

A radical re-statement of programme is necessary

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We have characterised the principal forces who lay claim to Trotskyism as centrist. This term has been abused, distorted or ignored by these forces. As Trotsky said centrists hate to be called by their real name. It is important therefore to understand what centrism is, and how it can be fought.

Historically, centrism has emerged from either Marxism or reformism.

It is a vacillating, transitional phenomenon between the two. Centrism that emerges from Marxism has normally arisen either as a result of serious defeats or prolonged apathy amongst the working class. It reflects both of these things. Thus the centrism of the Second International grew out of the relatively stable years prior to 1905. It maintained a formal Marxist orthodoxy but practiced limited, largely electoralist tactics. The strategy of socialist revolution was relegated to the distant future.

The early centrism of the Comintern (typified by Zinoviev on the left, Stalin in the bureaucratic centre, and Bukharin on the right), arose out of the defeat of the post-war revolutionary upsurge and the bureaucratisation of the revolution. Both of these species of centrism existed for relatively lengthy periods. Their decisive crossing over to the camp of counter-revolution was the end-point of their centrism, an endpoint that genuine Marxists did not passively wait for, but one they fought. The end-point came when these formations were forced to choose the path of revolution or the path of democratic counter revolution. is a petrified centrist current [?] there has been not one, but several centres claiming to be the FI, and that none of them represented revolutionary, programmatic continuity with Trotsky's FI, are doomed to failure. Our approach to building an international is to state-"Programme First". We regard the principal epigone tendencies of the FI (USFI, IC,FI ICR) as definitely centrist.

However, the FI's centrism, whilst sharing the general characteristics of all centrism, has to be seen as distinct in form from the pre-1914 Second International or the pre-1935 Comintern. We call the centrism of the post-war FI petrified centrism that is a centrism which is paradoxically relatively stable, in that it has continued to exist for over 30 years. This form of centrism is not new. Trotsky observed the same phenomenon in the old London Bureau of the 1930s, which included the ILP and which he designated "a petrified centrism without masses"¹⁴¹.

This centrism is divorced from the masses, and as a result can remain relatively immune to the pressure of the masses during great social upheavals. It can thus constantly postpone making decisive choices.

The Second and Third Internationals were rooted deep within the working class. The Second International came to reflect the privileged social layers of the labour aristocracy and bureaucracy. The Comintern leaders were based upon a privileged social caste within the Soviet Union, with the resources of state power at their disposal. In the last analysis their politics became anchored, through these layers, to the conservative interests of states, capitalist in one case, degenerated workers' state in the other.

The magnetic pull of these counter-revolutionary social forces proved irresistible to the incoherent politics

of centrism. The Fourth International movement has never directly rested upon such privileged social forces. In the 1930s and 1940s its cadres were courageous individuals capable of swimming against the tide of fascist, Stalinist and reformist persecution. These cadres came from the ranks of advanced workers and from those intellectuals willing and able to break from their class of origin. In the years 1933-1948 the FI deepened its proletarian roots. This greatly assisted its programmatic firmness.

With the recovery of US and European capitalism and the onset of the cold war the FI sections were increasingly isolated from any revolutionary proletarian forces. The proletariat of the principal imperialist powers sank back into reformism, political apathy, economism. New revolutionary recruits became fewer and fewer. Within the thinning ranks of the Trotskyist groups, conservative older workers and petit-bourgeois came to predominate. The isolation from the masses sealed the Trotskyists from having to take decisions, yet the social pressure on them was increasingly from a petit-bourgeois milieu and petit-bourgeois movements.

It would be merely vulgar materialism and crude workerism that sought to identify the causes of the FI's degeneration in either its leaders' petit-bourgeois class origins (the SWP leaders' class credentials were impeccable) or in the class composition of its membership, but given the political collapse of the FI into centrism, alien class forces nourished and preserved this. Where the centrist "Trotskyists" had a mass base and where decisive actions were required of them by developments within the class struggle (e.g. the LSSP in Ceylon) right centrism collapsed into open reformism. This petrified centrism is defined by more than just its lack of a mass base. Its programme is a mutation, a hybrid of revolution and reform.

