TROTSKYIST BULLETIN

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# Trotskyism vs Centrism

## The LRCI's fight against sectarianism and Stalinophilia



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# Trotskyism versus Centrism

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# Disoriented by the collapse of Stalinism

*A reply to the split statement of Poder Obrero (Bolivia) and José Villa*

DURING SEPTEMBER and October 1995 the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) has suffered two separate splits from its sections; one from the New Zealand section (the Proletarian Faction) and another from its Bolivian section.

Both involved walkouts by comrades who failed to conduct an internal struggle within the League, despite the full right to do so allowed by our statutes. Both involved issues on which they had already been heavily defeated at the LRCI's third congress, held in mid-1994

Both involved as central issues the question of international democratic centralism and the ability to relate tactically to the changed conditions after the downfall of Stalinism in the 1989-91 period. Both were preceded by secretive and disloyal manoeuvres, including discussions of their intention to split from the League.

The prompt political response to these manoeuvres and the insistence on the observation of elementary discipline, first divided the Bolivian and New Zealand secret factionalists, and then led to their bolting one after the other, rather than face an open political fight which would have revealed how little support they had.

Various sectarian opponents of the LRCI, the ICL (Spartacists), the IBT, the RIL have issued small pamphlets ringing the changes on the theme of a "crisis in the LRCI". Obviously splits are never a testimony of peace and harmony. But only centrists regard such crises as entirely negative. It would be a strange Bolshevik who failed to recognise the role of internal struggles in the creation of a revolutionary party of the working class. If by "crisis" however, these opponents mean that the LRCI has been distracted from its ongoing tasks by internal struggle, or significantly injured by these losses, then they are going to be seriously disappointed in the period ahead. If there was a "crisis in the LRCI" it has been terminated—thanks to the desertion of the splitters heading for sectarian oblivion, if not in some cases out of politics altogether.

The first knowledge the LRCI had of the split of its Bolivian section and the one LRCI member in Peru was when José Villa appeared at a public meeting of Workers Power Britain, held to launch its pamphlet on Black Liberation. Villa not only denounced the line of the LRCI on the Nato bombing of Bosnia as a capitulation to imperialism but announced that "the Latin American sections" of the LRCI were splitting from the League. We had to wait a further ten days before we received a resolution from Poder Obrero Bolivia (POB) announcing their split.

It proclaimed; "we declare ourselves outside the discipline of the leadership of the LRCI" and that "we do not recognise the resolutions of the last IEC nor the IS elected by it." Clearly this is a declaration of a split. The International Secretariat had taken the protective measure of suspending PO(B) from the League after Villa's declaration. Since these events Villa and Co are trying to appear as expelled or victimised members of the LRCI—some sort of public faction. This is a lie. It was they who refused to recognise the decisions of the LRCI's third congress and the leading bodies elected by it. It is they who have publicly violated its statutes and renounced its discipline. The attempt to pose as expelled comrades of the LRCI, requesting "a democratic Congress at which the comrades of the Proletarian Faction can also participate and others that were initially attracted towards the LRCI but which were pushed away for disagreeing with its rightist turn" is a ridiculous deception. They and /or the New Zealand splitters could have requested an emergency congress before their split. At the July IEC this year which recognised the PF it was specifically made clear that wewould organise a special congress at the end of the year if members in other sections supported their platform. The Bolivians and Villa could have requested such a congress, *on one condition*—that until that congress they abided by the same discipline as all other members of the League. This is precisely what they would not do. They are thus quite simply deserters as their own statements reveal. Moreover, since they left the LRCI, Villa at least has been in discussion with rival organisations to the LRCI (e.g. IBT); this alone makes a mockery of their attempt to portray themselves as "a loyal external faction".

The PO(B) statement purports to be a resolution passed by the sixth conference of the POB. This split conference was held in September without any prior notification to the LRCI's international bodies, thus depriving the League and its membership of any opportunity to influence, either in writing or through a representative, the outcome of the conference. José Villa, originally from Peru but since early 1993 a member of Workers Power/Britain, had requested and been given leave of absence from all political activity at the time. Despite this he was present at the meeting in Bolivia.

The resolution and the shoddy manoeuvre which led to it are typical products of José Villa. The resolution contains a great number of lies about the LRCI's positions—old lies, which we have replied to many times in the LRCI's internal bulletin in the years since 1991. It came as no surprise to the League's members that the resolution is packed with grotesque distortions of our political positions and of the history of our tendency. We apologise in advance for having to go into these matters. Few readers will be in a position to make an independent judgement. But, whilst we certainly have many more important tasks to pursue, we are obliged to counteract the fact that "a lie is half way around the world before the truth can get its boots on".

Additionally, a reply to these people can serve a useful purpose for the LRCI itself, as well as those individuals or groups who are drawn towards its politics. We will make a public balance sheet of our dealings with J. Villa and his followers in Peru and Bolivia in order to learn the lessons for the future. In so doing we will prove the principled character of our politics and the blameless record of our internal life and democratic centralism. And for the sake of our outright political adversaries, those at least that are honest and honourable people, we will reward their patience by doing them the service of warning them to avoid like the plague people who have proved themselves neither honest nor honourable.

But first we shall reply to the political accusations raised by the deserters. We will begin with the question of Bosnia because this provided Villa with the pretext for a split from the LRCI for which he had been searching since his defeat at the LRCI's third congress (July 1994).

## Bosnia; the LRCI sides with Imperialism?

The immediate pretext for the split declared by PO(B) through the mouth of their spokesperson José Villa was the position the LRCI took on the Nato bombings in Bosnia in early September. They claim that this was "the equivalent to putting oneself on the side of imperialism" and that "it signifies the abandonment of all Marxist principles and an adaptation to ones own imperialism." So what was this supposed 4 August of the LRCI?

Our statement, published within days of the attacks in in a special broadsheet of *Workers Power*, was totally unequivocal in

its condemnation of imperialism's actions and in its call to oppose them. Its headline and the first of its key slogans made this absolutely clear;

"Stop the air strikes, stop the artillery bombardments, UN/ NATO out of the Balkans!"

Our overall position is also seen clearly from the statement;

"We condemn the NATO intervention, demand an end to it. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops. We likewise demand an immediate end to the RS (Bosnian Serb Republic- ed) siege of Sarajevo and the surrender of all territory seized as a result of ethnic cleansing since 1991. At the same time we continue to support, critically, the BiH forces in their war of self defence and liberation, despite the assault launched by their reactionary imperialist allies on the RS forces."

Only a completely confused person (or a professional confusionist) would conclude that because we refused to side with the Bosnian Serbs who were bombarding Sarajevo that we were *ipso facto* siding with the Nato jets. Moreover, we stressed the paramount need in the imperialist countries involved to fight for the ending of the bombardment and the withdrawal of all Nato troops, the US fleet in the Adriatic etc. Thus the suggestion that we sided with imperialism is a vile slander which should discredit the slanderers with all serious people.

Why did we not take a defencist position of the RS? Because what it was primarily, indeed nearly exclusively doing, was fighting the Bosnian multi-ethnic people not imperialism! Its episodic clash with imperialism flowed immediately and directly from its refusal to stop bombarding Tuzla and Sarajevo. Its struggle with the imperialists to continue was not in any way progressive. That is why we could not support the RS forces victory in this struggle. It is a malicious falsehood however to argue that if you are defeatist vis a vis one side in a conflict you are in favour of the victory of the other. This was precisely the slander thrown at revolutionary defeatists from Lenin's time onwards.

The problem is that Villa and his Bolivian supporters started from completely misunderstanding the Bosnian war, and then went on to wilfully distort the actual situation—most criminally by denying the attempted genocide which the Serb side has tried to carry out. Today they present the struggle as one between imperialism and a degenerate workers' state Their statement starts with a description of recent events in Bosnia that well sums up these politics of distortion and wild exaggeration.

*"Since the end of August, we have seen the biggest attack ever launched by NATO. For weeks the coalition of all the western imperialist powers has been carrying out massive daily bombings of all Bosnian Serb cities. "*

Since the Nato bombings in Bosnia are the *only* actual attacks it has made since the formation of the alliance they must therefore, by definition, be the biggest. But during these September raids the Nato planes have not bombed *any*, let alone *all*, Bosnian Serb cities, which is why, as journalists reported, people were able to sit and drink coffee in the streets of Pale during the attacks on the gun emplacements and the radar equipment.

Apart from about a dozen casualties in a hospital near Sarajevo, next to which a heavy artillery battery was deliberately sited, there have been scarcely any civilian casualties. Nato deliberately set out to avoid civilian casualties, not because the Nato generals are nice people but because they were trying to pressure the Serbs (and the BiH government) into peace negotiations. The Izetbegovic government set as its pre-condition for discussions the raising of the siege of Sarajevo. Although Ratko Mladic called the Nato action "genocide" does anyone believe him —apart from J. Villa and POB? The effects on the Serb "cities" (in fact only Banja Luka is a city) are minimal. When this is compared with the 11,000 people killed in Sarajevo or the hundreds in Tuzla they are totally insignificant.

## The Jihad against the Serbs: the LRCI joins up?

*"Openly the IS greets the breaking of the encirclement of Sarajevo, asks for more international volunteers, apart from the thousands of Croatian, Muslim fundamentalists and Nazi Ustasha soldiers that arrive in order to smash the Serbian Republic of Krajina and to conquer other areas of Bosnia . . . "*

Here ignorance, fantasy and dishonesty are mixed in equal portions. The Bosnian Serbs, so it seems, are valiantly defending themselves against the mass imperialist bombing of their cities. How? By attacking the British and French Rapid Reaction force? No, by continuing to bombard the population of Sarajevo.

The imperialists demand that they stop doing so, threaten them with air attacks and when they refuse to stop attack the heavy artillery installations and their air defence systems. The splitters take the idiots guide to revolutionary strategy which says that wherever the imperialists put a minus we must put a plus.

They conclude that the Serbs must be fighting for progressive objectives because the imperialists want to stop them. Therefore, those against whom they are fighting must be the arch-reactionaries; they must in fact be "Muslim fundamentalists" allied with Nazi-Ustasha soldiers.

The LRCI "openly greets the breaking of the encirclement of Sarajevo"? By the BiH forces —most certainly we would! By the imperialists, not at all. The threats, and limited bombing actions to enforce them by Nato, changed neither the war objectives of the Bosnian Serbs nor the character of the war they are waging.

It would do so only if the imperialists intervened to seriously threaten the Serbs themselves with national oppression, military occupation and ethnic cleansing. In reality the imperialists are trying to force the Republica Srpska to rest content with most of the territorial gains they made as the result of their ethnic cleansing.

But not for Villa such concrete considerations. His newly discovered "anti-imperialist" chetniks might be forced, horror of horrors, to stop bombarding the streets and apartment blocks of multi-ethnic Sarajevo. Who apart from the most hardened Serb chauvinist could complain about this? Every consistent democrat *should* indeed rejoice.

Who, apart from an Islamophobe, would uncritically retail the RS propaganda about Muslim fundamentalism? Anyone who has studied events in Bosnia should know the following; the Bosnian Muslims are an ethnic category, first designated as such by the Titoite bureaucracy, to identify those in Bosnia who did not identify themselves as ethnic Serbs or ethnic Croats or Yugoslavs.

Before this they were often called *Bosniaks*. i.e. Bosnians. Whereas Serbs and Croats clearly looked to their eponymous republics in the Yugoslav Federation most of the people whose ancestors had converted to Islam, did not develop a pan-Serb or pan-Croat identity. They were content to call themselves Bosnians. Bosnia was an old province with a uniquely intermixed culture. Tensions in Bosnia before the twentieth century were often class (peasants against landlords and merchants) and occasionally (though rarely) religious, especially where they overlapped with the former.

