

Theses on the Early Stages of Party Building

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This document, passed by the IEC in 1992, outlines the early stages of building a revolutionary party. It provides guidelines for revolutionaries work across the class struggle and how to establish a firm foundation in the working class

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1. Introduction

1.1 The LRCI reaffirms its general understanding of the stages of party building contained in section 7 of The Trotskyist Manifesto. The following document attempts to explain in more detail the concrete tasks of the earlier stages of party building. Whereas the LRCI has laid an international programmatic foundation for its work it has no direct experience of party building beyond the stage of small fighting propaganda groups. We have, of course, the imperishable legacy of the revolutionary Comintern for these later stages but we cannot as yet enrich and develop this with the fruits of our own experience. It is otherwise with the stages of founding and building propaganda groups which participate as much as they can in the class struggle. We have taken as our guide the theory and practice of Trotsky in the 1930s but also we have drawn lessons from the negative example of his epigones: Moreno Mandel, Healy, Cliff, Lora and Robertson. At the same time we must critically draw on more than a decade of our own experience, its successes and its failures.

1.2 The LRCI has always understood the centrality of programme and the necessity of fighting for this programme in the struggles of the working class and its allies. But programme itself can become a dead fetish if it is not related to the construction of a revolutionary combat organisation. Party building is a highly concrete task. It is an art which cannot be mastered apart from practice, but an art that must be guided by scientific principles. We must try to understand and systematise these principles. A revolutionary party cannot be improvised. The Bolshevik party arose out of three Russian revolutions. It experienced the general rehearsal of 1905 and the February 1917 revolution, tempering itself and welding itself to the masses. The revolutionary party can only be called such if, before the revolution, it had been able to understand the laws that were determining the evolution of society and its role in that evolution.

1.3 The different stages of party building merely combine in differing proportions the elements of propaganda, agitation and organisation. Moreover, each one of these these stages is not a watertight compartment. Tasks which properly predominate in a later stage cannot be subordinated at all times during the earlier stages. Conditions of heightened class struggle or revolutionary events may imperatively demand that even an initial nucleus of cadres should throw itself totally into the mass struggle for a whole period. But in such circumstances the organisation must not lose sight of the real objective relationship of forces which may require having to return to propaganda circle existence once the situation passes.

1.4 But if such advances are possible so are retreats. A large organisation may be obliged to return to prior

stages and repeat the activity proper to them. Because of objective pressures (major defeats of the working class) or because its own tactical mistakes (including splits). Not every revolutionary party will therefore either have to pass through every stage or pass through it but once. When we talk of different stages of party building we must not suppose that they have to be worked through in the correct order with no leaps forward or retreats. Revolutionary or counter-revolutionary situations or prolonged non-revolutionary periods which give rise to rapid growth or collapse, to splits and fusions, in reformist, centrist and revolutionary organisations mean that there can be no evolutionary course for building a revolutionary party. Nevertheless, each stage does have its own general features, its own special type of publication and activity.

2 Essential Features of the Leninist Party

2.1 At every stage of its construction certain fundamental principles of the Leninist Party are applicable. First amongst these is the primacy of the programme as the defining feature of the organisation??programme first?. On the basis of the programme the members are able to measure the revolutionary consistency of its leadership. On the basis of the programme the party educates its cadres and trains them to be principled leaders of the struggles of the working class and the oppressed. The programme is a route map which charts the essential landmarks on the road to working class power. It is a scientific summation of the lessons drawn from the essential features of capitalist society in its major forms, the lessons drawn from the history of victories and defeats in the workers epoch long fight to overthrow imperialism. It is a strategy for winning the class struggle through the use of a series of inter-related tactics.

2.2 Through acceptance of this programme members are recruited into the party. To be a party member there are three requirements, as the Bolsheviks insisted: agreement with the party programme, the party statutes and its general line; disciplined activity in a branch or cell; payment of a regular sum to the party treasury. There should be a period prior to full membership of training, education and selection. Comrades who wish to join the party should usually pass through periods as a supporter and as a candidate member (with all rights except the right to a decisive vote). The criteria for selection will vary in different countries and conditions, in legal or illegal conditions, during periods of defeat or of mass upheaval. But whenever selecting comrades we should place great emphasis on criteria such as loyalty, dedication, honesty and understanding of the party?s main positions. The proletarian members, especially those from oppressed strata like women, blacks, immigrants should have a shorter period of testing and a different education and training to members from a petit-bourgeois background. Nevertheless, the party must not tolerate any indiscipline or conceit, even from the most prominent worker leader. We should try to promote an atmosphere and environment in the party that makes it easy to integrate comrades from these sectors. Nevertheless inside the organisation there must be no discrimination between comrades coming from different classes, sexes, nations or races. Everybody must be treated equally. Everybody is a comrade.

2.3 On the basis of this fight for the programme within living struggles the party is able to develop and enrich its own programme. The revolutionary programme is not a dead sea scroll. It is a living thing, constantly being tested and corrected, as Trotsky put it, in the light of experience, the supreme criterion of human wisdom. Only if it is put to this test will its correctness be proved or its errors remedied. The experience of the Bolsheviks, after the February revolution, demonstrates the centrality of this understanding of programme, the party re-arming itself programmatically through testing and correcting its old formulae in the heat of revolutionary struggle. Struggle without a revolutionary programme will either lead to defeat or degenerate into an accommodation with the old order, no matter how militant the struggle begins, but a programme that is not constantly developed on the basis of struggle will degenerate into becoming a mere catechism. By means of translations of this world programme into national, local, sectoral and conjunctural action programmes the party seeks to win the masses to its programme. In short,

it seeks at every stage to fight for its programme in the working class movement. The form in which this fight takes place must, however, vary according to the size of an organisation, its ideological tasks and the state of the class struggle. But in the imperialist epoch such a perspective must be part of the make-up of every organisation which intends to go beyond revolutionary thought into revolutionary action.