The ILP's distinctiveness was its pacifism but this was embroidered by strong elements of pro-Stalinist positions and concessions to social democracy (e.g. parliamentarianism). In the case of the FI after the war, its "Trotskyism" became increasingly disfigured by Stalinist social democratic or petit-bourgeois nationalist influences. The FI and its fragments have prevented this hotch-potch from being torn apart into its constituent elements because it has never, as an International, been in the leadership of large sections of the working class in pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situations.

In the imperialist countries the predominant drift of this centrism in the 1950s and 1960s was to the right. All the fragments became reconciled to the "social peace" of the post war boom, politically adapting themselves to the dominant hold of Stalinism or social democracy. Even in the upheavals in the semi-colonies during this period, right opportunism was apparent in the attitude of the fragmented FI to petit-bourgeois nationalism.

Yet centrism would not be centrism if it was incapable of shifts to the left. The Healy grouping in the IC was pushed to the left by forces breaking from the CPGB under the impact of a crisis within Stalinism after Hungary 1956. The anti-war struggles, the general strike in France, the Italian and British strike waves of the late 1960s and early 1970s produced left-centrist turns in the USFI and in various national sects. This "left" turn was riven with errors and contradictions and soon resulted in a turn back to the right. This in turn produced smaller leftward breakaways, to one of which, in the SWP(GB) we owe our origins. Future sharp turns in the class struggle are likely to generate more such splits. Moreover, we recognise in "left" centrist splits potential recruits to communism. But for that to take place, the banner of communism has to be raised once again as an alternative to the numerous banners of centrism that parade the FI's symbol.

The organisational disintegration of the FI reflects nothing less than the programmatic disintegration of that organisation in the period after the Second World War. The subsequent history of all of the FI's fragments since the early 1950s confirms this analysis to the letter. For this reason we understand the refounding of a revolutionary International in programmatic terms.

For us the task is not to 'reunify' or 'reconstruct' the FI out of the degenerate fragments of Trotskyism, but rather a task of rallying the best elements within those fragments to a new, unspotted programmatic banner. In the first place this means that genuine Trotskyists must set as their central task the re-elaboration of the Trotskyist programme, refocusing it towards the new period of economic and political crisis that has opened up in the 1970s/80s.

It is precisely this political instability in the world, the hallmark of the epoch of imperialism, the epoch of wars and revolutions, which gives revolutionary strategy and tactics their central importance as guides to action for millions. There is no room for vagueness or ambiguities within such strategies and tactics. We live in a period of dramatic fluctuations in the class struggle where revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situations can rapidly turn into periods of black reaction, as in Chile, Iran, or Turkey for example. Only with a clear programme, that includes precise tactics which flow from and are subordinated to a revolutionary strategy, is it possible to build a revolutionary party and International which can lead the working class to power and defeat the threat of reaction.

There is no brick wall between principles, strategy and tactics. Serious and persistent errors of tactics, which remain uncorrected, inevitably lead to a liquidation of the programme. This was the road along which the post-war FI travelled. All the centrist fragments, the USFI, the Healyites, Lambertists, Morenoites, and national based groups like to claim adherence to the Transitional Programme.

They can do so with impunity because they have turned that programme into abstract principles which do not in any sense guide or inform their strategy and tactics. The Transitional Programme is for them an icon to be brought out every now and then to reassure their followers of their 'continuity' with Trotsky's FI. This explains the collapse of democratic centralism without real programmatic unity. Democratic centralism is replaced in the case of the Healyites and the iSt with bureaucratic centralism (i.e. subordination of the small groups to one large group), and in the case of the USFI and the Lambertists by federalism and the principle of non-interference in the respective national sections' 'spheres of influence.'

For us, therefore, revolutionary credentials are not valid if they are based on a formal declaration of loyalty to the Transitional Programme. Such formal adherence has, as we have shown, disguised opportunist and sectarian distortions of the programme and the method underlying it. The Transitional Programme was developed on the basis of the whole tradition of revolutionary Marxism. It represented the continuity and development of that tradition since the publication of The Communist Manifesto. Embodying the method of its predecessors it stands on the shoulders of these programmes as a document of enormous historic significance. However, like the work of Marx, Engels and Lenin, whole elements of it were specific, necessarily so, to its immediate period.