The twentieth century brought Serb and Croat nationalism into Bosnia though many Orthodox and Catholic Bosnians rejected it, as of course did the many Jews, Gypsies, Vlachs and other religious or ethnic groups.

In the second world war the Nazis, the Ustashe regime, the Bosnian Muslim Organisation (the party of the big landowners) *and the Serb Chetniks* managed to set the ethnic groups literally at each others throats. Contrary to nationalist propaganda the Serbs were not the only victims, though they provided the greatest number. Nor did the Bosnian Muslims, in their great majority or for the whole war, support Ante Pavelic's Ustashe regime. Many Muslims as well as Croats and Serbs joined Tito's multi-ethnic partisans.

The second world war gives no evidence to any "theory" of the national, ethnic or religious guilt of the Muslims, a specially reactionary nature or for that matter to a special anti-imperialist let alone communist destiny or nature for the Serbs.

Appeals to the past in this way are the infallible sign of someone who has completely lost their bearings as a Marxist. Revolutionary communists (as opposed to Stalinists) reject the arch-reactionary notion of progressive or reactionary nations. Villa does not; he coquettes and toys with it continually. As all

LRCI members know he has repeatedly tried to twist Engels' notion of "non-historic peoples" to suggest a model of pro-imperialist or anti-imperialist national struggles with the former overwhelmingly outnumbering the latter especially in Europe. His attitude to the break up of the multi-national USSR and Yugoslavia is a million miles from Trotsky. It is closer by far to that of the Oehlerites of the 1930s and today's ICL (Spartacists) and their offspring the IBT.

For Villa national struggles are only justified if in the semi-colonies they are "anti-imperialist", or in the degenerate workers' states if they pledge themselves in advance to oppose the restoration of capitalism. In general, however, he sees them as the chosen tools of imperialism for Balkanising the big and powerful semi-colonies or degenerate workers' states. Thus he adopts the big state fetishism of a semi-colonial military bonaparte or a Stalinist bureaucrat—not the standpoint of a proletarian revolutionary.

That is because he cannot accept, in more than name only, Lenin's position on the national question. Leninists support the right to national self-determination, up to and including the right to secession, even when we do not advocate secession. Only in this way can we remove all suspicions that we are nationalists, nation builders great state fetishists, even of the most refined and "socialist sort".

Of course, we do not seek the proliferation of new nation states. Where there are multi-national or multi-ethnic states we prefer to see the preservation of their unity—but on these conditions: that all their peoples wish them to be preserved; that there is no coercion; that there is absolute equality and no privileges. We are interested in only one fundamental thing, one strategic goal—uniting and strengthening the revolutionary working class which will build socialism and winning to its side, as allies, all the exploited and oppressed.

This has been the fundamental method of the LRCI throughout the period of disintegration of the former USSR and the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. When mass movements of the peoples of these states demonstrated a wish for independence and where Stalinist regimes based on the dominant nations in these federations tried to obstruct this, the LRCI supported their right to secede.

Indeed, the LRCI was always willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with their resistance against bullying and coercion; hence, we supported Lithuanian resistance in 1990.

## Bosnian Islamic fundamentalism?

*"Izetbegovic is an Islamicist theologist who in the 1940s was part of a political party of the Muslim landlords that made an alliance with the Nazis and Ustashas against the Titoite resistance and later defended large pre-capitalist property and clerical institutions against women, workers and the Yugoslav revolution."*

*"Izetbegovic calls publicly for the re-Islamisation of the Muslims of Bosnia and the construction of the first Islamic state in Europe based on the rejection of socialism and western institutions."*

From the beginning of the Bosnian conflict Villa has exaggerated the Islamic character of the Bosnian Muslims, regards the multi-ethnic character of Bosnian urban society as a "myth" and insists on the Islamic, indeed "fundamentalist", character of the BiH government and its armed forces. His acute Islamophobia drives him beyond all credibility except to those who know nothing about the Bosnian war. No serious writer or commentator actually believes that Izetbegovic himself is an "Islamic fundamentalist". He is most certainly a devout Muslim. He wrote a book in the 1970s which described an ideal Islamic society and state.

This was undoubtedly a very reactionary book in that it envisaged a totally religious society and state. Many such books have been written by Christians or Hindus. However, it was not a book about Bosnia, let alone a blueprint for a future political programme for BiH. In it he specifically repeats that there can be no Islamic state where the majority of the population are not devout Muslims. He recognises moreover that in Bosnia the great majority of the population are either Christians or non-believers.

The SDA was founded as a party with an ethnic-Muslim identity and consequently with a powerful element of cultural-Islamic ideology and symbolism. In essence the reasons for this were exactly the same as those which motivated Karadjic and Mate Boban. With the break up of the Communist Party there was no ideological basis to appeal to the voters except nationalism. Izetbegovic set out to create an Muslim nationalist, not a Muslim fundamentalist party. Naturally, this meant a role for religion in his nationalism but anyone who doesn't recognise a qualitatively similar role for religion in Serb and Croat nationalism knows nothing about the history of Balkan nationalism.

Religion, as in Irish and Polish nationalism, is a component of the "national myth"—a reactionary one, indeed, but a historic one and not one which *per se* invalidates their national struggles. Last but not least, in a horrendous genocidal war waged against them by the Serb neo-Chetniks and the Croat neo-Ustashe, it would scarcely be surprising that the response of many secular Bosnian ethnic-Muslims was a return to religion or at least religious-nationalist ideology.

The SDA always had, and has now, an important (and growing) Islamic wing. But it does not, as the Serb neo-Chetniks claim and Villa suggests, have a *programme* for an Islamic Republic in Bosnia. On the contrary, it stands publicly for a *multi-ethnic republic*. The Serb nationalists have by contrast repeatedly stated the impossibility of living in a common state with the Muslims. The SDA is nevertheless, and the LRCI has also pointed this out from the very beginning, a reactionary party because of its nationalism and its pro-imperialism and restorationism all of which features it shares with the Serb and the Croat nationalist parties. But the SDA is not the multi-ethnic population of Bosnia's major towns and cities nor is it the Bosnian Muslim ethnicity.

The "Bosnian Muslims", burdened with a name they never chose for themselves, were never the main religious force in the war. Every serious writer on Bosnia records that they were by far the least religious community in Bosnia (about 10% attended the mosque). The Serbs and the Croats were far more religious. A much higher proportion of them were peasants whereas a higher proportion of "Muslims" were workers and urban intellectuals.

So why does the POB document harp on about "Muslims", "fundamentalists" and not do the same for the other Bosnian ethnic categories too? Why not talk about Catholic fundamentalists or the Orthodox fundamentalists? Why not accuse Karadjic or Mladic of wishing to restore a medieval Serbo-Byzantine state? They cavort with orthodox patriarchs as much as Izetbegovic does with the mullahs. Why pass over all this? Because Villa has slid into the mire of fashionable Western orientalist fantasy where "the wrath of Islam", the "holy warriors" the "mediaeval fanatics" are the new bogies for scaring political children and incidentally justifying the creation of Rapid Reaction Forces to fight the new enemy which has replaced communism as the main challenge to western "civilisation".

It is the Serb neo-Chetniks who have spread this poisonous nonsense, justifying their own genocide by claiming to be a victim of an Islamic conspiracy hatched in Saudi Arabia or in Tehran. Meanwhile, it is they who have blown up all the mosques in the areas they have conquered, including the beautiful sixteenth century Ottoman mosques of Banja Luka. Maybe Villa sees this as a struggle against religion—if so it was Stalin's method not Lenin or Trotsky's!

Having conjured up an Islamic Menace where there is not one, José Villa manages the opposite trick, making the LRCI's class line and revolutionary programme on Bosnia disappear altogether.

## "They are all as bad as each other"—refusing to take the side of the oppressed

*"The Croatian-Muslim federation headed by Izetbegovic is as restorationist, reactionary and as guilty of ethnic-cleansing as the Bosnian Serbs."*

Villa is a "holocaust revisionist" when it comes to Bosnia, just as he is in the case of Rwanda. In Bosnia between 150,000 and 200,000 (ethnic Muslim and progressive Serbs and Croats) were massacred—some 7% of the Muslim ethnic group. Villa sets out repeatedly to downplay or ignore these facts. The only people who deny them are the perpetrators of these genocides or their apologists. He uses every example of retaliation (which we have always pointed to and condemned) to create an equal sign.

In dealing with the victims he creates a pot-pourri of ancient history—the Bosnian landlords were mainly Muslims before 1945, some Muslim units joined the SS and committed horrible genocides against the Serbs in the 1940s, Izetbegovic is an "Islamic Fundamentalist". This farrago of historical irrelevancies, half truths, and lies is served up to avoid having to take the side of the victims, the side of the oppressed, in the 1990s and on the basis of what has happened in Bosnia since 1992.

It is true that atrocities have been committed on all sides. Croatian ethnic cleansing and racism have been amply documented both in Bosnia and in the recently reconquered Krajina. Even the Bosnian Muslim forces have taken part in ethnic cleansing.

In mid-1993, faced with ethnic cleansing by both Croat and Serbian aggressors some Bosnian militia units carried out a similar policy against Croatian villages in central Bosnia. According to Norman Cigar ( Genocide In Bosnia):

"By the end of summer 1993 the Bosnian Army had eliminated thirty three Catholic parishes in central Bosnia. In the process Muslim forces also committed atrocities, such as the September 1993 massacre of the Croatian population of the village of Uzdol."

Another area where Muslim forces used illegitimate force appears to have been in the Drina valley, where resistance forces based in Srebrenica carried out a guerrilla campaign of village burning.

No socialist should attempt to deny these facts. The point is, however, that ethnic cleansing was never a policy of the Bosnian side and, given the existing conditions, could not be. Any Bosnian state could only survive if the Muslims were part of a multi-ethnic community given their minoritised status and dispersal. The Serbs however pursued an ethnically pure state as the prime objective of their war aims. This is why their massacres have been on such a quantitatively greater scale, so much so that they have a qualitative difference.

Even nationalist politicians such as Izetbegovic have been forced to renounce not only ethnic cleansing but an ethnic solution to the war. Cigar reports:

"With the Croatian-Bosnian agreement of 1994 the Bosnian government was able to bring such elements under control and to stop the attacks by arresting and bringing to trial some of the perpetrators . . ."

Likewise, the Mujahedeen, mainly Middle Eastern Islamic volunteers but including some embittered Bosnians, have been shunned by most working class Bosnians. Such is their unpopularity that the Izetbegovic government even requested the British UNPROFOR contingent to wipe them out.

Socialists in Bosnia, and in the Bosnian solidarity movement, should fight to expose and bring to justice all perpetrators of ethnic cleansing and atrocities, including those on the progressive side.

But we should reject the pathetic excuses of those who refuse to support the legitimate right of self defence for the Bosnian Muslims and multi-ethnic communities.

## The LRCI enlists the CIA?

*"The IS . . . calls on imperialism to donate airplanes, tanks and Scud missiles to its lackeys in the region and demands military trainers from imperialism and its intelligence services."*

The LRCI has indeed consistently called for an end to the arms embargo and for the imperialists to allow the BiH government forces to be equipped with the kind of weapons they need to win their just war against the Republic of Srpsk. Machine guns are insufficient in the face of heavy artillery and planes. The day that Villa finds a side in a civil war that he can support and wishes them to be armed he will have to find a suitable supplier.