2.4 The Leninist-Trotskyist party must be internationalist not only in its organisation and its programme. Its cadres must be active internationalists, combatting and uprooting the national prejudices and chauvinism inherited from capitalist society. In the imperialist epoch this means it must educate all its members to see their 'national' work and struggles from the perspective of the world revolution. In the imperialist countries this means communists striving to assimilate the viewpoint of the workers and oppressed masses of the semi-colonial world and of the degenerated workers' states and to regard their 'own' imperialist fatherland as the main enemy. It means championing the struggles of these workers against imperialism and fighting to win solidarity for them from the workers of the imperialist metropolis. Likewise in the semi-colonial world it is the internationalist's duty to ensure that the justified hatred of imperialism, and indeed of its social chauvinist 'labour lieutenants' in the imperialist countries, does not lead to a lack of understanding of and solidarity with the workers struggles in the imperialist countries.

2.5 Internationalism cannot take firm root and stand the pressures of wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions without strong international fraternal links and ultimately a democratic-centralist organisation. This international organisation alone can develop a truly international programme and a world perspective. It must, by internal education, debate and by the circulation of its cadres between countries reach a situation where all of its cadres feel themselves first as members of the International and then, flowing from this, as members of one of its national sections.

2.6 The essential organisational principle enabling the party to carry out all aspects of its work is democratic centralism. Centralism means that the party can act with a single will, with military precision wherever and whenever battle is joined. Without such discipline no cadre or organisation has the right to call itself Bolshevik. Yet this discipline is not blind, unthinking or mechanical. Centralism is not a matter of a one-way traffic of orders from the centre outwards. Each local cell passes not only information but its own opinion and analysis back. The leadership is thus kept in touch with the fronts of struggle, with the views and moods of the vanguard and the masses. At the same time the cadres, by subordinating themselves to the broader and more general outlook of the national and international centre, can overcome parochial and national prejudices.

2.7 Whilst centralisation is vital to defeat the power of the bourgeois state, the revolutionary party cannot copy the type of discipline of a bourgeois army. Blind obedience does not train revolutionaries. It can breed bureaucrats as Stalinism did for fifty years, by enforcing the atomisation of the cadres and by prostrating the rank and file before an all-powerful and self-perpetuating clique or a 'leader'. It thus brought discredit on the Leninist party, identifying democratic centralism with bureaucratic despotism. Against this we counterpose the fullest measures of proletarian democracy. The leadership must be elected by and answerable to the membership. It must be able to do this regularly, after a period of the fullest discussion, in an assembly of the members or their delegates where both individuals and groupings are free to criticise the outgoing leadership. The leadership itself must be built in each section and internationally on the basis of accountability and inclusiveness. Leaderships are not clubs for the politically wise, they are instruments of the revolutionary class struggle. As such they are based on the principle of inclusiveness. Members with a widely differing range of talents and experiences need to be included in the leadership so that it is able to incorporate organisers, agitators, theoreticians, writers, active workers and the oppressed, including the youth.

2.8 There must also be discipline within all leading committees. Whilst all members of them have a right and a duty to take issues on which they find themselves in a minority to a higher body, this must itself be accompanied by the loyal carrying out of the existing decision so that the party's action is not disrupted. To lose a vote, to be in a minority is not the greatest of all evils. Tomorrow may prove in practice that the minority was correct. Loyal arguing even an incorrect position may help the party to improve a correct but one sided position. The absolute condition for the party to correct its own mistakes is loyal criticism.

2.9 All leaders and all members have a right to appeal to the membership at large especially during a pre-conference period and to form factions or tendencies if they think it necessary to do so. When such temporary internal groupings are formed on a clear platform, it is fundamental that the majority allows the widest democracy and free access to discussion in the branches and the internal bulletin. Nobody should be repressed, subjected to censorship or penalised for expressing these differences. The minorities must in return behave loyally to the organisation, operate entirely within its discipline, and should not plot together with the enemies of the party. Only thus can there be a sound and healthy discussion. However, as Trotsky said, factions are a 'necessary evil' not as some of his epigones believe a sign of the political health of an organisation (as with the USFI for example).

2.10 Democracy and centralism do not exist in a fixed proportion to one another regardless of time or local conditions. At a time of pre-conference/congress discussion, democracy asserts itself over centralism to facilitate the fullest discussion. Contradictions must be freely expressed to be resolved. After a congress, and where combat and manoeuvre are called for, centralised discipline asserts itself. The party should in legal conditions at least produce bulletins for the members to promote education and internal debate. One type should be strictly internal for expressing freely all inner party disputes. The members should not discuss internal problems of the group with non-members. In a separate type of bulletin, it is possible to reproduce articles that are not (yet) the line of the organisation, researches, and contributions from supporters or periphery. In certain circumstances it is possible to open the party's public press to inner party debates. This could normally be useful, not only at times of relative stability when the party is not under strong attack from the state or repressed by enemy forces within the workers' movement, but even in difficult circumstances like those before the Bolsheviks April 1917 conference when it was indispensable to avoid a split in the party and also as a means of mobilising the direct pressure of the rank and file of the party against the conservatism of the 'old Bolsheviks'. When a party significantly increases its forces it is often unavoidable that some of its internal disputes should filter out. In such circumstances it would be better to conduct a loyal and healthy public debate on the issues concerned. The party, however, is not a permanent discussion club. Especially in the intensified combat conditions caused by illegality make many of the forms of democracy either impossible or very attenuated. It is here that the spirit of democratic centralism plays its most vital role what Lenin called a 'complete comradesly mutual confidence amongst revolutionaries', what we call loyalty. This is a solidaristic, collective, proletarian spirit based on the attitude 'how can the party go forward?'. It is in total contrast to the individual self-aggrandising, competitive attitude in short, the petit-bourgeois spirit. To develop this loyalty and trust amongst comrades it is vital to fight against any cliquism, subjectivism and personal intrigues within the party. Loyalty can never be built on cynical diplomacy or paternalism by leaders to groups of members. Proletarian loyalty can only be based on a democratic spirit and on a high-level political approach to all problems.