Trotsky himself was clear that all programmes are specific to some extent precisely because they are a summation of the general lessons of the preceding period of class struggle and revolutionary thought and practice. Programmes develop a strategy of action for the coming period based on an analysis of the lessons of the preceding period. Writing in 1937 Trotsky reminded his followers of this important rule with regard to revolutionary programmes:

"What other book could even be distantly compared with The Communist Manifesto? But this does not imply that after ninety years of unprecedented development of productive forces and vast social struggles, the Manifesto needs neither corrections nor additions. Revolutionary thought has nothing in common with idol worship. Programme and proposes are tested and corrected in the tight of experience..which is the supreme criterion of human thought. The Manifesto too required...corrections and additions. However, as is evidenced by historical experience itself, these corrections and additions can be successful. Only by proceeding in accord with the method lodged in the foundation of the Manifesto itself." 142

This method guided Marx and Engels themselves. They said of their own "Transitional Programme"

"That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today. In view of the gigantic strides of Modern Industry in the last twenty five years, and of the accompanying improved and extended party organisation of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune, where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some respects become antiquated."143

Forty four years after the publication of the Transitional Programme we have to make "corrections and additions" to it, in the same way as Trotsky made "corrections and additions to The Communist Manifesto. We must re-elaborate Trotsky's programme by proceeding according to the method lodged within it. This involves more than just "bringing the Transitional Programme up to date".

The Transitional Programme itself was not the complete programme of the FI in two senses.

In the first place it represented the "summation" of the collective work and struggles of the Left Opposition, the ICL and the MFI over 15 years. In these struggles, against Stalinism, social democracy, centrism, fascism, imperialism etc., the Trotskyists developed the programme of the International Tendency in polemics, declarations, resolutions, documents and theses:

"The Left Opposition, therefore, has a colossal experience of an international character. There was not a single important historic event that did not force the Left Opposition to counterpose its slogans and methods to the slogans and methods of the bureaucracy of the Comintern.,144

In the struggles around questions of the Soviet economy, the regime of the CPSU, the Chinese Revolution, the Anglo Russian Committee and later the Spanish revolution, the struggle against fascism and war etc., the Trotskyists hammered out an international organisation based on a common programme and method that was rooted in a common analysis of actual revolutionary events. In this sense, therefore, the Transitional Programme was rooted in agreements over far more than a set of general principles.

Secondly, the Transitional Programme was a focused programme heavily oriented towards providing an action programme for the rapidly developing crisis. It was based on a perspective of immediate war and resultant revolution-"The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International". That is, as with "The Action Programme for France" the programme concentrates heavily on short term perspectives and tasks, without fully analysing epochal developments, such as the changes within world imperialism. Trotsky himself recognised this shortly after drafting the programme he pointed out that not only - the beginning section on modern capitalism in the imperialist epoch not complete but:

"Also the end of the programme is not complete because we don't speak here about the social revolution, about the seizure of power by insurrection, the transformation of capitalist society into the dictatorship, the dictatorship into the socialist society. This brings the reader only to the doorstep. It is a programme for action from today until the beginning of the socialist revolution." 145

Thus the programme reflected the necessary turn of the FI towards mass work. This turn was based on the perspective of impending revolutionary upheaval with the FI coming to the head of the masses during the war and the programme becoming the guide to millions. As we have shown this perspective did not materialise, and its failure to do so clearly has programmatic implications. It required of Trotskyists that they test and correct their programme in the light of experience.

In his discussion of the Transitional Programme with the SWP, Trotsky had insisted that the programme was directed towards expected upheaval. He, more than anyone, realised that if this perspective was not

realised, a review of the programme would be necessary:

"You can raise the objection that we cannot predict the rhythm and tempo of the development, and that possibly the bourgeoisie will find a political respite. That is not excluded-but then we will be obliged to realise a strategic retreat. But in the present situation we must be oriented for a strategic offensive, not a retreat."46 Trotsky's perspective, unlike that of the post-war FI, had an alternate character.