Perhaps Villa would like to suggest where the BiH forces should get their arms from? Perhaps he knows of a workers' co-operative somewhere specialising in the manufacture of Scud missiles; or China or Cuba perhaps where Stalinist dictatorships still rule? We have no qualms about the BiH accepting arms from wherever they can get them. Unfortunately, most firms that make and supply them are multinational capitalist firms and that will have to be the first port of call. Is it unrealistic to expect arms without political strings attached by imperialism? No. Many semi-colonial regimes in the Middle East are willing to provide the BiH government with money and many arms dealers are self-interested enough to supply arms. Ask Saddam Hussein.

As to the exaggerated suggestion that the LRCI calls on the CIA and other services to head for Sarejevo, we defy Villa to point to any such demand in the documents of the LRCI. Search as he may, he will find none, for the simple reason that we call for the withdrawal of *all* NATO and UN forces from Bosnia—whether in uniform or not.

## The LRCI abandons its programme?

*"It is not accidental that none of the extensive documents of the LRCI on Bosnia call for the formation of a revolutionary party, soviets or workers' militias. This is replaced by the call for military victory to the government forces of Izetbegovic."* [1]

It is not accidental either that the comrades of POB can sign such a brazen lie! They have never translated a single line of the LRCI's "extensive resolutions" on Bosnia. Villa, however, does not have that excuse. In London for most of the last three years he has most certainly read all the resolutions of the LRCI. Thus when he writes such a lie he knows exactly what he is doing . He simply assumes the ignorance of his audience and relies upon it to produce shock and indignation. This is known in politics as demagogy and Villa is a past master at it.

There has been scarcely a single LRCI resolution or article which has not called for soviets, workers' militias and a revolutionary party. Indeed the LRCI's resolutions have been many and "extensive". Let us quote some of them.

"The Crisis in Yugoslavia" (IS resolution, 29 June 1991) was published in *Trotskyist International* No. 7 (Sept-Jan. 1991/2). The resolution concludes with the key slogans:

"• Break with the bourgeois and Stalinist restorationists.

• For independent workers' militias to safeguard all minorities and full democratic rights to the workers and peasants. Down with the pogromists.

• For workers' council states in Slovenia, Croatia and all the republics".

The next resolution was adopted by the IEC on 24 July 1991 entitled, "The Situation in Yugoslavia and the position of proletarian revolutionaries" (see ibid). It contained at the end the slogans:

"• Down with the organisers of pogroms. For a multinational workers' militia to stop the slide into reactionary civil war

• No to capitalist restoration! For a proletarian political revolution against the ruling bureaucracy!

• For a federation of independent workers states of the Balkans!"

Then in *Trotskyist Bulletin* No 2 a "Resolution on the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina" ends:

"The only real solution to the present crisis, which has as its root cause the restoration process begun and supported by US and EC imperialism, is for workers' political revolution in all the former Yugoslav republics:

• replace all the national chauvinist, restorationist regimes

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[1] This is translated from the Spanish original. After this was translated by the LRCI Villa himself published his own English version which inserts "latest" before "extensive". Villa was well known inside the LRCI for both his written and verbal "creative" translations. This further act of bad faith clearly was intended to deflect attention from the enormity of the original lie told to the dupes who signed the document. Still, as the following quotes show, this extra word does not save him either.

with workers' and peasants' governments!

• Fight for a Socialist Federation of the Balkans."

In *Trotskyist Bulletin* No 3 in "Stop the annihilation of the Bosnian Muslims" (IS resolution, 22 November 1992) we find:

"There can be no progressive outcome, no lasting and non-oppressive solution for the national tensions brought into this intermixed country, short of a proletarian revolutionary one. This means the creation of a multi-national workers' republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a step towards a socialist federation of the Balkans . . . To prevent such a spread of the conflict [to the surrounding Balkan states] . . . the working class of these countries must support the just struggle of the oppressed nationalities and combine this with the struggle to overthrow the reactionary regimes in Belgrade and Zagreb. In order to achieve this revolutionaries have to combine the struggle against capitalist restoration with the struggle for working class power based on workers' and peasants' councils and a workers' militia."

And again:

"Only such a state—the dictatorship of the proletariat in alliance with the small peasants—could hope to overcome the national hatreds of the Balkans peoples and thereby stimulate a social revolution in the other Balkan states."

Once again:

"To achieve such a goal (the Socialist Federation of the Balkans) it is necessary to break the workers and peasants of all nations from their current reformist, liberal or nationalist leaderships. The building of an international working class vanguard party as an integral part of a new revolutionary communist international is an indispensable tool for breaking the toiling masses away from their misleaders and leading them in the struggle for working class power."

In *Trotskyist Bulletin* No 5, "Bosnia strangled by nationalism and imperialism" (IS resolution ,22 March 1994) states:

"The danger of a sell out by the Izetbegovic regime must make the struggle against it the focus of working class resistance. This rotten regime must be overthrown and replaced by a workers' government based on militias and councils of the multi-national working class.

A workers' government would fight against any form of imperialist intervention. It would fight against Serbian and Croatian nationalists but not with a Muslim-national programme, let alone with a reactionary Islamic one. Its programme must be internationalist, socialist and secular.

Communists must put forward the plan for a multi-national workers state of Bosnia-Herzegovina within a Socialist Federation of the Balkans."

In *Workers Power 185* (January 1995) we find:

"The only real solution is a multi-ethnic workers' state in Bosnia united in a federation with the other workers' states of former Yugoslavia and indeed of the Balkans as a whole.

The crimes committed in the name of nationality do not make internationalism impossible. The rural and urban working class in Serbia, in Croatia as well as in Bosnia, are yearning for an end to the chaos brought by the national chauvinism of their rulers. The policy of the working class must be to reverse and reject all the 'gains' won by ethnic cleansing, to bring to working class justice the torturers, rapists and executioners on all sides.

Once the fruits of national oppression have been renounced the representatives of the working people of Bosnia should work out a state structure, whether unitary federal or confederal, which meets the aspirations of the various ethnic groups, their aspirations for open borders with Serbia or Croatia.

• For a working class solution to the national and ethnic conflict

• For a multi-ethnic workers' state of Bosnia

• For working class power in all the republics of former Yugoslavia

• For a Socialist United States of the Balkans."

On 5 August 1995 the IS passed a resolution on the "Croatian Offensive in the Krajina". It said:

"In Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia workers must break from the parties of the national and social chauvinists and form new revolutionary multi-ethnic workers' parties. It is the duty of the international Labour movement to provide material humanitarian aid and where possible actual military support to the fightback of the victims of oppression. Beyond this we have an urgent duty to aid politically the reformation of the Balkan workers' movement."

So what is left of the claim that "none of the extensive documents of the LRCI on Bosnia call for the formation of a revolutionary party, soviets or workers' militias."?

Nothing but the brand of a slanderer on the forehead of José Villa and on his dupes and accomplices.

## Bolivia: the LRCI imposes a defeatist perspective?

*"In the case of Bolivia the LRCI imposed a line on Poder Obrero that hindered its work. The League said that in 1986 there was a historic-strategic defeat, that was the worst in all the Americas and that was of the same type as the one that destroyed the first workers' state (The Paris Commune) . . The POB was obliged to observe that line due to discipline."*

The first outrageous suggestion is that the LRCI "imposed" a line on POB (a section of the LRCI). In truth no single subject inside the ranks of the LRCI has been debated on more occasions over a longer period of time than the question of the balance of class forces inside Bolivia.

The origins of POB lie in the period after the defeat of the heroic miners' strikes of 1985/86. In 1985 a split occurred in the POR (of G. Lora) which deprived it of its regional organisation in Oruro, the main miners' city in Bolivia. A heterogeneous but sizeable political group was formed—the FOT.

José Villa, a leading student activist of the POR and then an organiser of the POR's work in the mining areas around Oruro, was one of its leaders. He contacted the LRCI in July 1985 after having read articles on Bolivia in *Workers Power*. Shortly after opening discussions with the LRCI the FOT split and José Villa was forced to leave Bolivia for a period due to a serious illness.

The MRCI invited Villa to Europe for discussions. He returned to Bolivia convinced of the need to build a fighting propaganda group and intervene in the still revolutionary period which was unfolding and which culminated in the March for Life and Peace" of ten thousand miners from Oruro aiming to get to La Paz.

Villa himself explained to the LRCI the problem with the Bolivian comrades at that time:

"Several factors stopped the possibility of building a solid organisation. The leading comrade (Villa) could not stay in the country, the defeat of the working class led to demoralisation amongst workers and members, there were too many cliques like the OTI, we were not part of an international with a programme and we had a 'mini-mass party' conception of building." (IEC minutes, August 1989) Villa assembled a round him a small group of comrades who brought out a small duplicated paper, *Guia Obrera*, and a number of polemical documents. This group was visited by two members of the International Secretariat of the MRCI shortly before the march and an agreement to co-operate politically with the MRCI was concluded.

The defeat of the miners' march led to a severe crisis in this group. All of its members, apart from José Villa, decided to abandon active intervention. Villa, with the support of the MRCI remained active until the defeat of the miners was complete and thousands were sacked and many mines closed. Eventually, Villa returned to Peru where he started to build a group, Poder Obreo, linked fraternally to the MRCI.

The result was in Bolivia was a messy situation in which the remnants of *Guia Obrera*, to all intents and purposes became a study circle (in 1987 the organisation told us that it had formally dissolved itself). One of the components of this crisis was what assessment to make of the scale of the defeat that the workers of Bolivia had suffered.

One side of the former FOT, the OTI, concluded that the miners and the workers' movement in general had suffered a "historic defeat". They drew from this the false conclusion that it was impossible to build a revolutionary fighting propaganda group in Bolivia.

Between 1988 and 1990 the small group of Guia comrades remained a discussion circle—Guia Obrera/CEAGO. It was only after prolonged discussions, visits by several leaders of the LRCI and, be it said, political *pressure* from the LRCI that the comrades broke from this passive propagandist existence and formed a small fighting propaganda group, Poder Obrero. For his part Villa later liked to forget his (more honest) references to the generalised "demoralisation" of this period in Bolivia.

During the first phase of our relations, in the period 1987-88, the Bolivian comrades and the MRCI had a serious discussion on revolution and counter-revolution in Bolivia from the late 1970s to the end of the revolutionary period in 1986. The document that emerged—the MRCI Theses on Bolivia—formed the basis of the POB declaring fraternal relations with the MRCI.

The POB argue that the current position of the LRCI was a departure from these original theses and they are merely defending a "founding document" of their group. But the problem is that the theses were written between 1987 and 1988. The character of the defeat in 1986 was not fully understood and is not reflected in them. This is no surprise. Revolutionaries are, rightly, the last to leave the field of battle Thus, the Theses were necessarily provisional. They stated:

"It is possible that we are entering a period between two revolutionary periods (an inter revolutionary period)."

By 1992 we were able—indeed we had to be—less provisional, and more decisive. We were plainly not in an inter-revolutionary period. The revolutionary period was closed. But how had it been closed? What were the consequences for the types of slogans that should be advanced and what tasks had to be posed agitationally within the workers' vanguard? Indeed, given the decimation of the mining industry after 1986 the very question of who formed the vanguard of the Bolivian working class had to be reviewed. This whole question was ranged over very fully inside the MRCI and then the LRCI. It was debated and discussed with a leading member of the LRCI on a long working visit in 1989/90. It was discussed again with an IS member in Bolivia with all the comrades in 1991. At the Second Congress of the LRCI in 1991 it was debated out on the floor of the Congress but no decision was taken.

Between the Second (1991) and third congresses (1994) of the LRCI the discussion continued. The leadership of the LRCI further elaborated the argument in a series of documents and draft resolutions.

Unfortunately, while the comrades in POB listened, and declared themselves unconvinced, *they did not themselves write a single document* on the subject elaborating their position between the two Congresses.