2.11 The worker learns this spirit of collective effort in the working class community, in the workplace, in the trade union. The party recruit of petty-bourgeois origin has to learn it in the workers' movement and in the party itself. However, an artificial 'workerism', the cult of supposedly proletarian traits, are no solution to this problem. All too often these are not at all class characteristics but national or local, trade union or economic attitudes. From the non-proletarian strata collective spirit requires not only adopting the formal political outlook but also the fighting practice of the working class. It means rejecting the outlook stemming

from membership of a privileged class; arrogance towards the toilers and subservience towards the bourgeoisie and its agents. It means rejecting 'democratic' public opinion and the moral values of the exploiters. It means sharing the conditions of struggle of the working class without assuming the right to command. The clearest test of this rallying to the camp of the working class is making disciplined proletarian politics the centre and purpose of one's life, subordinating all professional and the personal interests to it.

2.12 For the worker militant to become a professional revolutionary means as Lenin said in 'What is to be Done?', transcending the outlook of the 'trade union secretary' (or even the shop steward) and becoming a 'tribune of the people'. It means transcending the notion of the class struggle as primarily an economic struggle over wages and conditions, it means overcoming local and national restrictions and developing the skills of the revolutionary agitator and propagandist. Clearly, the worker faces disadvantages, as compared to the petit bourgeois or intellectual, in mastering these skills. The revolutionary organisation, at whatever stage it is at, must recognise this and allocate special resources to help the revolutionary worker overcome the problems inherited from a lack of a lengthy formal education, the problems caused by having to sustain a family on a low wage, the problems of having to work shifts, and the problems of having to operate daily in a class whose cultural level is deliberately kept low by the capitalists. The value of the revolutionary worker to the organisation, even at the very earliest stage of its development, is that he or she provides the organisation with a living link to the masses. Moreover, the revolutionary worker possesses advantages over the petit bourgeois or intellectual recruit. They are able to understand many of the most sophisticated Marxist concepts through an educational method which combines analysing their own exploitation and oppression and the development of their struggles against this.

2.13 Lenin insists that the party must be made up 'chiefly of persons engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession'. This does not narrowly mean just full-time functionaries, students and the unemployed; that is, only those who can devote most of their time to political work. Lenin is clear that it must include full-time workers as well. But it does exclude those only willing to spend 'spare time' on politics. As soon as the human and material resources allow it even the smallest of revolutionary groups should create a small full-time apparatus. This must play an important role at leadership level and with growth in the regional and local organisations as well. The accumulation of such professional revolutionaries'cadres who devote their whole time to party work'is insolubly linked to the accumulation of party cadres in general. However, the leadership of a party can never be the preserve of a full-time bureaucracy without the greatest danger to the party. Even the most revolutionary officialdom needs to be under the strict control of a leadership that has roots in the working class and other strata and which has a high level of revolutionary consciousness and training.

2.14 The entire activity of the party must result in the development of cadres. It must start from the unity of theory and practice but this unity is not given, it has to be fought for. Practice, without theory and analysis is short sighted, sacrificing tomorrow's tasks and gains to the ephemeral successes of today. Theory isolated from practice rapidly turns into Byzantine dogmatism or impotent scepticism. The unity of theory with practice must infuse all areas of the party's work. Practical tasks must be analysed and given a perspective. Serious difficulties, inconsistencies and problems that arise during their implementation must be referred to theoretical analysis. This process must be familiar as a method to the youngest party cadre. No absolute division into thinkers and do-ers must be allowed to fragment the party into one-sided interest groups. Any necessary division of labour must be kept within certain bounds, both for individuals and for collective bodies. Thus a leading committee must be 'balanced', possessing individuals who have strengths and weaknesses that are mutually compensating.

2.15 The democratic internal life and debate of the party must itself be a permanent educator. For this

reason internal disputes must be so conducted as to educate the membership. Demagogy, that is, arousing prejudices, utilising ignorance, spreading confusion, or dragging in extraneous issues, all has the opposite effect. It de-cadreises, it breaks down loyalty, trust and ultimately disciplined effectiveness in action. The antidote to demagogy is education and training. Education must include familiarisation with the method and doctrine of classical Marxism. It must base itself on understanding dialectics and historical materialism, Marxist political economy, the forms of the class struggle and the tactics and strategy summed up in our programme and its predecessors. On this basis further areas of knowledge must be built up, allowing for comrades to specialise in the differing spheres of agitation, propaganda or theoretical work. Regular educationals for individuals, groups or special schools are essential to raise the educational/cultural level of the party's cadres. Training cadres in the skills of writing, editing and printing is essential as are the skills necessary for agitation and propaganda (e.g. public speaking). This training needs to overlap with practice in the form of the apprenticeship of inexperienced cadres to more experienced ones. Cadre training has a necessary craft or skill learning component, learning by observation and copying techniques. But cadres are not simply writers or interveners in discussion meetings. They are potential leaders in the class struggle. As such they must seek to establish or maintain their roots and activity within the working class. To achieve this end all of the above skills need to be complemented by training cadres within the labour movement. Learning how to relate to the struggles of the masses, to work within the mass organisations without appearing as an "outsider", learning how to combine unflinching commitment to revolutionary principles with practical flexibility inside the mass organisation?all constitute vital skills for the revolutionary cadre.