The task of re-elaborating the programme has to start from a recognition that, in the light of world developments since 1945, new lessons and experiences of the class struggle need to be analysed and understood before a new programmatic summation can be made. This is all the more necessary since, unlike the FI in 1938, we do not have an unbroken series of correct positions and documents to look back to and build upon. From 1945/46 when the FI reconstituted itself, its documents were only partially correct analyses and programmes for the new world situation. Since the 1951 Congress the documents of all the fragments, of all the sections, have been fatally flawed by centrism, sectarianism and opportunism. Re-elaboration involves a review of the post war period, of the responses to that period by the centrists and a restatement of programme in the light of this analysis. Trotsky used an analogous approach in relation to the period of centrist degeneration of the Comintern:

"The Left Opposition. . . considers necessary a radical restatement of the programme of the Comintern, whose Marxist gold has been rendered completely worthless by centristic alloy."147

The first stage of re-elaboration is to develop clear positions on the key questions that have caused chaos within or been thoroughly revised by the post war degenerated Trotskyist movement:

a) Imperialism- Trotsky's perspective was based on the view that all the imperialist powers would face collapse and catastrophe as a result of a prolonged and unimaginably destructive war. The outcome would be a profound revolutionary situation from which capitalism if it survived would do so at tremendously reduced levels of production and under fascist or bonapartist regimes. This proved a false perspective. US imperialism emerged from the war immensely strengthened-the expansion of its productive capacity, its enormous export of capital led the way to a prolonged boom. Democratic regimes were re-established in the major imperialist powers. Social democracy maintained or regained its hold on the working class of Britain and Germany. Stalinism dominated the French and Italian labour movements. A new relationship of forces, unforeseen and unforeseeable by Trotsky emerged. The long boom, the period of unchallenged US hegemony in the imperialist world, the armed truce with the Stalinist bureaucracy, replacement of the Franco British colonial empires by a system of semi-colonial client states, the emergence of new areas of Balkanisation (the Middle East) all necessitate perspectival and programmatic analysis. Only thus can the period of renewed crisis, class struggle and war, preparations for which have characterised the 1970s and 80s, be understood and acted upon.

b) Stalinism-Trotsky predicted the destruction of Stalinism either by an imperialist victory or as a result of political revolution. Neither eventuality occurred. Indeed a process of Stalinist expansion took place which, occurring through a number of stages, resulted in the establishment of workers' states, degenerate from birth. In these states, rather than in the USSR itself, the most acute political revolutionary crises have occurred-Hungary, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia. The real nature of the Stalinist expansion and the lessons of the various political revolutionary crises were never understood by the FI's fragments.

Pablo, Mandel, Cannon and Healy all capitulated to various shades of Stalinism at different times, while others, like Cliff and CLR James turned their backs on the Trotskyist analysis of the USSR. A revolutionary understanding of Stalinism, its expansion, the dynamics of its crises and of the strategy of political revolution will be integral elements within a re-elaborated programme.

c) Permanent Revolution - The Transitional Programme was extremely condensed in its tactical conclusions for the struggle in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, although it was supplemented by Trotsky's writings on India and Latin America. The extensive capitulations to petit-bourgeois nationalism by the Healyites, the USFI and other tendencies, all highlight the urgent need for a restatement of the tactical conclusions that flow from Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution.

Permanent revolution itself needs to be defined, not as an ever forward moving 'objective process', but as a strategy that has to be fought for by a conscious revolutionary party. Its tactical conclusions (anti imperialist united front, democratic demands etc) need to be understood as being premised on the maintenance of the independence of the working class and the refusal by it to subordinate its struggles or interests to the needs of a 'national democratic' (i.e. bourgeois) stage of the revolution.

d) Work in the unions and reformist parties -In the Transitional Programme Trotsky wrote that the crisis of leadership in the trade unions should be resolved in the following way:

[...] working class in Germany, and the role of the Comintern and social democracy in that defeat. This call drew sharp distinctions between all those who could be won to revolutionary politics through making a clean break with the old Internationals and those who wished to keep their bridges open to the twin camps of reformism (social democracy and Stalinism). In other words Trotsky urged an alliance around something that was a burning question facing the international working class and all those who claimed to represent its revolutionary interests. But in urging this alliance Trotsky always made clear that taking it forward meant developing an international programme that would seal the uncertain elements (OSP, SAP, RSP) to clear revolutionary action:

"Not only are denunciations of the Second and Third Internationals insufficient to advanced workers but the bare admission of the necessity of a new International does not suffice either. It is necessary to say clearly what International we have in mind: the restoration of the miserable Two and a Half International or the unification of the international proletarian vanguard on the basis of a revolutionary programme that actually corresponds to the problems of our epoch. 48 The fight for this programme meant that the ILO (ICL) kept its programmatic positions intact and promulgated them within the programme commission that was established by the Four (but did not get very far).

The ICL entered the Bloc of Four well aware that its allies were leftward moving centrists. But at no time did Trotsky fail to criticise the politics and leaders of these organisations on every vacillation they made to the right. He also made clear that the Bloc did not mean that the ICL took any political responsibility for the other groups positions. Thus Trotsky could write in March 1934 when his allies were backtracking from their declaration:

"With regard to the OSP, as in all other cases, we draw a distinction between the centrism of the workers, which is only a transition stage for them, and the professional centrism of many leaders, among whom there are also incurables. That we will meet with the majority of the OSP workers on the road to the Fourth International-of this we are quite certain."149

This does not mean that today we regard all forms of centrism alike. In fact it is only by recognising centrism in all its variegated colours and stages that we can distinguish between a left break from centrism, to which we must reach out and win individuals or whole groupings to revolutionary Marxism, from the left vacillations of the inveterate centrists. We say quite openly that the history and record of the leaderships of all the centrist currents, Healy, Lambert, Mandel, Barnes, Moreno etc., have shown them to be incurable centrists, incapable of learning through their mistakes. A revolutionary international will be built with the best elements from within these currents but only through an implacable struggle against their leaders.

For us a necessary and inevitable stage in the struggle to re-found an International is the stage of building fighting propaganda groups. This term is profoundly misunderstood. Organisations such as the WSL insist that it is the equivalent of a sectarian turn away from the working class: the programme exists, the task is to win the 'world Trotskyist movement' back to applying it. For the iSt on the other hand, the fighting propaganda group has been turned into a barren sectarian concept. Divorced from class struggle and programmatic re-elaboration, the Robertson cult has turned it into a provocation machine aimed directly at breaking up opposition tendencies.

The essence of a fighting propaganda group is neither of these things. It is a recognition of two real, fundamental and interrelated problems facing genuine Trotskyists. First we do not, and cannot yet have, full programmatic clarity. We have around us chaos, confusion and fragmentation. In these circumstances, genuine Marxists cannot bury their heads. Confusion on programme and theory leads to practical errors.

The fighting propaganda group's *raison d'être* is to solve these theoretical problems. Lenin was clear on this during the Bolsheviks' period as a type of fighting propaganda group.

"Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement".

This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opposition goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity. . . our party is only in the process of formation, its features are only just becoming defined and it has as yet far from settled accounts with the other trends of revolutionary thought that threaten to divert the movement from the correct path. . . Under these circumstances what at first sight appears to be an 'unimportant' error may lead to most deplorable consequences and only short sighted people can consider factional disputes and a straight differentiation between shades of opinion inopportune or superfluous."¹⁵⁰

The confusion in the post-war FI was even greater than that in the RSDLP in 1902. It is vital that our first task is to understand and overcome this confusion. But while it is our first task, it is not our only task. The second fundamental problem facing post-war Trotskyism was its continuing isolation from the working class. This was related to its programmatic weakness. The fighting propaganda group, therefore, does not turn its back on practical work.

It attempts to focus its programmatic work towards the fundamental needs, interests and concerns of the working class. This is its only method of avoiding sectarianism. However, our size and implantation, and, we would contend, the size and implantation of most ostensibly Trotskyist groups, mean that a direct orientation to mass work is severely limited, not by choice, but by the conditions we find ourselves in. Thus our work has to be of an exemplary communist nature. Where circumstances allow-and we search such circumstances out actively-we fight for our communist politics inside the working class. We utilise tactical compromises, (e.g. the united front) to win support for revolutionary strategy and tactics and to win a hearing for our propaganda.

