a simple agitational slogan? is very revealing. For the entire Leninist tradition of the MRCI, LRCI and LFI agitation is simply a priority message to be addressed to large number of people. If we believe that a new International, a Fifth International, is a vital necessity for the working class in its struggle against globalisation then we have to present it in agitational form to the largest audience we can. This does not in any way preclude presenting our full programme in propaganda to the small audiences who will listen to us in circles, our own public meetings etc. But to suggest that the main or sole way to present the slogan is through propaganda aimed at a few is to grossly misunderstand the period we are in and the fact

that mass forces are assembling in great forums to debate how to resist neoliberalism.

We are then told by our opposition that

?the formation of a new International through a struggle at the ESF is not the most likely way in which a new International will be forged?.

Why we are not told. Nor are we told where else is more propitious, a more advantageous forum.

We are told that this is a breach with ?our tradition of seeking co-thinkers amongst the international political tendencies by engaging with those we identify as the most leftward moving centrists?.

Where are these leftward moving centrists to be found? Not it would seem at the ESF or WSF or suchlike gatherings. But why not? Is it really likely that leftward moving centrists cannot be bothered to engage with tens, even hundreds of thousands of young anticapitalists and left reformists at forums like the ESF and the WSF? This seems to us highly unlikely. Rather we would assume that a left centrist group moving towards more revolutionary politics would want to get involved in anticapitalist and antiwar mobilisations, would be seeking to influence and win over young people newly drawn into struggle, to meet those engaged in the mass struggles in Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Bolivia, Argentina and so on. Since it is precisely these arenas where real left reformist, Stalinist, populist misleaders can be encountered and confronted live (not just in literary exposures), we can hope to contact leftward moving militants there who like us want to fight the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois forces.

Wherever we can meet the broadest number of people engaged in such struggles, we also stand the chance of meeting those centrists who have any political life left in them. What is wrong with the Opposition platform, what would really be a lifeless schema, what never was ?our tradition?, is the belief that the first and indispensable stage in the creation of the new International must be to build up our own tendency by discussions with left-centrist organisations.

Our perspective of raising the call in the anticapitalist movement, in the mass organisations of the working class, to break from capitalism and its agents and move towards the foundation of a Fifth International was included not only in our perspectives but in our programme. Leading members of the opposition explicitly endorsed this perspective. Some, like Stuart, even criticised the Fifth International slogan at the time because in his view it would prevent us from appealing to ? the mass forces in the ESF! Precisely the opposite reason to the one he would give today, no doubt?

Can the Opposition seriously object that we raise this slogan agitationaly in the assemblies and meetings of hundreds (European Preparatory Assemblies) tens of thousands (ESFs) and hundreds of thousands (the WSF)?

The suggestion that the IS concentrates our attention on ?the tops? at the EPA is a hollow one. On a national scale was it right to attend the leadership bodies of the Socialist Alliance and the Stop the War Coalition? Did we gain nothing from confronting the reformists and the centrists there? Did it contradict activity in all the mass forums? On the contrary it aided our whole intervention, helped us to get the clearest view of what the centrist and reformist leaders were up to. Does anything make an international body like the ESF less worthy of intervention than a national one?

The Opposition Platform?s jeers about measuring our success in terms of applause at the ESF or WSF ring a little hollow. Would the comrades jeer in a union conference or anti-antiwar assembly if our calls receive enthusiastic support from the rank and file? Whilst revolutionaries must be able to stand up to unpopularity and isolation it is our objective to win people over, especially in situations of mass struggle or resistance.

We are told that calling for the Fifth International at the ESF and the WSF is a ?magic solution, a shortcut to the formation of a new International that avoided the painstaking tasks of arguing communist politics and programme.?

Why? This completely misunderstands the way agitation in large arenas of struggle and debate relate to the discovery of co-thinkers.

As for the suggestion that making this call to the anticapitalist movement means that we are abandoning the struggle against the misleaders, the struggle for a Leninist party, programme and international, then the comrades should read a bit more of the documents they are so blatantly misrepresenting.

The Fifth International must be the re-emergence at a higher level of ALL four preceding Internationals. A common feature of the fight for and the initial building of the three mass Internationals (and even in a curtailed way in Trotsky's struggle for the Fourth) is the attempt to draw all mass forces, seriously moving to the left, towards the task of founding the new International. The aim is not to split the difference with reformism or to 'build a centrist International' but to win the mass forces - many presently still reformist or centrist - to a revolutionary programme whilst engaging in common action around the key issues facing the world working class movement at that particular period/conjuncture.

If we wanted to retreat from our full programme, why do the comrades think we re-drafted and re-elaborated it for adoption at the congress? We included in this a political strategy for the movement based upon the need for a revolution to smash the state and seize power.

We have coupled this call with transitional slogans that address the need to organise and take forward the anti-capitalist movement.

Some of our best successes have undoubtedly come through our youth work. Certainly, in the current movement young people have shown that they can learn the revolutionary lessons of struggle faster than older workers. This factor is illustrated by the growth of Revolution in Britain, Germany, Austria, Indonesia and Australia. That's why the call for a revolutionary youth international addressed to the young militants of the ACM remains a key component of our broader political strategy. Incidentally, it also refutes the Opposition's taunt that 'since 1997 the party building perspectives of the LRCI/LFI have failed miserably.' Are they really unaware of the powerful renewal of our ranks that is underway through the recruitment of new layers of young people in England, Germany, Austria?

The Youth Assembly at the London ESF marked a good start to making some headway with the call for a youth international. Far from being on a low political level we are combining our street activism on the ground with the development of a serious, thinking, Marxist leadership for Revolution nationally and internationally. We have invested a lot of political and financial capital in consolidating the Revolution group in Indonesia around our politics and hope to out of this work to soon found a section of the League. If we succeed in this it will be the first section that we have had in a semi-colonial country for over ten years.

Since the last congress we have produced two copies of our new theoretical journal Fifth International and a pamphlet on the anticapitalist movement. This is already three times as many as were produced between the 5th and 6th congresses. We aim to produce two more theoretical journals before the next congress.

This year alone, our newswire has carried reports and critical political analysis on the emergence of new social and workers movements in China, the revolutions and counter revolutions that have taken place in Central Asia, the victory of the French workers in the referendum on the constitution, the revolutionary upheavals in Bolivia, and the fight to build a working class party in Germany.

We are implementing a programme of re-organisation and rationalisation of the L5I web presence. Our aim is that the website is rich not only in global news items but also the theoretical work and documents that we have written that taken together amount to the theoretical heritage of our tendency.

Winning contacts and supporters in Latin America must become a central priority in the period ahead. We must aim to orient to the social and working class movements there. Here, in the hot bed of resistance to globalisation, is where we will find those closest to our political programme and perspective.

At the World Social Forum, we engaged in a day's worth of talks with the Revolutionary Socialists, a split from the PTS who reject their stupid and sectarian position on the WSF amongst many other things. They are certainly centrist, not least because they think the use of the term is sectarian, but we should discuss with them because they were very

interested in our Fifth International slogan and orientation to the social movements. This orientation to the anti-globalisation movement is the major litmus test of the left centrist Trotskyists and one that many of them fail miserably. Since the WSF M from the GAM has also had discussions with RS in Latin America. Getting these discussions off the ground via email, and translating our main documents into Spanish will be an important task of the new Latin American commission established by the IEC.

We have shown over the last period that we can win new contacts, supporters and cadres to the League. We must continue on the course we have set ourselves and not turn backwards to an orientation away from the global movement towards what would be fruitless discussions with groups outside of the context of intervention in the mass movement of resistance to neoliberalism.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/perspectives-and-programme>