2.16 Cadre training and education has a particularly important role for the socially oppressed, those facing a specific discrimination as well as for worker comrades. Poor access to education and employment, lower incomes, lack of time due to socially imposed roles, attitudes which devalue the skill and abilities of these groups, can all form barriers to participation in the party. Yet comrades who face such barriers are vital to the party. They can promote the process whereby the programme of the party is informed by the experience of the oppressed. The party should positively discriminate in the allocation of resources to the cadreisation of such comrades and in this way promote the development of skills and confidence necessary for the members of the socially oppressed groups to participate fully in the organisation. The party must not allow cadre from oppressed groups to be ghettoised or restricted to tasks and activities which fit in with their socially stereotyped roles. All comrades should be educated and developed so that they can contribute to all areas of the party's work. The party should recognise that leading bodies at all levels need to incorporate their skills and experience. The most experienced comrades should demonstrate genuine modesty recognising that they too can learn much from all the comrades. A new recruit coming to the party from the poorest sectors of the working class and the oppressed masses, even one who was illiterate, could from their own experiences teach a tremendous amount to any sensible leader.

2.17 But even such ?positive discrimination? in the conscious development of comrades from socially oppressed groups will not?on its own?overcome the problems these comrades face. Under the conditions of class society it is impossible even for the most developed comrades to rid themselves entirely of inherited prejudices and discriminatory habits and attitudes. A permanent fight needs to be waged against these obstacles to full involvement, not only in society at large, but also within the party itself. Giving the right to hold caucuses to comrades from the oppressed groups is one means to achieve this. Caucuses, which developed in the North American left, are meetings open to all the party members of the oppressed or discriminated-against group concerned and can be convened by individuals who feel that they are suffering from such oppressive behaviour or systematic discrimination and who are seeking to find the best means to address and solve these problems. Caucuses should have no right of veto on decisions within

the party. This would simply remove from the majority the duty to discuss and decide on an answer to the problems. The important point is to convince comrades guilty of discriminatory practices of their errors, rather than seek to impose decisions on the whole membership.

2.18 Every healthy organisation has to practice criticism and self-criticism, whether of individuals or collective bodies. No party, leading committee or member could possibly be perfect or unerring. All of them in the thick of the class struggle receive different pressures and have to confront new phenomena. Every time they do this they are likely to make a series of mistakes. It is no declaration of weakness or stupidity to admit ones mistakes and to try to overcome them. The organisation has always to try to critically assimilate the experience of its own class, its leadership and its membership. It is thus indispensable to regularly make in-depth, self critical balance sheets of the work of each cell, fraction or leading body of a national section or of the international organisation. We are not Stalinists who use 'self-criticism' as a means of punishing individuals by forcing them to humiliate themselves. The best comrade is not the one who 'makes no mistakes' (in fact, one who simply fails to recognise them). Quite the opposite. The best comrade is the one who sets a good example by openly recognising their mistakes, discussing the lessons of them and tries hard to overcome them. The organisation or the militant that fails to criticise their own mistakes is condemned to repeat them in an even more damaging manner in the future.

2.19 The party must be made up of professional revolutionaries as Lenin wanted. This means that it must be composed of cadres that devote their entire lives to revolutionary activity as their central aim. Only a minority of them, however, could or should be paid officials of the party. The size of this full-time apparatus will depend on the political conditions obtaining at any given period. A majority of the party's members must be militants that are involved in paid work, in production, which not only puts them in daily contact with workers but also enables them to generate the funds without which the parties activity would be impossible. It is very important to try to involve cadres from the working class and the oppressed strata at all leadership levels. Probably, they would have less culture and formal education than petit-bourgeois intellectuals but they will transmit to the party what is going on in the class or amongst the oppressed and will in return better transmit our line to these sectors This involvement will in its turn generate an improvement of our line, influence and organisation. We reject the idea of removing all or a majority of worker-leaders from their workplaces in order to dedicate them to full-time party activity. This would adversely affect our links to the class and damage the comrades concerned.

2.20 Every Bolshevik organisation must be capable of carrying out its work in conditions of illegality and consequently must master the necessary conspiratorial techniques. It must learn to combine open and clandestine work. It must prepare itself to resist repression not only from the state but from the fascists or from the bureaucratic agents of the bourgeoisie within the workers' mass organisations. In all conditions, no matter how democratic the country, it is essential to have some sort of illegal apparatus, security system, codes etc. Any comrade suffering repression from the state or the employers should be defended by the organisation. It is vital that comrades imprisoned or sacked for party work should be given material assistance and the whole national and international organisation should rally to the support of these class war prisoners. When a number of cadres are imprisoned it is important to build resistance cells within the prisons.

2.21 The press should as Lenin said be the collective organiser of the work of the party. It should also be the collective work of the party and be the channel through which the party conducts a dialogue with its immediate periphery and with the class at large. All the members should aim to contribute to the production and all should sell the press. When selling it the cadres should be able to show that they have a thorough knowledge of its positions and are able to argue for them in public. It is also important that leaders should regularly perform this task. It is important to focus on specific sectors of work, factories or other

workplaces, using the sales to establish links with the working class, to convey information to it but at the same time to gather information from it. We should attempt to get even uneducated and hitherto unorganised workers to contribute their ideas to the party press through interviews, through making reports of their problems and struggles. Industrial or factory reports should not only denounce abuses but give a concrete orientation to the struggle against them. In different periods, even during the stage of building a fighting propaganda group it may be necessary to have two types of press, one more agitational, periodic and popular, the other more theoretical and propagandistic. The latter type could even be produced in common with sections in other countries which speak the same language. Also it is necessary to have special leaflets, broadsheets addressed to specific sections of workers, peasants, shanty-town dwellers. Around such bulletins the party should attempt to create organisations of its periphery.