The question of whether a group is a propaganda group is not, in the first place, a question of numbers. It is rather a question of the stage of development of the Marxist nucleus and the working class movement. Thus an organisation of thousands can be a propaganda society a grouping of a few hundreds, a party. The reduced numbers in the underground circles of the Bolsheviks in 1914-17 represented the nuclei of a vanguard party that had led the workers in revolutionary mass struggles (in 1905 and 1912-14). It was consequently able to become a mass party within months of the restoration of legality.

Propaganda circles represent the first stage, the embryo stage of party building. In situations of illegality and repression this work would be heavily dominated by 'discussion type activity'. ¹⁵¹ It is the period of

the development of programme and the training of cadres.

Marxists however, are characterised by the striving to unite theory and practice, to enrich each with the other. Therefore they seek always to find every possible avenue to the working class in struggle. The stages of growth of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) and its Bolshevik wing have rich lessons for communists at all stages of party building. As the RSDLP passed from the period of propaganda circles to that of creating the framework of an illegal party, Lenin had cause to attack sharply those who wished to utilise this vital transition to dissolve or liquidate the programmatic gains and dilute the training of cadres (the Economists and the Mensheviks).

These stages and the transition between them are not however historical curiosities or unrepeatable events. The defeat or degeneration of parties and internationals can and do represent these problems.

Trotsky himself passed from circle-propagandist to clandestine party leader, to mass agitator, to leader of a mass party and International in the first twenty years of his political life.

In Trotsky's last exile he was again obliged to turn to the task of leading what were in effect propaganda groups and indeed to founding an International - most of whose sections were still propaganda groups. From 1929 to 1933 the International Left Opposition considered itself an expelled faction of the Comintern. It therefore devoted the overwhelming bulk of its activity to propaganda against the programmatic degeneration of the Comintern (against Socialism in One Country) and against the disastrous 'Third Period' tactics. After the German catastrophe, the International Communist League was formed to openly address the workers aroused to struggle by the Fascist menace.

Trotsky had to purge the ICL's ranks of the sectarian traits which had developed in the imposed isolation and propagandism of the 'Third Period.' Trotsky therefore stressed the need to turn to the masses, to involve the small ICL nuclei in the mass organisations of the class - the trade unions and between 1934 and 1936 the Socialist Parties, where these were destabilized by the political and economic crisis. Yet Trotsky realised that the ICL sections remained propaganda groups, but ones that sought to orient to the class struggle. At the time of the French Turn he stressed that the French section was not a party, but only the embryo of one - i.e. its leadership was the first layer of cadre. It had yet to win a leading role within the proletarian vanguard.

Trotsky more than once characterised the ICL after 1933 as 'instruments for the creation of revolutionary parties'.¹⁵² We can put this another way, namely, propaganda groups seeking to transcend their existence as propaganda groups. At no time did Trotsky abandon this characterisation, although given the favourable position of the SWP(US) in the American labour movement and the inevitability of war, Trotsky emphasised the great prospects enjoyed by the FI after 1938 for becoming a mass party through the convulsions brought on by the war.

The fighting propaganda group is thus a dialectical concept. It puts programme first not merely in theory, but in its practical struggle within the working class, albeit forced to do so on a small scale. This way we seek to win and train future cadres for the movement real leaders who understand and can apply communist politics. A return to this stage of work has been imposed upon us by the post-war collapse of Trotskyism. It cannot be wished away or jumped over. Faced with the collapse of the Comintern in the 1930s, Trotsky understood the importance of such a stage in the development of .new revolutionary parties: 'The real initiators of the FI begin with Marxist quality and turn it afterwards into mass quantity. The small but well-hardened and sharply ground axe splits, hews and shapes heavy beams. We should begin with an axe of steel. Even here the means of production are decisive.'¹⁵³

However we reject absolutely any attempt to justify abstract propagandism. We do not advocate study circles divorced from the class struggle. Our programme is for the action of millions, not for saving our souls. We focus our propaganda on the key issues of the international and national class struggle. We take our place in the mass organisations of the working class, we orient to every major struggle - strikes, campaigns around democratic rights, the struggle of the unemployed, democratic reform in the unions, or the mass reformist parties.