True, they objected to other peoples' formulations in the first and incomplete draft of a Latin American Action Programme[2], 1992 (drafted in Europe because the comrades could not draft it themselves) and in a balance sheet of the class struggle in Latin America in the 1980s.

In short, they acted to veto a change of line but did not venture to elaborate their position. Eventually, the IEC in mid-1992 adopted a position on the question after a full discussion; four Latin American comrades contributed at that meeting. After the IEC decision the POB did not publish the line. They were pressed to do so by the IS and the IEC. Eventually, in 1993 they registered the position briefly in their paper but never published the full text of the resolution of the question which sets out the arguments. Meanwhile, they signalled they wished to take it to third congress in mid-1994. This was duly done. At the Congress the issue was again fully debated. More comrades spoke on this issue than on any other resolution or debate at Congress! More than a third of the POB membership were delegates to the Congress. Eventually, the POB resolution on the subject was defeated by over 2:1 with a third of the whole LRCI membership present. Only in February 1995 was an article explaining this position carried in Poder Obrero

So what do the PO(B) comrades mean when they say that the line was "imposed"? They mean that after five years of discussion on the IEC and at two congresses, they believed that they were not obliged to publicly carry out the line of the LRCI, agreed democratically. Rather, they regarded it as an illegitimate imposition. What does this show? It shows that the comrades do not understand the first thing about international democratic centralism, or democratic centralism generally. They are, unfortunately, stuck in the rut of national centredness and federalism that has long been a feature of Bolivian degenerate Trotskyism. All Villa's ranting about "colonial Trotskyism" is just so much third world guilt-tripping demagogy. In no other international organisation could there have been a more patient, loyal debate on the issues, or more willingness to listen to everything the comrades had to say.

## What kind of defeat?

In turning to the substance of the argument the first thing to note is that the comrades deliberately elide the terms "historic" and "strategic" as if it was all the same. But the distinction between the two terms became very important as the discussion unfolded. Early drafts of resolutions on the subject did use the term "historic" defeat to describe the battering the miners took in the mid to late 1980s. It was *agreed by all* to drop this term since it understandably suggested that the defeat inflicted was much the same as those suffered by the workers in Germany in 1933, the Paris Commune in 1871 or the Chilean workers in 1973; that is, bloody massacres, destruction of workers' organisations, imposition of military or bonapartist/fascist dictatorships.

So when the split statement claims that the LRCI position on Bolivia in 1986 was "the same as the butchery that destroyed the first workers' state in the world (the Paris Commune)" they know this to be untrue. The use of the term "strategic" defeat was both meant to suggest something different and yet quite specific in itself.

What did we mean by a strategic defeat in Bolivia after 1986? If we recognise strategy to be a combination of tactics aimed at winning a battle and thereby enabling us to win the war, then a strategic defeat means that we have lost a battle or series of battles and we are obliged to change course from a revolutionary offensive, to a course of defensive struggle.

That is what believe to be the case with regard to Bolivia. In 1986 we lost a decisive battle. Its effects were not merely tactical (not limited to the casualties of that battle alone) but were strategic—they had an impact on the entire working class of Bolivia and threw it back onto the defensive. Saying this, recognising the strategic character of this defeat, does not mean that we change our strategic goals—the dictatorship of the proletariat. It means that an offensive to win those goals is off the agenda for a whole period. That is all the term means.

A 1992 IEC resolution on the balance of class forces in Bolivia concluded its lengthy appreciation of the events during and after 1986 with this comment:

"In previous defeats (1964 and 1972) the Bolivian miners and workers suffered greater state repression (deaths and imprisonment of union leaders, illegalisation of certain activities for a while) but the class and the unions remained intact and capable of an early revival of generalised class struggle. But the mid-1980s defeat was worse in that it gave a big objective blow by reducing the numbers of the core of the agency of social revolution (the working class) and it ruptured the links that bound the political vanguard with the rest of the working class, assisting the latter in the task of generalising its sectoral resistance into mass, consciously political battles. The defeat of the 1986 strikes thus marked a strategic defeat for the Bolivian proletariat as a whole, implying that many years of regroupment and defensive struggles lay ahead of it."

By "strategic" we did not mean an abandonment of the strategy of proletarian revolution—ridiculous suggestion! We mean that the route to power has had to undertake a considerable detour (involving a time loss as well) because of the nature and significance of a defeat inflicted upon our movement. The entire working class movement of a country has been forced onto the defensive for a whole period by this defeat such that a generally defensive strategy has to replace an offensive one; i.e. one which puts the tasks of recovery or recomposition in the

foreground.

Since the "strategic defeat" in Bolivia many social and political conditions have changed dramatically, sufficiently so for us to mark it off as a watershed in the modern history of the Bolivian working class. Taken together the changes provide us with the content of our analysis. We can break the picture down into four segments:

(i) a shift in the class structure of Bolivia. With the defeat of 1985-86 the state was able to impose a radical programme of sackings in state owned industries that sharply restructured the relative weight of plebeian classes in Bolivia. The size and social weight of the extractive and industrial proletarians within the working class, and the size of the stable, employed part, is reduced. There are less than 2,000 miners working for COMIBOL today compared to 27,000 ten years ago;

(ii) secondly, the political and social weight of the peasants and the middle class/unproductive workers within the COB has been increasing while that of the miners has been decreasing. The miners were the political vanguard of the Bolivian workers. This was reflected in their weight within the leadership of the COB. Just as importantly. they saw themselves as the sector of the working class which could speak for all other sectors, could embody the hopes and aspirations of all workers. They stamped the whole of the COB with their aims, namely the struggle for socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Ever since 1990 this guaranteed leading "organic" position of the miners inside the COB has been under challenge from the peasants. Each year this challenge has been getting stronger. The 1994 COB Congress was preceded by a concerted campaign to dilute the class nature of the COB away from its character as a wage labourers' organisation of struggle to an organisation of the toilers (i.e. including peasants and urban petit bourgeois classes such as street traders). There are few landless or land hungry peasants in Bolivia, most are private property owners. This necessitated a frontal attack on the very ideological foundations of COB as it emerged from the 1952 revolution; an attack on the Theses of Pulacayo for example. These ideological attacks are unprecedented and were unthinkable before the strategic defeat. Alongside this process the relative weight of the COB in Bolivian political life has been diminished although it is still high. Other forms of "popular" protest of a multi-class character (e.g. the Civics) have been founded and come to the fore;

(iii) strikes and direct action have not disappeared since 1986 but they have changed their character. Up until about 1991 the working class are still suffering a hangover from the defeat of the mid 1980s. Since 1991 there has been increased number of strikes but they are defensive in character. This is true of the strikes and blockades in 1995 which led to the imposition of the state of emergency in April.

The strikes in March this year by teachers were a defensive response to proposals to "reform" education and remove the historic gains of the 1952 revolution such as free, non-selective education, educational autonomy, and opposition to privatisation.

Many of the struggles have been lost, some forced the government into compromising and re-routing their attacks. But unemployment has increased and wages have declined, poverty has increased. The government is pushing ahead undeterred with its neo-liberal plans. In 1995 the government has succeeded in selling off two of the more important state companies to European imperialist countries despite opposition. The government is implementing the coca eradication plans demanded by the USA.

Moreover, withdrawal of labour has become relatively less important as a weapon than hunger strikes and is another indication of the nature of the period. The peasants are the most militant sector and often the most feared by the government. This fact increases their bargaining power inside the COB and adds weight to their claim that the present "organic structure" (i.e. voting strength) inside the COB is outmoded. In short, the very balance of the workers' and peasants' alliance, at the heart of the COB since its foundation, has been undergoing a profound metamorphosis;

(iv) finally, the political character of the COB leadership and the miners' union leadership has undergone a major shift to the right. The left social democratic and Stalinist leaders have been eclipsed by leaders that support openly bourgeois parties (e.g. MBL).

This then is the real content of the defensive period opened up by the strategic defeat of 1985/86.

## Did the "imposed" line hinder the work of POB in 1995?

The overwhelmingly dominant "Trotskyist" organisation in Bolivia is the POR of G. Lora. Though the organisation probably has little more than 200 cadres its political influence is far greater than this would suggest. In particular they lead the urban La Paz teachers' union, a union that has been very combative over the years and whose struggles have often drawn in others behind them.

The great political defect of the POR is its facile revolutionary processism; pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situations are ever present or imminent. The taking of power is ever but a short grasp away. Whatever the real balance of class forces, defensive, immediate demands are skated over—the seizure of power is always on the horizon.

The PO(B), in the person of its "historic leader" J. Villa, is rooted in this method and tradition. PO(B) members feel this pressure today. Despite our best efforts the POB have never drawn up or published a serious public critique of the POR and its false method. This has been the biggest hindrance to the work and growth of the POB as a small propaganda group. A group that does not settle accounts with its main rival and the tradition from which it has sprung will remain crippled from birth.

The failure to make a conscious break with the centrist method of the POR means that the POB will repeat these mistakes. This is the reason why the POB criticise the LRCI for pessimism and defeatism over Bolivia; they find it difficult to say "what is". They say that:

*"When the last general strike broke out we were obliged to declare that Bolivia had suffered a strategic defeat and for this reason the line argued had to use minimum and unitary demands that disarmed the section. In a large demonstration the POB militants had to sell a paper in which it was said that we were living through a strategic defeat."*

Leaving aside the characteristic demagogy (the strategic defeat occurred in 1986, nine years previously, plenty of time for a process of recovery and recomposition to begin) it is a plain lie to say that the LRCI imposed minimum demands and demands for unity as we shall see.

In times of relative passivity in the class struggle after 1986 the POB reluctantly accepted the practical consequences of the nature of the defeat. But under the pressure of a revival of class struggle the POB always tended to revert back to their POR roots. So, for example, one argument by Villa (in 1992) advanced against the majority line of the LRCI on the strategic defeat was:

" . . . that despite the defeat, nevertheless, the working class organisations until now exist, fight, every year launch constant strikes and demonstrations etc. After seven years of neo-liberalism the different pro-IMF governments, despite their significant advances, couldn't impose their programmes of privatisation of education, health etc"

In other words, the class struggle does not cease. But this was only the beginning of wisdom. The decisive question was: what was the character of those strikes, how successful were they; what were their aims; did they achieve them; how well sup-

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[2] Both then and since the comrades disloyally refer to this incomplete draft to "prove" that the International Secretariat of the LRCI was opposed to various demands not yet dealt with in this draft. They do and did this despite having been told at the time that the draft was incomplete and was for their comments and additions. They have more than once accepted this as the truth. Yet it never stops Villa repeating what he knows to be a total fabrication when he gets a new audience.

ported were they?

When these questions were asked then the balance sheet was not all so positive.

As to the events this year, the line of the LRCI was not at all a hindrance if understood properly and not posed in an absurd passive way.

The tasks of the day in the face of the teachers' strikes of March and the peasant blockades was not to "explain" to the masses that they were living through a strategic defeat and therefore cease their struggle; this is a caricature that only people with little or no grasp of the Marxist application of perspectives could come up with. The task of the revolutionary vanguard was to first, orient the workers in struggle around a series of immediate *and transitional* demands that would consolidate, unify and generalise the struggles, and point out as concretely as possible the next steps; secondly, it was necessary to patiently explain the obstacles in the way of success as a result of the damage done to the working class as a result of the accumulated defeats since the mid 1980s. It was indeed vital to polemicise against those who blithely ignore these obstacles and think that it is possible to leap over them by an effort of subjective will, in classic POR fashion.

In this there was very little difference between the LRCI and the POB in March-June, especially after the state of siege was imposed in April. In *Workers Power* 190 in June we published the position of the POB in the April/May period and it posed the tasks concretely and correctly: release the prisoners; drop the charges; end the state of siege; scrap the government plans and meet the wage demands.