3 . Stages in the Building of the Party

3.1 Generally, we characterise the stages of party building by the priorities the organisation has to address and not by its sheer size. Thus a primary cadre nucleus could be larger in numbers than a fighting propaganda group. Nevertheless, it remains a primary cadre nucleus if its central priority remains the reformulation of fundamental principles. Only from fulfilling these ideological tasks can it go on to develop a specific collective practice.

3.2 However, revolutionaries, at whatever stage of party building they find themselves in, are guided by the need to find a political terrain to operate on. This may take the form of entry into a larger organisation, entry into a significant campaign, involvement in united fronts, concentration on particular unions or parties etc. Wherever the best focus for revolutionary work is, revolutionaries need to be there. The reason for this is that without an audience for revolutionary ideas the tiny group will be condemned to stagnation and split, to demoralisation and even the abandonment of revolutionary struggle. Without an audience for our ideas, our ideas will become desiccated. Finding an audience implies some level of external work, even for the tiniest revolutionary group. The earliest stage of party-building is that of the initial accumulation of cadre; the assembling of a team whose main task is to write publish and distribute propaganda. The elements of democratic centralism needed at this stage are collective work and discussion, majority decisions carried out. In this stage, there is unlikely, however, to be much distinction between a ?leadership? and a ?membership?. An initial nucleus must be built of co-thinkers, theorists and polemicists and be capable of creating a distinct ideological trend in combat with opportunist and sectarian tendencies. Theoretical work and propaganda for Marxism and its programme is an integral part of the class struggle. To compare it negatively with ?practical work?, to agitation, to trade union or immediate political mass struggle is a sure sign of philistinism and opportunism. This work is essential at all stages of party building. But during the earliest stages it has a pre-eminent role as the party-building nucleus sets out to create its own national and international programme. It is also vital during all major turning points of the class struggle when it becomes essential to re-assess and re-evaluate the period and its tasks. But just as comparing theoretical work and propaganda negatively to "practical work" reveals philistinism, a disdain for practical work and an absolute counterposition of theory and propaganda to practical activity in the class struggle betokens a passive, sectarian spirit. It reveals a reluctance to get involved with the ?day to day? struggle, and underlying that reluctance is disdain and a lack of revolutionary will.

3.3 The key targets for recruitment by a tiny group whose tasks are necessarily heavily oriented to propaganda, are cadres - pre-existing or potential. Such cadres may be found in a variety of locations depending on the nature of the class struggle and the socialist movement in a particular country. Experienced working class militants, critically thinking members of centrist organisations, militant youth propelled into their first struggle and acquiring an appetite for a revolutionary world view, left reformist or Stalinist workers educated by their parent organisations but dissatisfied with their pro-capitalist actions, revolutionary nationalists disillusioned with the betrayal of their hopes by their petit bourgeois or bourgeois

leaders, students and intellectuals whose access to intellectual life is choked by a dictatorship - all of these provide potential recruits for the small nucleus. But from whatever quarter recruits are made the task of the nucleus is to turn these recruits into rounded cadre, even at the expense of being obliged to limit the scope for agitational work of the workers and youth it recruits or disappointing the literary ambitions of the petit bourgeois or intellectual recruits who are not yet "party intellectuals" and have a proprietorial attitude to their literary work and believe that they alone possess all the answers. All must become cadre capable of carrying out some aspect of the organisation's propaganda work

3.4 The key task is to produce regular theory and propaganda. The essential literary weapons of a primary cadre nucleus striving to establish itself are a theoretical journal or review, or a regular series of in depth pamphlets or even books which not only defend the revolutionary traditions of Marxism against the Stalinists, social democrats and centrists but are capable of innovation and developing theory. It must address the principle questions of the national and international class struggle. Even in the context of a grouping which is part of an already existing international tendency which has already made important conquests at the level of re-elaborating the programme, each new national section has the responsibility, in collaboration with its international co-thinkers, to tackle the theoretical aspect of the class struggle in their own country, leading to the production of an action programme. Clearly, this does not mean that the small nucleus is freed from the obligation of engaging in practical work. It does mean that the practical work undertaken is directed towards assisting with the fulfilment of these essential propaganda tasks and as such is temporarily subordinated to them, except in circumstances where the character of a practical intervention, in a mass revolutionary struggle for example, poses the possibility of the rapid recruitment of cadres.

3.5 If the creation of a new revolutionary nucleus occurs through the development of a faction or tendency within a centrist and or a reformist organisation then it is likely that the starting point will be criticism of the latter's tactics and method developing into a full critique of the programme of their centrist organisation. Factional struggle leading to a substantial split of a number of cadre is the optimum starting point for the creation of a new organisation.

3.6 The primary cadre nucleus, however small, must concentrate its polemical fire not only on the mass misleaders of the workers' movement. It must devote special attention to the centrist would-be leaders even if some of the centrist organisations are quite marginal to the masses and their struggles if they represent a serious obstacle to the initial nucleus' development into an active propaganda group. For it may well be from these rival grouplets, or from strata which know the ideas of these groups, that the first recruits will come to bring about the transformation of the primary nucleus into a fighting propaganda group.

3.7 The next stage, that of a fighting propaganda group continues many of the tasks of the preceding stage but it puts as central to its tasks the carrying out of widespread and systematic propaganda for these ideas. It concentrates on applying them to a range of key issues. It is concerned not only with fighting to create a programme but with fighting to win adherents to it. For most of its cadres their tasks are not theoretical work but propaganda work. Disseminating and explaining a propaganda group's positions occupies more time than creating them.

3.8 A regular publication is essential to a fighting propaganda group. This should appear on a monthly or bi-monthly basis at least. The sales of this, in various spheres of activity and propaganda are the means of winning members. It must be centred on and subordinate to the central tasks of a fighting propaganda group. It must not be tempted backwards into purely theoretical tasks or forwards into the illusion of producing a mass popular paper. It should be the servant of the group's activities. For a sizeable fighting propaganda group a theoretical journal must take up the tasks of programmatic elaboration and ideological

combat. Mass popular agitation, when needed, should usually appear in the form of leaflets or broadsheets. The paper is before all else an instrument of propaganda, of patiently explaining our ideas to an (unfortunately) small number of people.