We reject with contempt any attempt to turn Marxism into a sterile dogma justifying separation from or indifference to the struggles of the working class or other progressive forces. The neo-Bordigism of such groups as the iSt is absolutely foreign to us.

Nevertheless no small groupings in the present conditions can jump over the stage of focused propaganda. Those that attempt to do so, to pretend to be a party, to involve their members in constant shallow agitation, to engage in 'mass' recruitment simply dig their own grave. The results are a leadership with primitive politics which develop sectarian and eventually cult-like features; a membership with no education unable to check or criticise the leadership. The 'party' or league will eventually develop a rapid turnover of membership.

We stand by Trotsky's posing of the question in a similar stage:

"Our strength at the given stage lies in a correct appreciation, in a Marxian conception, in a correct revolutionary prognosis. These qualities we must present first of all to the proletarian vanguard. We act in the first place as propagandists. We are too weak to attempt to give answers to all questions, to intervene in all the specific conflicts, to formulate everywhere and in all places the slogans and replies of the left opposition. The chase after such a universality, with our weaknesses and the inexperience of many comrades, will often lead to too hasty conclusions, to imprudent slogans, to wrong solutions. By false steps in particulars we will be the ones to compromise ourselves by preventing the workers from appreciating the fundamental qualities of the Left Opposition. I do not want in any way to say by this that we must stand aside from the real struggle of the working class. Nothing of the sort. The advanced workers can test the revolutionary advantage of the Left Opposition only by living experiences, but one must learn to select the most vital, the most burning, and the most principled questions and on these question engage in combat without dispersing oneself in trifles and details." 154

The present world situation makes the building of an International and in the first place an international tendency, an urgent task. The 1980s are witnessing profound crises that indicate nothing less than a disruption of the world order achieved by imperialism after the Second World War. The renewed period of cold war by the USA against the USSR, the turmoil and wars in the Middle East, the attack on Argentina by Britain, revolutionary upheavals in Asia and Latin America all reveal this.

These events demonstrate that Lenin's characterisation of the epoch as one of wars and revolutions is becoming a generalised feature of the coming period. These events find their reflection also in the degenerate workers' states. The upheavals in Poland show that the new period will see challenges to the stranglehold of Stalinist bureaucratic rule in these states. The job of revolutionary Trotskyists is to lead the revolutionary upheavals that occur to success - to the conquest of power by the working class. This can only be achieved by building revolutionary parties and an International firmly united around an international revolutionary programme. Such a programme will, in the sharp test of practice, win workers from Stalinism and social 'democracy and centrism only if it is re-elaborated for the new period.

The destruction of the FI after the war and its fragmentation and disorientation, make the job of building an International a more difficult one. But we are not fatalists. The class struggle will act as a constant spur to

new layers of the proletariat, both within and outside of the existing movement that claims to be Trotskyist. It will propel these forces into a search for revolutionary answers. The task of the hour is to develop these answers. All talk of leading the masses without specifying exactly what programme they are to be led on is to lay the basis for further confusion and defeats.

We recognise that the development of a communist programme is an international task. A grouping isolated in one country will invariably succumb to national pressures - the SWP(GB) are a classic example of that. The Irish Workers Group and Workers Power have jointly attempted to begin these programmatic tasks.

Together we work as fraternal organisations. The aim of our two groups is ultimately to achieve a degree of programmatic agreement sufficient to facilitate the establishment of a genuine democratic centralist international tendency.

This in turn needs to be done through international discussion with other tendencies and groupings. We wish to seek out other groups who agree with our method and tasks. We wish to establish fraternal relations with other groups so that the work can be carried forward. We invite groups and individuals who agree with the positions and propositions in this document to enter into programmatic discussion with us, with the aim of jointly pursuing these programmatic tasks. It is precisely through the successful completion of these tasks that an international tendency based on a common method and programme and on democratic centralism, will be forged.

Within the disintegrating fragments of the Fourth International political disagreements have either been overcome by bureaucratic dictat or federalism. Both traditions represent a travesty of the traditions of democratic centralism pioneered by the Bolsheviks, the Comintern and the Fourth International.