These are immediate and defensive demands that fully correspond to the balance of forces between the labour movement and the government. They raise demands upon the COB leadership and call for the base of the COB to organise itself to prevent a betrayal by their leaders.

It does not pose tasks that are not achievable in the immediate future; it does not indulge in ultra-left fantasies about seizing power or leaping over the leadership of the COB.

How then did this line hinder the work of the POB?

Because it unavoidably isolated the comrades from the more voluntarist of the POR periphery who had illusions about what was possible? Perhaps. The biggest criticism one could make of the PO(B)'s positions was that, they did not polemicise or even warn against the misleadership of the POR and they did not issue any sharp or clear warnings about the likely betrayal of the COB leadership. On this last point Villa himself was very critical of them.

Thus all the nonsense that the LRCI was responsible for PO(B)'s "failures" or, "demoralisation" was simply a cover up for their own failings. If they were demoralised it was because, like the POR, they had hopelessly exaggerated expectations of this phase of struggle and the defeats were unexpected. We have seen this pattern several times over the last five years or more. It is a serious weakness. It means the comrades are only enthusiastic and effective revolutionists during a general advance or a general defensive struggle of the class.

Retreat or defeat puts them into a darkened room. The Bolivian workers and their international co-thinkers hear nothing of them for months. When they re-emerge it is always to assert that nothing serious has happened and that anyway their problems were all caused by the IS in Europe. The real hindrance to the work of the LRCI around Bolivia, for example, during the state of siege after April this year, was the Bolivian section!

Despite constant appeals we failed to get essential information from POB concerning the fate and condition of arrested teachers' leaders, material from their union, addresses to receive the solidarity funds collected in Europe. The POB were the only Bolivian group with solid international ties during the emergency which should have been used to great political effect on their periphery at home; but the chance was squandered.

Was it possible to overcome this terrible methodological weakness? We believed so which is why we patiently persisted. But at the end of the day the debate over the balance of class forces in Bolivia during the last ten years has always been sacrificed on the altar of an altogether "bigger " question; José Villa's inveterate factionalism.

In 1992 neither Jose Villa nor the POB could bring themselves to vote for the "strategic defeat" conclusion for one main reason: the polemic served the purpose of providing grist to the mill of the a more general accusation that the LRCI leadership was "defeatist, pessimistic and rightist". For this they had to make themselves believe that this debate was but another battle in the long war to stop the IS shifting the League to the right "under the pressure of imperialism".

Hence, the POB could only come up with dogmatic and schematic objections to the analysis while at the same time having little alternative but to concede the programmatic consequences of the analysis on a day to day basis.

This factional attitude hindered the work and growth of the POB. It froze a healthy debate, not least inside the POB itself. Over the course of the 1990s the differences within the POB section (and between POP and POB) over the tactics and the precise evaluation of the Bolivian class struggle have been at least as great if not greater than those between the POB comrades and anyone in the international leadership.

Differences exist on the question of whether there is a definable vanguard in the Bolivian working class; whether the teachers should be considered part of the working class or middle class; whether to agree to proposals that would change the structure of the COB.

The political development of the POB was thus hindered by artificially suppressing important issues in the name of keeping up a common front against the alleged defeatism of the LRCI over the 1986 events.

## Once again on 1991

*"For the LRCI the main enemy is the absence of democracy. For this reason the leadership of the LRCI prefers the victory of Yeltsin and the Russian bourgeois parliament in 1991 and prefers making united fronts with the "democratic" parties against Stalinism."*

The attempted coup in 1991 and the LRCI's response to it has been a source of debate in the LRCI for some time. The faction that has now become the Communist Workers Group in New Zealand and Villa have frequently accused us of "siding with imperialism" or even crossing class lines on this question. The POB's resolution now adds that through our position we give "the world bourgeoisie the right to interfere in a degenerate proletarian dictatorship in order to subvert it."

Nobody reading the resolution of the LRCI on this question could take these charges seriously. In what way did we support the counter-revolution? By supporting Yeltsin's attempt to seize power? Did we call for "bourgeois democracy"? Not at all. We argued for workers' and soldiers' councils, for using the political turmoil in order to launch political revolution. As a resolution adopted in the midst of these events explained (printed in *Trotskyist International* No. 7) :

"The greatest danger to the working class now that the coup has collapsed is Yeltsin. The greatest tragedy for the Soviet working class would be to hitch itself to the wagon of Yeltsin or the Democratic Forum . . . Yeltsin is no friend of the working class. He represents all the elements in the former bureaucratic caste who have abandoned the prospect of bureaucratic parasitism based on the proletarian property relations in favour of becoming the new ruling class of a restored capitalist Russia."

This was written on 22 August 1991. The "oppositionists" who have deserted the LRCI uttered not one word of protest at this resolution at the time and not one word outlining an alternative position. Instead, the resolution's clear position of opposition to Yeltsin has been systematically ignored by Villa and co for four years.

What happened in August? Once the Emergency Committee launched its coup attempt, our duty was to defend the real (bourgeois) democratic gains from all attempts to crush them. We would have been in a *de facto* bloc with all those prepared to act for this objective (in fact, for only three days), without in

any way seeking to get the restorationist forces into government. Such was the episodic character of the tactic that in the real world we probably wouldn't have had time to conduct the sort of negotiations with Yeltsin that would have revealed whether or not he would oblige us by meeting our conditions for united action.

Our response to Villa and the others who have attacked our position on August 1991 has always been the same - to demonstrate that their abstract and dogmatic attachment to "defencism" would have led them into, at best, a purely abstentionist position during the coup. They would have stayed at home. By contrast we were very clear in relation to defencism. The immediate issue was not an attack on the social basis of the USSR - even though it would, as we pointed out in our resolution, become so under a Yeltsin government - but an attack on the concrete gains that the workers had won.

As Trotsky argued, "it is necessary to know clearly and precisely how to formulate slogans which correspond to the concrete situation. But above all it is necessary to establish clearly just what we are defending, just how we are defending it, against whom we are defending it." To have abstained on the grounds of "defencism" would have meant not establishing clearly what we were struggling to defend.

Moreover, now that, unlike Trotsky, we have seen a few political revolutions, from East Germany, through Hungary to Tiananmen Square and beyond, we can recognise that things will rarely be cut and dried. Restorationist forces - be they "honest" social-democrats or out and out pro-capitalists - will almost certainly be present. How can we decide the balance of defencism and political revolution? For example, in Poland in 1981, it was clear that an important section of the Solidarnosc leadership around Walesa was committed to a pro-market, restorationist policy. What should have been our attitude to these forces? If Villa and co think that they should have been crushed, then at least we know where we are.

If they think that the groups that went on to form the MRCI were right to oppose Jaruzelski's coup we need to know why and how our tactics then were so very different to our tactics in August 1991 - certainly Walesa and Yeltsin exhibit no great strategic differences in our view. Do they to Villa and the POB? If so, what are they and why was it correct to bloc with Walesa's supporters in 1981 and not with Yeltsin's in 1991? The deserters cannot answer this question, mainly because they are not interested in the answer.

## Not a principled faction fight but unprincipled combinations

It is very significant that Villa and the Latin American sections did not raise these criticisms at the time (i.e. August-September-October 1991). They merely climbed on board the criticisms of the RTT, a US group which at that time had fraternal relations with the LRCI. Towards the end of 1991, shortly before the second congress of the LRCI, the RTT savagely and without warning denounced the LRCI for having crossed class lines.

They appealed to the LRCI membership to overthrow its leadership, acting as if they were a faction inside the League. This they were not. Indeed they had delayed and delayed joining due to precisely the political differences that led to their break—chronic Stalinophilia. The LRCI, faced with this assault on it as centrist betrayers, naturally rescinded its invitation to the RTT to participate in its second congress, an invitation made on the basis that they would apply to join at the congress.

Villa, who had hitherto not taken a position on the Yeltsin coup, denounced the IS for "expelling" the RTT, demanded their presence at the second congress and promoted a diplomatic version of their criticisms. Despite having been defeated overwhelmingly on this issue both at the second and the third congress he uses it as part of his armoury to prove that the LRCI sided with imperialism. Although if this issue is such an acid test of a revolutionary leadership why did Villa never form a faction to remove the existing leadership? This is a question he has never been able to answer. Moreover, why did he wait for eight months after the coup (and four months after the second congress) before putting *in writing* his first mention of a difference with the IS position? The reason is simple.

Villa is a classical *factionalist*; never forming an open faction to fight the leadership but never ceasing to slander this leadership as revisionists, as bureaucrats and as capitulating to bourgeois democracy. At the same time he tirelessly wages a subterranean struggle, accusing the day to day executive body of the LRCI of countless crimes and injustices, most of which were never substantiated, and none of which were ever upheld by an IEC or a congress. There is a short historic term for such a person in the Trotskyist movement—an Abernite.

For Villa and the POB, the Yeltsin issue is the most dog-eared factional one which they seek to use against the LRCI. Nowhere and at no time have we ever called for imperialism "to interfere in a workers' state", nowhere have we supported such interference. The bloc with Yeltsin's supporters was a necessary tactic to stop the immediate danger of the coup succeeding. Moreover, those supporters would have included such workers as the miners. Such is the damage that Stalinism had done to the working class that sections of workers such as the miners were amongst Yeltsin's most staunch supporters at the time. Are the POB against a bloc with such workers because they were then Yeltsinites? If so they should say so clearly. But then again, to ask our opponents to say anything clearly is asking far too much of them.

Take a look at the programme we advanced in the resolution on 22 August, which included amongst other things, the call for workers' councils throughout the USSR, for a revolutionary party and for "no political support for Gorbachev, Yeltsin or the Democratic Forum", and consider, how does this programme match the deserters' charge that we "prefer the victory of Yeltsin"?

## Rwanda

*"In Rwanda the IS called for the military victory of the RPF. This is an arm of the bloody Ugandan dictatorship that defended the ambition of the old Tutsi elite to re-establish its power. This communalist army was trained by the CIA and was resisted by the bulk of the Hutu majority (85%) of Rwanda's population."*

The rest of this section of the POB document goes on to explain the details of the RPF's ethnic cleansing programme against the Hutus. And our "support" for the RPF is explained by the fact that it was a great favourite of "democratic imperialism". Most of the arguments in the POB resolution are scant on facts or proofs. Accusations are made, but verifications are absent. To correct this let us quote what the IS resolution said about the RPF:

"In Rwanda in 1959 the Hutus rose against the Tutsi elite and overthrew their rule massacring some 100,000. and driving hundreds of thousands of others into Uganda, Zaire and Congo. These Tutsi exiles were to become elite military forces in Uganda allied to Yoweri Mussevini's guerrilla war against Idi Amin and Milton Obote. The RPF is indeed a creation of this milieu, closely allied to Mussevini's military bonapartist regime to this day. Mussevini wants to install a regime friendly to himself in Rwanda and to send back the large number of Tutsi exiles who settled in Uganda over the last thirty years thus freeing land there to meet the chronic land hunger in Uganda. Thus he sponsored the invasion of Rwanda in 1990 which unleashed the chain of events which led to the present carnage."

This hardly camouflages the nature of the RPF does it? But, once again, this is only the beginning of wisdom. The key question at the time was what should revolutionaries do to stop the genocide that was being perpetrated by the Hutu chauvinist regime against the Tutsis? This genocide was one of the most horrific in history. Whole swathes of the Hutu population were deliberately implicated in it by the chauvinists. Its aim was the eradication of every living Tutsi in Rwanda. What answer do Villa and the POB give to this population in the face of this genocide. None whatsoever. The LRCI concluded that a tactical bloc was necessary for the sole purpose of halting the genocide. We wrote:

"In the present conflict there is no socialist force. Nevertheless, socialists cannot be neutral. Whatever the RPF's own guilt in perpetrating some of the massacres, it is the government, army and army sponsored chauvinist Hutu gangs that are carrying through the genocide. While we therefore condemn any massacres perpetrated by RPF forces and call for organised resistance by workers' and peasants' militia to all of the pogroms, we begin from the need to defeat the government.