3.9 The membership's primary abilities must now be the ability to argue and to educate, to polemicise against other groups, to conduct patient explanatory work for the group's politics and to win cadres for the group. A central goal for the conducting of propaganda is the building of the group's own education or discussion circles into which contacts and sympathisers are drawn and out of which members are recruited. If this is not possible then the principle means will have to remain intervention into the larger centrist (and even reformist) groups or parties' public meetings and activities. The propaganda group's objective is not only individual recruitment but a process of winning whole groups, generating opposition factions within centrist or sectarian groups leading to splits of these groups and fusion with the revolutionary organisation. Where there is a tradition of significant centrist organisations, that will generally mean that the first recruits will in all likelihood be won from their ranks. Elsewhere other fields for recruitment must be found and prioritised.

3.10 The fighting propaganda group also has to involve itself in the key and central struggles of the working class. In normal circumstances a fighting propaganda group must recognise that its agitation and focussed propaganda in everyday struggles is primarily of an exemplary character; that is, an example of how it would act everywhere if it actually had greater support. In exceptional circumstances, in favourable local conditions, it may be possible to compete for leadership. The group must provide teams to support worker militants' exemplary work, a method which has the added benefit of allowing non-proletarian members to be steeped in proletarian life and struggles. These steps are necessary precisely because of the importance of making more proletarian the young fighting propaganda group and preparing for a further stage when it can move to qualitatively and quantitatively increasing its proletarian composition, and its weight and influence in the class. Its objective in these struggles is to root its cadre in the experience and methods of the living class struggle, to develop its collective strategy through learning from the working class (and other oppressed strata) and to recruit if at all possible the advanced militant elements to the fighting propaganda group. More regular and systematic areas of work must be organised by fractions where possible—trade union work, work in reformist parties, work in popular committees. The propaganda group should never follow the opportunist method taking control of these organisation's apparatus, behind the backs of the masses, and then plundering its resources for party purposes as the Stalinists and the centrists have often done.

3.11 Where the fighting propaganda group does not have worker cadres within the mass organisations involved in struggle it is forced to intervene 'from outside' by promoting solidarity actions with the struggle, by issuing leaflets. But this is a weakness and so once a substantial number of cadres has been assembled and trained a 'turn' to more agitation, to work in and around the mass organisations. The fighting propaganda group at this stage may be attempt to place non-industrial workers into industries central or key to the class struggle. This is likely to be most fruitful when the organisation is also directly recruiting a number of industrial workers. At this stage the aim will be to create propaganda circles that can attract substantial numbers of workers or better still be centred on workplaces. The revolutionary tendency must grasp the specific difficulties faced in recruiting, holding, educating and training cadre, where poverty, long hours of work, and difficult living conditions exist. These difficulties weigh particularly heavily in the early stage of transition from an ideological current of two, three or so comrades into a fighting propaganda group of 10-20 or more. Recruits with excellent credentials as thinkers, fighters and organisers who in a wealthier country could be stable cadres, even leading cadres are often driven out of political activity by economic need, and family crises related to economic need.

3.12 To direct the larger group with more diverse task a more highly structured leadership system is needed. A smaller political committee will always be needed at first to supervise not only day to day activity but also the publication(s). A separate editorial board is a division of labour desirable only at a later stage but it must be politically subordinated to the PC and the NC/CC. But a small political executive alone will no longer be sufficient. The group will also need a larger and sovereign leadership body, that is, a National or Central Committee. This should aim at being inclusive of the different areas and types of the group's work. When electing this body the group should also try to represent the different areas and regions where the group has cells or branches. It needs to select its members from amongst the group's best journalists, full-timers, theoreticians, trade union militants, activists amongst the oppressed, as well as ensuring a proper representation for women, youth, national or racial minorities.

3.13 To 'escape' from the limits of the fighting propaganda group into a small cadre party stage more than organic piecemeal individual recruitment is needed. For this to occur one or more of a number of qualitative leaps must be effected. One of these could be the direct qualitative expansion of the fighting propaganda group itself in a revolutionary situation where long term-systematic propaganda and cadre selection and training enables it to link up with the radicalised masses who take up its slogans support its press and whose activists are consequently attracted in large numbers to its ranks. Thus the organisation can become well known and a significant point of reference in the whole workers movement Another transition is through fusion with a much larger leftward moving centrist organisation and its transformation into a revolutionary vanguard party or a very favourable split of revolutionary elements from a left reformist or centrist party resulting in a quantitative/qualitative leap. For doing this it would be possible to use various types of entry tactic into left parties. These could include: total entrism into a reformist or centrist organisation aiming at the formation of a large 'revolutionary' fraction or tendency leading to eventual expulsion. Other united front tactics could help the transition from fighting propaganda group to cadre party including the creation of a sizeable revolutionary tendency in the trade unions, peasant, student or urban poor organisations, or in movements of the oppressed in which the fighting propaganda group gains the leadership and 'fuses' with or recruits a whole layer of its most active militants.

3.14 The small cadre party if it is worthy of the name must embrace within its ranks at least a representative cross section of the vanguard of the class. These will be drawn from the trade union representatives at the base, the leaders of the community organisations, prominent representatives in the united fronts of struggle. In such a party the work should be concentrated on the working class. Proletarianisation of the ranks and of the leadership is critical. After around a decade of development of the SWP (USA) when it had reached the size of a small cadre party able to intervene in mass struggles and even to win leadership in them (Minneapolis) Trotsky proposed they should overcome the pressure of the petit bourgeois intellectual dilettantism within its ranks. He proposed that each non-worker should be obliged to win a worker for the party in a certain number of months, and if they did not succeed should be reduced to the status of a sympathiser.