In the process of forging an international tendency it is obvious that fully fledged democratic centralism will not arise simply through formal agreement on basic position documents or through joint work alone. Democratic centralism itself will develop as part of the process of establishing operative agreement only all key programmatic, strategic and tactical questions. It will be preceded by a period of collaboration, of fraternal relations.

The construction of a democratic centralist international tendency will at first entail the establishment of a series of international conferences representing nationally elected leaderships. To the extent that binding agreement on programme and operative questions of principle can be reached an authoritative international leadership will be forged out of the national sections.

It will then be possible, finally, to elect an international leadership, invested with executive political power over the decisions of the national sections. By establishing democratic centralism in this manner real debate and decisions over the national tactics of constituent organisations can take place. Obviously an international leadership would take the opinions of a national section into serious consideration. It may even allow tactical experiments where minor differences of orientation or emphasis exist. However the international leadership would carefully oversee national work, check it against international developments, and ensure that it was carried out in a strictly principled communist fashion.

This is not "bureaucratic interference" or mere "collaboration". It is the common discipline that is built as a result of programmatic agreement.

The majority of subjectively revolutionary militants who we as a communist tendency can hope to relate to, remain within the centrist groups who claim to be Trotskyist. While we have no illusions in the leaderships

of these tendencies, the international class struggle will continue to throw these organisations into crisis, leading to splits.

An international communist tendency would aim to win the best cadres from these groupings through intransigent criticism, programmatic debate and where possible common action against the class enemy. We do not hide, however from the fact that all of the FI's fragments are caricatures of Trotskyism.

This testifies to the fact that the Fourth International no longer exists as a revolutionary international. It is necessary to build a new world party of Socialist Revolution.

Whether that new International will be able to take up the banner of the Fourth International once again is not yet decided. It has not yet been proven whether the various fragments will travel along the reformist road of the LSSP. It may be that the hammer blows of the class struggle and the criticisms of an international communist tendency will break up the centrist amalgams and allow for a principled regroupment under the banner of a programmatically and organisationally rebuilt Fourth International.

It is possible that the so-called Trotskyists will openly abandon even formal adherence to the Fourth International and become qualitatively indistinguishable from social democracy or Stalinism - as the SWP(US) appears intent on doing. Should this happen with the major international fragments, then it may be possible for revolutionaries to , re-appropriate the banner of the Fourth International as their own.

What we can say is none of the existing claimants to the banner of the Fourth International represent the basis for the rebuilding of a revolutionary international. If they succeed in definitely liquidating the banner of the Fourth International into the camp of either social democracy or Stalinism in the full view of significant sections of the international working class then we will not flinch from pronouncing the Fourth International to be dead in number as well as in programme.

At present our perspective and tasks point to one inescapable conclusion - the FI no longer exists as a revolutionary international:

FORWARD TO THE REFOUNDING OF A LENINIST TROTSKYIST INTERNATIONAL!

FOR A NEW WORLD PARTY OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION!

Endnotes

141. L. Trotsky, Writings 1931-38 (New York, 1976) p 286.

142. *ibid.*, p. 22.

143. K. Marx and F. Engels, "Preface to the German Edition of 1872" in *The Communist Manifesto* (New York, 1970) p. 12.

144. L. Trotsky, Writings 1933-34 (New York, 1975), p.73.

145. L. Trotsky, "Completing the Programme and Putting it to work" in *The Transitional programme* p.113.

146. *ibid.*, p.101.

147. L. Trotsky, Writings 1932-33 (New York, 1972) p.52.

148. L. Trotsky, Writings 1933-34 *op. cit.*, p. 67.

149. *ibid.*, p. 268.

150. V. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1961) Vol. 5, p. 369.

151. G. Zinoviev, *History of the Bolshevik Party* (London, 1973) p. 55.

152. For example, see L. Trotsky, Writings (Supplement) 1934-40 (New York, 1979) p. 533: "The ICL cannot act as an independent party of the proletariat, it is only the instrument for the creation of independent parties".

153. L. Trotsky, Writings 1933-34 op. cit., p. 268;

154. L. Trotsky, Writings 1930-31 (New York, 1973), p.297.

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