The predominant character of the conflict is that it is a war of chauvinist genocide and reaction by the government and army. It is on this basis, and only on this basis, that we now support a military bloc with the RPF to defeat the government, as the best means of stopping the genocide. However, we would give no political support to any RPF government that might be installed as a result of such a victory. Indeed we would oppose the RPF using its military victory to establish an RPF government against the will of the majority of Rwanda's population. The RPF is in no sense a socialist organisation.

It is bourgeois and it will seek to create a bourgeois government, albeit based on the compromise power sharing solution agreed in the Arusha accords of 1993. The RPF is a regular military force, trained and equipped abroad, that could not be expected to install a democratic regime. An RPF government would almost certainly be a military bonapartist dictatorship. Its international backers, Moussevine's Uganda and US imperialism, have no interest in political freedom for all Rwandans. The hostility and fear which the majority of Hutus show towards it ensure that it will not base itself on democratic rights and liberties for the majority. The RPF, despite the presence of some Hutus, is predominantly led by and made up of Tutsis, the former politically privileged section of the population and a small minority. The "historically accumulated privileges", maintained in exile, education, military training all make it likely that the installation of the RPF in power will mean the restoration of the Tutsi to a position of political privilege, control of the army and state bureaucracy etc., if not to a position from which to wreak bloody revenge on the Hutu majority. Therefore despite the RPF's claims to multi-ethnicity socialists cannot place any reliance on these.

At the moment it is clearly not in the interests of a small minority ethnic group to proclaim their intention of ethnically cleansing 90 per cent of the population. Realism and elementary self-interest dictate that the RPF presents itself as "multi-ethnic" and anti-genocidal. More than that it is true that the overall character of its campaign is not genocidal or "communalist" against Hutus. Hence it should not be allowed to install a new dictatorship on the back of any victory. It should be forced to relinquish power immediately, if it won a military victory, to a democratic constituent assembly. The way for the masses to ensure that this happens is for them to form workers' and peasants' committees in Kigali, in every town and village and in the refugee camps, open to Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. We argue that the road out of the present nightmare in Rwanda lies in the development of a socialist programme and a socialist leadership, capable of building a multi-ethnic workers' state."

Where in any of this are the concessions to imperialism? This was the only practical answer to stop the genocide. The telling point against Villa and the POB is that they do not so much as mention the genocide. They show a stomach churning indifference to the fate of the Tutsis who were being systematically slaughtered. They refer only to the deaths since the RPF's victory as proof of their correctness. But they ignore the fact that so far there has been no genocide against the Hutus who have returned to Rwanda and that most of the deaths have been caused by disease and starvation in refugee camps. This is a tragic situation. But it is not genocide. And it stems directly from the fact that the Hutus fled because, having been implicated in the actual genocide that took place, they feared they would suffer reprisals. This is not ethnic cleansing either. But then why let facts, why let human lives, why let the difference between a genocide on the one hand and epidemics on the other, get in the way of a good factional argument. Such is the sickening logic of demagogic anti-imperialism.

And, finally, the only real direct intervention by imperialism in this whole affair (apart from a Belgian containment exercise) was the arrival of French troops - on the side of the Hutus!

## Democracy and the LRCI: on factions and tendencies

*"In the light of us not being permitted to exercise our right to form a tendency inside the LRCI we declare ourselves a tendency of the international workers' movement."*

This lie is easily dealt with. In July 1995 PO/B informed the IS that they wished to form a tendency over Bosnia, Rwanda and Haiti and that one member was going to re-raise the question of the nature of the defeat in Bolivia. Neither the IS nor the IEC refused them their constitutional right to form an international tendency. Rather, it simply insisted that they must first perform their outstanding unfulfilled duties to the membership of the League. The IEC agreed that such a tendency would be registered and the resources allocated to a tendency discussion as soon as the LRCI's positions on Bosnia were translated into Spanish, precisely so that the Bolivian tendency members, three quarters of whom cannot read English, could actually consider them firsthand and not be obliged to take it on trust via the account of Villa. The reason for our concern over this was simple. Villa has become, over the years, a by-word in the LRCI for a complete lack of objectivity, for systematic disloyalty to the views of his political opponents, for polemical demagogy and for organisational unscrupulousness. All of these feature heavily in the final split of the Bolivian section of the League.

To ask the comrades to translate *one* document of their opponents and to read it before finally signing a tendency platform: is that so harsh and draconian a response that they had no option but to walk out of the LRCI? How can you have a serious debate with a tendency, most of whose members have not read any of the many resolutions and articles that have been written by the LRCI leadership on the very issues around which the tendency has been formed? This is so elementary for serious political people as to not need saying. But by their very declaration, they prove they are not serious and that they lack an elementary comradeliness and internationalism.

They want to disagree with positions that they have not actually read and they want to desert their organisation rather than discuss with their comrades in the other sections.

All this happened in the context of the declaration of a faction by the New Zealand minority, the immediate and unconditional recognition of this faction, and the decision to translate all its documents at least into French and Spanish. The financial resources, facilities and arrangements for all these translations were made by the LRCI. The Bolivian comrades themselves in fact had a very bad record of doing any translation work related to the internal life of the League. Indeed, on more than one occasion money has been allocated for translations that have subsequently not been made. The POB was asked to translate the Bosnia material so as to speed up the process of allowing a real tendency debate to develop.

The Statutes of the LRCI are quite clear. Tendencies and factions have duties as well as rights. The New Zealand minority had fulfilled their duties to the League and despite the enormous inconvenience to the LRCI of a factional struggle only one year after a congress, in which most if not all of these matters had been discussed, we set out to accord the comrades their rights. The Bolivian comrades however were in enormous deficit with regard to their duties to the League. Thus their elementary duty before the League commenced a fullscale tendency struggle was to translate one document from their opponents relevant to the debate. The "tendency" refused to carry out this duty. As the statutes make clear:

"Factions and tendencies must fully observe the principles of democratic centralism."

## Did the LRCI violate internal democracy and refuse to discuss Bosnia?

*" . . . internal democracy came to be restricted more and more. Insults, subjectivism against critics, manoeuvres and vio-*

*lations of the statutes have been becoming a norm."*

In fact it is the PO(B) comrades, terribly misled by Villa, who have trampled on internal democracy, and failed to follow the principles of democratic centralism. Far from the leadership trying to block a discussion on Bosnia the IS had put down for discussion at the July IEC a new set of theses reviewing our entire position on the subject since the beginning of the break up of Yugoslavia. This was one of three key reasons we wanted the Bolivian IEC member to come to the IEC to ensure he could be part of this discussion (the other reasons were the continued failures of the Bolivian section to meet the requirements laid down by the third congress of the LRCI and because the New Zealand minority had declared a faction and the IEC would be discussing their faction platform and the IS reply to it).

If our Bolivian comrades were serious about participating in the internal life of the LRCI, including in struggling against the "revisionism", "pro-imperialism", "colonial Trotskyism" "bureaucratism" of its leadership then here was the time and place to do it. Why not confront the revisionists face to face? Did they even try? No! Despite having been sent the money to come, despite admitting that they had no material reasons to prevent their IEC member from coming, POB manoeuvred to try to pass their vote to José Villa.

Did they have the right to do this as they claim? No. The constitution of the LRCI and its practice over five years makes clear that this manoeuvre was a breach of both the letter and the spirit of democratic centralism. Our statutes and practice lay down that all sections must be represented. They allow for alternates where it might happen that the IEC member could not attend. This is doubly important where, as in LA and other countries like New Zealand, face to face contact can only be at the time of IECs and congresses plus visits by individuals. The presence of IEC members from these countries is especially important to an international tendency which is building itself on the basis of real democratic centralism.

The third congress elected a Bolivian alternate so that if the IEC member was unable to attend for objective reasons (illness, work), then the alternate could attend as an IEC member with a decisive vote. Indeed, this was exactly what happened at the preceding IEC, without a murmur of protest from anyone. But José Villa set out to overthrow all this in order to attend the IEC himself (it was not being held in Britain). Why? Because he wanted, above all, to enter into negotiations with the IEC member from New Zealand, to manoeuvre with the Proletarian Faction (which he had not joined but with whom he was conducting secret correspondence). So vital did he regard his own attendance that he "petitioned" (their words) the Bolivian IEC member and the alternate *not to attend the IEC* but to designate Villa—he was an alternate but a member of Workers Power Britain— to represent *them*.

This was an outrageous flouting of both the spirit and the letter of our statutes, and of the democratic decision of the third congress of the LRCI with regard to the IEC's composition—a major discussion as to Villa's suitability for IEC membership occurred at the third congress. In this discussion Villa demanded to be on the IEC to "represent the Latin American sections". Yet he refused their own repeated requests to return to Latin America to work with them. The European comrades placed no pressure on him to do so—perhaps they were wrong. Villa's reasons for staying in Europe were, ostensibly at least, entirely personal. The result was that Villa was not elected to the IEC and the congress chose what it considered the two best comrades resident in and working politically in Peru and Bolivia. Villa was chosen as an alternate and was regarded by all as a more or less permanent member of the British section.

Rather than seeking to bureaucratically prevent a tendency struggle the IS and IEC had, since the end of 1992 at least, urged the comrades in Bolivia and Villa to form a faction or tendency on the basis of the sharp and sharpening criticisms they were making of the LRCI's leadership over Bosnia, the August 1991 coup and so on. Why did we do this? So that:

a) all the issues could be clarified in an open struggle;

b) the rights to representation of such a tendency or faction at congress could be guaranteed.

Villa, the POB and the members of the future splitters in New Zealand declined these repeated offers and appeals—for no good reasons given their differences. Or rather, their only good reason was to effectively undermine the decisions of the third congress by waiting until after it had voted down the positions they support (which it did) and then, after it, declaring factions and tendencies on these issues. Factions and tendencies are a "necessary evil" in a democratic centralist organisation, as Trotsky explained, but such a spirit of reckless and unprincipled factionalism is neither necessary or evil - it is simply a petit bourgeois pastime. We are well rid of the people who cannot break from it.

## A minority captures the LRCI for revisionism?

*"Due to the fact that the LRCI then suffered strong internal contradictions and tried to reconcile two very distinct methods - the Trotskyist one of its original documents (such as the Trotskyist Manifesto, the Fundamental Principles of Our Programme, and the Degenerated Revolution) and the semi-state capitalist one of the old Stalinophobic minority - internal democracy came to be restricted more and more."*

The thesis of the Villa/POB document is that they are the guardians of the Trotskyist legacy of the LRCI while a minority has hijacked the League's leading bodies. Hence, bureaucratism has replaced democracy and pro-imperialism has replaced internationalism.

Let us just consider the political issues on which this is based. First, the supposed minority on Afghanistan in 1980 and on the character of the state in the Stalinist States. Here we have another Villa amalgam. One comrade, now in the leadership of the LRCI, is being talked about. His position on Afghanistan was argued in an internal discussion in Workers Power Britain in 1980(!). He was defeated, and that was the end of the matter as far as he was concerned. It was Villa who decided to re-raise the issue in the context of an entirely separate discussion.