3.15 The revolutionary organisation should pay particular attention to the most concentrated and organised sectors of the industrial proletariat; those who by their economic weight and degree of concentration as a class are the strongest enemies of the capitalists and who constitute the axis of the vanguard of the class. The workers' quarters, those around the mines and the big factories, and the towns and cities dominated by them, have always proved to be the key in the development and radicalisation of the class and the potential development for adherents to the revolutionary party. The revolutionary organisation serious about proletarianisation must strive to establish close links with the factories, agro-industries, mines and other enterprises. It must build cells in these districts or towns and undertake a daily systematic agitation and propaganda aimed at the workers.

4. International Experiences?differences of tradition and terrain

4.1 In the process of creating an international democratic centralist organisation we will have to take into account and transcend national peculiarities. The breaks in the revolutionary tradition, the latest and longest lasting for thirty years or so, have exacerbated the problem. To this must be added specific national problems. The viewpoint of a communist coming from an imperialist country dominated by unbroken decades or centuries of legality and largely trade unionist ?class struggle? will be different to that of a communist even from another imperialist country but one that has experienced fascism, Stalinism, illegality and severe repression. A national labour movement dominated either by social democracy or Stalinism or even by a bourgeois ?liberal? party like the US Democrats will generate different kinds of bias. How much more will the conditions in those semi-colonies where mass unemployment and poverty is the norm, where health and education services are scanty, dictate differing relations between the intelligentsia and the working class between men and women. So too will it be in the Stalinist states still based on the old repressive bureaucratic plan or where they now face liberal marketising regimes attacking the conditions and gains of the masses or fomenting inter-ethnic conflicts. Of course, these differences also exist between semi-colonies or degenerate workers? states varying with the level of economic development, religious and cultural background, the history of progressive struggles by the working class, peasantry and urban petty-bourgeois. In addition, the main enemies within the mass movement could be completely different (e.g. big social democratic parties, monolithic Stalinist regimes, nationalist or religious multi-class movements).

4.2 The task of an international revolutionary organisation is to recognise these differences, locate and assimilate what is valuable and progressive in each and every national working class and revolutionary tradition. But at the same time it must criticise and reject what is harmful and reactionary in it . Our aim is to create, or rather to recreate, a truly international communist culture and global practice. The lead in this must be taken by the international central bodies (a frequently meeting International Secretariat (IS) and a regularly meeting International Executive Committee (IEC) which must see this fusing process as just as vital a part of their work as the programmatic work. A strong representation of the differing national sections is vital not only at the congress and on the IEC but also but as far as is possible on the IS. To this end the IS whilst it is bound to be resident in one country must seek to regularly draw into its work leading comrades from other sections for whole periods. In addition IS members must visit the sections regularly, staying long enough to get a real experience of the conditions of work, the abilities and needs of the cadres. Furthermore, revolutionaries should imitate the healthy tradition of the early Comintern whereby no section, not even the multi-million membered Bolsheviks, tried to dominate the international, ensuring that no section provided more than 30% of the IEC members.

4.3 The sharing of international experience should not be restricted to the international leadership. It should extend to the national leaderships and where possible the membership too. Interchange of comrades, sometimes for extended periods can help overcome language difficulties and forge a living bond of comradeship between all the sections. Organisations at different stages of party building can absorb invaluable lessons from the history and experience of others. Their cadres can learn lessons by working in other sections that they would have to wait years to learn on their own national terrain.

4.4 The cadres of an international tendency in different countries, widely scattered around the world and speaking and reading different languages cannot be left to absorb knowledge of the work of the other sections by accident. Regular international internal bulletins, translation of important articles and reports, reading and monitoring of all the section's press, special discussions in every cell and branch and periodic national schools are all needed to keep up a high international cadre level

4.5 The combined efforts of the international tendency can modify and shorten the early stages of party building for those who join later. Firstly, no new tiny grouping has to surmount the theoretical/programmatic

tasks alone once an international programme and tendency exists. If another section is in existence that uses the same language then a tiny initial nucleus does not have to put all their efforts into publication of the whole range of material that an isolated group would have to do. Even a group that does have a heavy burden of translation in order to use the key documents of an international tendency has the advantage of a programmatic starting point. In addition smaller groupings can gain the benefit of a model on which to base cadre training and leadership structures.

4.6 Poverty puts a severe limit on the apparatus for the production of publications, for administration, travel. This can be and should be overcome by a substantial re-distribution of resources within the international tendency from the larger groups in the wealthier (imperialist) countries to those groups in the poorer semi-colonial countries. In a period of mass class struggles and big opportunities it will be vital for such sections to receive all sorts of contributions, both material and political. This can enormously aid a substantial growth in the membership and impact of the organisation. There are of course political limits to this aid which include regard for the necessary self-respect and self-reliance of comrades in these countries who do not wish to duplicate the 'dependency' of their bourgeoisie. Moreover, however internationalist the spirit of giver and recipient, even in the healthiest organisation the latter may come to feel politically pressured by total dependence. In unhealthy organisations (including in degenerate 'Trotskyist' ones) this has been used to undermine political opposition, to split and manipulate. This must not happen in our ranks. Also to be in receipt of large sums from abroad may be used by political opponents (e.g. Lora) to slander the sections. Therefore financial support has to be related to overcoming really insurmountable obstacles.