On the question of the character of the form of the state apparatus in the degenerate workers' states the minority is—well, a minority. Villa has, both internally and externally, tried to present this debate as over the class character of the degenerate workers' states. Since everyone in the LRCI, majority and minority, completely accepts that this is derived from the planned property relations Villa's disloyal attempts to sow confusion on this question isolated him even within the majority with whom he associated himself. It is also laughable to note Villa's claims that it was the Latin American comrades who led the fight to defeat the minority. It was comrades on the IS who wrote the majority's key documents and amendments, led the debates in pre-Congress discussions in the sections (including in Bolivia and Peru), and at congress itself—not Villa or PO/B. Indeed, the majority of the Bolivian comrades did not read the documents on this subject and got their only educational discussions on it from IS members. Villa stayed away from these discussions despite being invited to attend them. As with the RTT and then the Proletarian faction Villa merely tried to exploit the evident differences for his factional purposes.

The minority lost its position on the form of the state apparatus in eastern Europe at the third congress of the LRCI. But of course there was no one majority or one minority at Congress; there were many fluid and changing alliances depending on the issues under debate.

Villa' real venom against two of the minority on the "state debate" was that they were important members of the majority which has for four years fought his assault on the League's democratic centralism, fought his factionalism and held him to account for his indiscipline.

So how come the minority on the state question is now dominating the political line of the LRCI? The answer is simple - it is not, any more than the minorities on the Fifth International, on the character of Eurofascism, on the nature of the current period or on any of the other debates that have taken place inside the LRCI, are dominating the LRCI. The LRCI is made up of a collective leadership which, while differing on

several individual issues, is united on its fundamental method. That unity evolved over many years of struggle in which respect for differences and comradely debate contributed to collectivity. Once decisions are taken, however we carry them out loyally, not disrupting the propaganda and activity of the League, by refusals to implement its line and insistence on endless discussion. We are fighting propaganda groups not petit bourgeois discussion circles.

The leaders of the LRCI and its sections have, with the single exception of Villa, never used present or past differences to factionalise against other leaders time after time. The reason for this is not that differences haven't been important or hard fought, but because these differences existed amongst people who are united in their fundamental political method.

José Villa did not understand this. For him a difference is like original sin - it stays forever and is useful not for what it is actually about (he knows next to nothing of the ancient dispute in Workers Power over Afghanistan) but for its usefulness as a factional weapon. That is why the fact that the supposedly all powerful minority were defeated on the state and have loyally accepted their defeat and acted accordingly, he still harps on about it even though in the debate on the state he was on the winning side!

What lies behind this attitude is a deep seated hostility both to democratic centralism (accepting the will of the majority and loyally abiding by it) and collective leadership - accepting that there is no room for a *caudillo* on the leading bodies of a genuinely democratic centralist organisation. The LRCI set itself on course for genuine democratic centralism. This meant building collective leadership bodies. This was embodied in the Statutes adopted at the third congress. Villa, and Villa alone, voted against those statutes. We know why. He is against anything that binds him to collective decision making.

The minority comrades on the state form question are an integral part of a collective leadership, one that has evolved over many years and has the confidence of the overwhelming majority of the LRCI.

During those years that leadership played the major role in drafting all documents referred to by the POB. The POB on the other hand has played virtually no role in drafting any of the major programmatic statements of the League. Villa himself has, especially in earlier years, before his factional obsessions got the better of him, made serious if partial contributions to those documents. Are the "state minority" comrades subverting the documents they themselves drafted? No, but Villa and the POB certainly are.

We would be the last to deny that the LRCI has made programmatic changes, we believe advances, since the adoption of all of these documents. It would be very strange if we hadn't given the momentous changes that have taken place in the world and the lessons for the class sruggle and the programme that we have learnt as a result of those changes and events. But Villa suggests, especially on the question of Stalinism, that these changes have been decisive methodological revisions. To prove this he suggests that previously we regarded parliaments as the "worst enemies" of the working class. We do not want to belittle the changes and advances we have made, but we do want to belittle Villa's wild claims about our alleged revisionism.

Take the much disputed question of "democracy and the national question" in the workers' states. The original draft of the *Trotskyist Manifesto* states unambiguously:

"Even where a separatist movement threatens to espouse social counter-revolution we continue to defend the right to state independence while maintaining the struggle for proletarian power." (pp 101/102)

This has guided us on the national question ever since. The deserters, who see the nationalities and their struggle for independence as tools of imperialism, are a million miles away from the *Trotskyist Manifesto* on this.

On the question of "democracy" in the workers' states, the *Fundamental Principles of Our Programme*, outlines a series of democratic demands fought for by working class methods and invested with a working class content. It stresses:

"This method of fighting for democratic demands in countries where capitalism has been overthrown ensures that democratic illusions are superseded by the triumph of proletarian democracy and the defeat of bureaucratic tyranny." (*Permanent Revolution* No. 1 p119)

Compare this with the position of Villa and the POB which prefers to trample on the masses democratic illusions because "parliaments" are the "worst of enemies". No, the "minority" who are supposed to have acted against these fundamental positions are far closer to them than our Stalinophile enemies.

Last, but not least, on the defence of the workers' states, consider the position of the *Degenerated Revolution*, which argued:

"For Trotskyists the highest good is always the independent mobilisation of the working class for its historic revolutionary goals." (p86)

It then went on to quote Trotsky's reminder that "the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR is subordinate for us to the question of the world proletarian revolution."

This is somewhat different from the POB/Villa position of seeing the agent of defencism in the decaying remnants of Stalinism. And once again it shows who is really loyal to the positions and traditions of the M/LRCI.

Those traditions have been upheld *and developed* since 1989 by a collective leadership that is not at all exclusive and that has not once violated democratic centralism.

Naturally, there have been changes to the *Trotskyist Manifesto* since it was written in 1989. We finished the work on it just as the world was changing dramatically and a new post-Cold War period was opening up. Our programme was put to the test of events, above all the challenge from below to Stalinist dictatorships. We were given good cause to look critically at our programme, especially in regard to the scale and depth of resistance of the working class in Eastern Europe to Stalinism and their atitude to the defence of post-capitalist planned property.

As Trotskyists we inherited much doctrine on the question of Stalinism and the political revolution. But if you fail to re-elaborate this doctrine where it has failed to live up to the test of events then it becomes turned into *dogma*.

This attitude to programme as holy writ has dogged the Trotskyist movement for decades since the war; many still insist on "returning" to the Transitional Programme of 1938. Throughout the late 1970s and all of the 1980s we intervened energetically into the various regroupment initiatives to argue for the re-elaboration of the Transitional Programme in line with the method contained within it and on the basis of the many profound changes in the post-WW2 world order.

The *Trotksyist Manifesto* was our contribution to this task; how then could we do anything other than respond in the same spirit guided by the same considerations when we were faced with an equally profound change in the post-war world order as the years after 1989 have opened up?

It is not the LRCI which has abandoned the *Trotskyist Manifesto* but José Villa and the PO/B who failed to absorb the *Manifesto's* most basic lesson.

## Haiti - proof of an alien political method

Much of the comrades' political method can be reduced to the statement, "when US imperialism is for it then we are against it". If US imperialism is, ostensibly and hypocritically, for democracy in Haiti then they are against it and if the military dictator Raul Cedras is against it then he is, potentially at least, "against imperialism". So it is to him that they look to give critical support if only the Haitian army will attack the US army. If they do this then Villa and PO/B are for Cedras all the way, even if in the concrete circumstances this means being against the whole Haitian people (minus the *ton ton macoutes*, the death squads and the most criminal and reactionary elements of the landowners and bourgeoisie). After all Cedras and his murderers of the union and shanty town leaders would have been transformed at a stroke into "anti-imperialists", *if only* they had

opened fire on the US troops who at the time were guarding mass pro-Aristide demonstrations.

The logic looks childishly simple: Aristide is pro-imperialist; Cedras is against Aristide; therefore it is to Cedras that the ex-LRCI comrades appeal for an anti-imperialist fight. Such an "analysis" *is* politically childish. And what is missing from this little equation? *Only* the workers, the landless peasants and the urban poor of Haiti who suffered for so long under the Duvalier dictatorship, their unions crushed, their leaders assassinated. Never mind them! They don't realise, backward as they are, that the "main thing", here, now, everywhere and at any time is to fight the imperialism. Just as the poor deluded Russian workers in 1991, who had just emerged from seventy years of the Stalinist totalitarianism, the secret police, the Gulag, did not realise that the "main thing" was to overthrow Yeltsin, the agent of the White House.

Unfortunately the comrade's chosen "anti- imperialist" heroes very rarely heed their advice or play the role they assign to them. This is very fortunate for their reputation. They can remain safe behind the word processor, formally condemning both sides, but heaping most of the abuse on the one behind which the working masses, with all their democratic illusions, stand.

Only in Tiananmen Square did such forces succeed and look at the great success that has proved in preserving the Chinese workers' state!

You would think that after so many failures the Latin American comrades would learn their lesson. You would think they might have learned it from Trotsky—from Marx indeed. What is the lesson? "The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself". The working class is the irreplaceable agent for the defeat of capitalism, for the defeat of capitalist agents within the working class movement, or in the degenerate workers' states. Not the pampered, privileged and brutal bureaucracies. Not "anti-imperialist" colonels or generals. If the working class itself takes action to defend its historic gains then we can and will ally ourselves with any part of the bureaucracy that, for its own selfish reasons, does so too—whatever the latter's record. If the working class does not then we will not advocate brutal repression against them as the Spartacists and the IBT do, impotently aping the Stalinists of yesteryear.

Instead of patiently explaining, in a Leninist fashion, to the workers and peasants, who want democracy but who also mistakenly believe that imperialism will bring it, the error they are making; instead of warning them of their coming cruel disillusionment and waiting for their own experience to show them the error of their trust in pro-imperialist "democrats" these comrades, filled with despair at the turn around in the world since 1989, rush hysterically into the arms of the likes of Cedras, Mladic and the like and shriek "fight imperialism and we will support you to the end". Alas these appeals fall on deaf ears, these gentlemen are by this time already packing their bags, usually with the dollars they have plundered from the states they ruled.

The signatories of this resolution, written by Villa, inhabit a political fantasy world where the victims of genocide become its main perpetrators, where vile pro-imperialist generals are looked to as anti-imperialist heroes, where the corpse of Stalinism is expected to rise from the grave to defend the workers' states, where US imperialism is the sole enemy, where national struggles and mass movements for democratic rights are simply a conspiracy by imperialism.

What all this shows is that for these comrades the working class is not the subject of history, which a conscious revolutionary party has to prepare itself to lead. Instead their viewpoint is that of a struggle against imperialism, "the main (in fact the only) enemy" and for which any "objectively anti-imperialist" force will do no matter how reactionary this force is vis-a-vis the working class.

What is this outlook called? It is certainly not Trotskyism. It is a rotten centrist degeneration from Trotskyism hybridised with decaying Stalinism. It is a method the LRCI has repeatedly rejected - democratically. Their recognition that this method could never win a majority vote of approval inside the LRCI is what has finally led these splitters to leave us without a fight. All their protestations about bureaucratic centralism are a cover up for this fact.

## A note on the signatories.

The very first line of the declaration says it is signed by comrades "who until now have been working with the LRCI"; a curious choice of words to describe the relation of members of the LRCI to its democratic-centralist international.

Another glance, however, at the list of 15 comrades and the reasoning behind the choice of words is clear at once: only nine of the comrades who signed it were members of the LRCI!

Knowing this did not prevent José Villa headlining his own English version of the declaration "A Resolution from all the Latin American Members of the LRCI". It would not have such a striking effect if he had to continue "and a half dozen barely connected friends and associates of José Villa."

Of the six non-members, "working with the LRCI" is at best an exaggeration of their relationship either to the League or its Latin American sections. If by this phrase we can assume that they attend LRCI meetings or activities regularly, if infrequently, then three signatories in Peru are disqualified. No other comrade of the LRCI has met them since 1991 and we have been repeatedly told by the one member in Peru that they are incapable (for family, work or discipline reasons) or unwilling to carry out the duties of membership.