4.7 The Stalinists and all too many of the 'Trotskyist', i.e. centrist, internationals are grouped around a dominant 'mother section' that concentrates in their hands all the central powers of the international and is its permanent centre. The international becomes a mere collection of satellites around this mother section, even subordinated to the supreme leader of this section, his views and ambitions, and imitating his methods and even his mannerisms. Sometimes these leading sections try to re-enforce and justify their role by claiming that they already are or are about to become the centre of the world revolution, that they are about to become a mass workers party or even that they are on the eve of seizing state power. (Nahuel Moreno in Argentina, Guillermo Lora in Bolivia and Gerry Healy in Britain). Whilst isolated national Trotskyism is a terrible deformation this 'colonial Trotskyism' is even worse because it seeks to dominate, corrupt and manipulate other sections. Every healthy revolutionary international should try to have a leadership that is as international as can be in its composition, in its practice, in the location of its meetings and the maintaining a clear distinction of its international centre from the apparatus of the largest national section.

4.8 Security and the tasks of legal and illegal work become in an international tendency a current task of every section and the international centre as well. The sections in countries enjoying stable and wide-reaching legality must use this for the international tendency as a whole. It must host conferences and meetings, publish materials, undertake research, theoretical and literary work that can draw on the bourgeoisie's accumulated resources (libraries etc). At the same time they must learn the techniques of illegal/conspiratorial work firstly in order to protect comrades in countries where democratic freedoms are non-existent or weak and unenforceable. A rediscovery of Bolshevik/Leninist practice with regard to the combination of legal and illegal work is one of the vital tasks of an international tendency. This must be based on a fraternal critique of inherited traditions' habits and methods carried over from the various centrist traditions from which the groupings came.

4.9 If an international tendency is to overcome the degenerate FI's legacy of federalism it needs not only an international leadership which has the trust and confidence of the sections, an international programme,

perspectives and tactical resolutions to guide it but it must lead the whole tendency in common actions, common campaigns, on a world scale. Initially such work must be modest. It must always be realistic. It must not slip into bombastic appeals or phony campaigns and conferences that mobilise nobody but a few dupes who will be speedily undeceived by the evident lack of any outcome or results. The USFI, Lambertists and Morenoites are past masters of this method of bluff. Exposure is usually not long in coming. But events like important wars, revolutionary or counter-revolutionary events or crises in the reformist or centrist world currents all present opportunities for an organised international intervention. Thus campaigns in all the sections? countries can be launched to save class struggle prisoners, to fight for solidarity strikes and boycotts. Delegations can be sent to international events, rallies and conferences. Where the tendency has the strength it may even initiate such events. Above all it is the task of the international leadership and the sections working together to make propaganda in as many languages as possible for our programme and organisations and against its centrist/reformist opponents.

4.10 The task of the international tendency is to co-ordinate, harmonise the growth of the international sections. If one or more sections is advancing rapidly and scoring important successes it is vital for all sections to learn the lessons of this and apply them. Nor should we scorn using the ?prestige? of these successes in other countries, providing we never lie or exaggerate or ?compensate? for weakness in one country by a complacent belief that our comrades in country X are strong and growing. Likewise if a section is weak, stagnant or in a crisis this is a matter for all the sections and for the international leadership which must intervene to discover the causes and find (if possible) the remedies. This criticism must be honest and undiplomatic but at the same time comradely and constructive. Resistance to criticism on grounds of national pride and prestige either by sections or the international leadership is anti-Leninist and anti-internationalist.

4.11 With the co-ordinated activities of the tendency as a whole we can send other cadres from other sections to help build a new section and help it become a fighting propaganda group. Experience, both our own and that of centrist/sectarian currents however, suggest that the ?parachuting? of cadres from outside and the calling of this grouping a national section is doomed to failure. To root a section it must have a core of cadres ?native? to the country concerned, able to speak and write its language and conversant with its labour movement and class struggle culture. But, on the other hand, a small band of ?missionaries? can win cadres or aid the development of a faction inside a centrist organisation. The international leadership has to carefully prioritise and organise such ventures combining an ability to seize openings with more long term planning based on the importance of certain countries (e.g. a major imperialist country or a semi-colonial country rich in struggle and revolutionary experience). Last but not least the whole tendency must ensure that in the process of growth and extension the central co-ordinating and controlling bodies and apparatus remain or become adequate to their increased responsibilities.

4.12 If the objective of the fighting propaganda group in each country is the foundation of a revolutionary party, (perhaps via the stage of a small cadre party of thousands rather than a mass party of tens or hundreds of thousands), then the task of an international fighting propaganda tendency is the foundation of a new ?international party of world revolution?. There is no fore-ordained size, organic relationship to the proletarian vanguard that would determine when such an international could be founded/declared. A particularly critical international conjuncture (world war, crisis, world revolutionary/pre revolutionary situation) may necessitate the jumping of stages and a ?proclamation? of a tendency that is disproportionately weak with regard to the tasks of an international. But in these circumstances the rapidity of events, the focussing of the vanguard fighters' attention on the competing banners (programmes) may make such a ?proclamation? justified (just as Lenin wanted to break with Zimmerwald/Kienthal whilst the 1914-18 war was still in progress and as Trotsky founded the FI in 1938 with small forces). But outside of these conditions a protracted struggle for our programme against degenerating centrism may require ?a

long march? that involves an independent fighting propaganda international tendency, entry into centrist or reformist internationals as a revolutionary faction.

5. Conclusion

5.1 We recognise that the above theses do not provide all of the answers to the question of how we build mass revolutionary parties. They are provisional and confined to the early stages of party building that the Trotskyist movement has been historically limited to. We recognise that there are whole dimensions to party building, particularly at the stage of mass organisations, that we have not elaborated upon. We are merely drawing a balance sheet of what we believe to be both the positive and negative lessons of the struggle to build a revolutionary international since the time of the Comintern's degeneration in the 1920s. In that sense are theses are a beginning, a series of markers, rather than a manual on party building. We are not dogmatists and we recognise that in the practical field of party building we have much to learn, and much to incorporate into our theses. However, a start must be made in order to guide our tendency away from the errors that have led other tendencies to dissolution or degeneration.

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