As for the PO/B comrades, two full members who signed up were so uninvolved in the life of the section that their leadership acknowledged in published minutes that they were not carrying out even the minimal duties of members.

The importance of this point is twofold. First, if criticism of the LRCI is to be taken seriously by those to whom it is addressed it can at least be expected that those comrades have followed the life of the LRCI, its publications and declarations with some degree of seriousness.

It goes without saying that as non-members they have never participated in the long and rich debate on many of these questions open only to members of the LRCI.

But it is worse than that. Half of these comrades have not even read the things they criticise in a language they read. Perhaps this explains, moreover, why such fabrications and exaggerations can go unchecked.

The second point to be made is that for Villa the distinction between "members" or "non-members" of the LRCI—in Latin America especially but not uniquely—was an academic point. The more important divide was "supporters" and "opponents" of José Villa whether inside or outside the LRCI.

Once one understands that then it is no mystery at all how non-members of the League but "supporters" of José Villa can be so well informed of debates inside the LRCI and so willing to criticise its positions despite their utter lack of organic connection to it.

Throughout the time that POB and POP were sections of the LRCI the leading bodies of the LRCI had to, time and again, insist that the requirements of a fighting propaganda group imposed minimum standards of commitment and activity on all its sections. Membership of the LRCI carries rights and imposes duties. One right is to fight for your positions; a reciprocal duty is to follow the debates and discussions inside the LRCI.

In Bolivia and Peru economic and social conditions make it more difficult than in Europe on average for working class people to find the time to belong to propaganda groups. One response is to dilute membership requirements.

The League rejects this since in a democratic organisation such as the LRCI every member carries the same weight and voting force; hence, it must be an informed and educated opinion. Anything else leads to the manipulation of unintegrated comrades by those with the time to devote themselves more fully to matters under debate.

José Villa never accepted this reasoning. Frustrated by the objective limits and slow tempo of building propaganda groups in poor Latin American countries he wanted to devise special

categories of members; ones who could not participate in the life of one of its cells under its discipline but "Poder Obrera*istas*" who by dint of their past or present membership of mass organisations or participation in strikes, would be given special dispensation.

In this way José Villa could boost the size of "his" sections (as he was fond of calling them) and thereby his prestige and, not the least consideration for him, the votes he could rely upon at Congresses and other leading bodies.

Now that Villa is free of the LRCI and it of him we will no doubt witness the dramatic and rapid expansion of the ex-LRCI sections in Peru and Bolivia, and an inflation of their influence and prestige within the Bolivian and Peruvian working class.

And so it will be proven that only the LRCI itself was holding back "all the Latin American members of the LRCI" from greater success. The only problem will be that this expansion of size and influence will belong to the same realm as Villa's politics on Bosnia, Haiti and everywhere else - the realm of fantasy.

## A balance sheet and prospects for the LRCI's work in Latin America

We have answered the main points of the Villa/POB document. Some minor accusations - that we are unwilling to defend Cuba, for example - we treat with the contempt they deserve. Our resolutions, a number of articles in our public press and our actions speak for themselves. But there remains the question of what the LRCI can learn from this whole episode.

Clearly this is not a case of patience rewarded. Our prolonged tolerance of Villa and the POB has been repaid with desertion, aggravated by the outright theft of $2400 advanced for air fares. Clearly people who do this have lost all sense of personal honour as working class militants. Nevertheless, our patience proves one important thing: for all the accusations of bureaucratism, it should be clear to everyone that our internal regime allows for wide political differences to be debated out within our ranks. Not one clause of our statutes has been violated during these debates except by Villa and his supporters. Thus the rights of minorities to form factions and tendencies have been defended and preserved. At every stage documents have been circulated and translated at considerable cost in terms of time and money. Every member who has been through the debates with Villa knows this to be the case and is confident that such internal democracy will continue.

But the other lesson of this split is to reaffirm our belief in democratic *centralism*. Our belief in its centrality has been confirmed in practice. It is the sharp end of the conflict between revolutionary politics and all deviation from it whether towards sectarianism or opportunism. The New Zealand splitters questioned the very validity of this method of organisation, believing centralism to be impossible in revolutionary organisations in the current period. We know from our own experience that this is untrue.

Since 1989 the LRCI has built up a functioning democratic centralism. We developed a common programme, *The Trotskyist Manifesto*, on the eve of the great upheavals in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. We have bound together in comradeship organisations in nine countries on this basis. We have been able to hold three full international congresses of our sections since then. We produce, on a roughly monthly basis, an international internal discussion bulletin open to all members, and public organs of the League in four languages. We have an international leadership representing all the sections which meets every six months for extensive discussions of theses and resolutions on programmatic issues and the tasks of party building, on key questions of the international class struggle and on the problems facing the sections. We have a weekly meeting international secretariat that since 1989 has involved comrades from different sections and different continents. From its foundation and on the suggestion of the British section, we adopted and fully implemented, statutory measures to prevent domination of the LRCI by its currently largest section—WP(B). Thus no one in the LRCI would recognise the slanderous picture Villa paints. That is why its retailing by the LRCI's political opponents is totally ineffectual, indeed self-defeating.

All this has taken enormous resources from the sections but has put back into them an incomparably more important resource—active internationalism. This is a million miles away from "obedience to London", the arrogant imposition of lines, "colonial Trotskyism" etc. that Villa and Co misrepresent it as being. So obvious is this to the members of the LRCI, so alien are such charges to their experience that virtually no one has ever sympathised with or solidarised with such accusations. That is why they dared not form either a tendency or a faction during their entire period in the LRCI. We believe that we have indeed re-created a living revolutionary international democratic centralism, just as we have re-elaborated a revolutionary programme. We clearly recognise that both are still far from the ultimate goal of a new international but they are in our view indispensable steps towards it.

Villa and the PO/B nominally accepted democratic centralism but completely rejected it in practice. For them centralism - unity in action, a democratically elected leadership centralising the work of the League, carrying out its decisions on a firm and disciplined basis - is simply bureaucratism. No matter that the LRCI, as a small and far from wealthy organisation, has no material basis for bureaucratism, no matter that the Latin American sections were always consciously and deliberately "over represented" at its congresses and on its leadership bodies to combat their fears of a Eurocentric approach, and indeed any actual tendencies to it in the ranks of the European sections. No matter also that every single decision taken by the LRCI has been democratically arrived at, after extensive debate and by a majority vote on the appropriate body. The fact is that when decisions were taken and when centralism was called for in their execution, Villa and the POB complained and threatened non-implementation—and in some cases actually did so. For them decisions that went against them were not for being acted on. Centralism was an "imposition". Discipline was an abstract idea, not a mode of operation.

This attitude, common amongst centrists who call themselves Trotskyists, has nothing in common with Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevism. It has nothing in common with the militant traditions of the international working class on which genuine Bolshevik centralism was based. Centralism is a vital method of organisation for those who are serious about doing something in the class struggle, for those serious about building real revolutionary parties that can act and not just discuss. It is vital because it is the means through which effective united action can be carried through. A strike committee does not take a decision and then allow every striker to abide by it or not depending on how they feel about it. The decision taken is a decision acted on by all. Working class discipline prevails because it is the guarantee of working class solidarity. This principle holds true for a revolutionary organisation a well. Centralism is a weapon in the class struggle. We do not fear it, because it is linked to internal democracy. We favour it because it demonstrates to those we are seeking to win and to lead that we are serious about our politics and disciplined in carrying them out.

Villa and the POB found this revolutionary centralism intolerable. And they thereby revealed that they had not broken from centrist "Trotskyism's" petit bourgeois organisational methods anymore than they had broken, fundamentally, with its political methods. We discovered this about them in practice and in struggle. Indeed, that is why it has taken so long to come to a decisive break with these people. The struggle had to be carried through. And we have learnt, through the struggle, the value of genuine democratic centralism.

We have been inured against the temptation to rest content with a kind of international federalism, we have learnt first hand of the dangers of indulging in national or continental particularism and we have re-learnt the importance of collective leadership.

Have we learned anything from the comrades, including from Villa himself? Yes. We have, especially during the first five years of our political collaboration. We learnt many things about the

recent history and current situation and conditions for party building in Peru and Bolivia.

We learnt from the undoubted revolutionary experience of Villa himself in the years 1984-6 in Bolivia and before that in Peru, adding this to the experience of other comrades in the League with long political experience in other Latin American countries. We learned that specific tactical adaptations and elaborations had to be made in countries subject to repressive bonapartist regimes, regular states of emergency and pre-revolutionary crises.

Above all we learned the need for considerable patience and absolute loyalty in relations with comrades operating in very adverse conditions, very different conditions to those of old, long established imperialist democracies. In the end, especially over the last three years or so we believe that we were very poorly repaid for this loyalty and patience.

Villa himself often observed the terrible tendency to *caudillo*ism in the Latin American Trotskyist groups. Of course, this was not confined to Latin America. A country which produced a Gerry Healy has no cause for complacency. But in the end it became all too clear that, on a very small scale, Villa was himself a *caudillo* who hated collective leadership.

Inside the League this revealed itself through his constant shifting alliances with different people, "against the leadership". Comrades wised up to the fact, slowly at first but very quickly after the third congress, that every one of these alliances owed little to the political issues at stake and lots to the fact that he wanted to be sole leader, especially with regard to Latin American work. In the future we will know how to spot a *caudillo*. And we will always treat them with suspicion. We will never again repeat the mistake of tolerating one in our own ranks for so long.

What this experience has not weakened in the slightest is our conviction that it is vital for revolutionaries in the imperialist countries to break through to and unite with revolutionaries in the semi-colonies, in Latin America, Africa and Asia. This was, is, and will remain, an absolutely central task of the LRCI.

In building the LRCI, in Latin America and elsewhere, our goal will be to engage living tendencies, with real collective leaderships, in political dialogue with a view to establishing honest programmatic agreement and functioning democratic centralism. Practical collaboration will go alongside formal political agreement. Only thus can mutual suspicions be allayed and the ground prepared for *lasting* agreement.

We are confident that such tendencies are developing in the aftermath of the post-'89 events and the crises of the old currents of centrist "Trotskyism" and that a revolutionary international will be forged with them. Indeed we have more resources to devote to this now that we have parted company with Villa and the POB. They had become a positive hindrance to the work of the LRCI, especially in Latin America. We will no longer be hampered by replying again and again to their unprincipled factionalism and their failures to carry out elementary duties.

As we have said, this is not to renounce everything about our past work with them. It is merely to recognise that there was a political, indeed a historical limit to this period. Writing of the Shachtman splitters in the Socialist Workers Party (USA) Trotsky observed:

"There has been more than one instance in history - more precisely it does not happen otherwise in history - that with the transition of the party from one period to the next those elements which played a progressive role in the past but who proved incapable of adapting themselves with timeliness to new tasks have drawn closer together in the face of danger and revealed not their positive but almost exclusively their negative traits."

So it proved with Villa and the POB as the LRCI has moved into a new period - both politically, in terms of the post-1989 world and organisationally in terms of a more solidly grounded international democratic centralism. We now draw a line under the entire experience, learning from both its positive and negative aspects, building on the former and rejecting the latter.■

**International Secretariat 15 November 1995**

# Appendix:
# Resolution adopted by the 5th conference of Poder Obrero (Bolivia)

The undersigned who comprise all the militants of POB, and who have been working with the LRCI, have decided to break with its leadership. We undertake to carry on defending the Fundamental Principles of our Programme and the Trotskyist Manifesto. For the same reason we do not accept the positions of the rightist leadership of the LRCI.

Since the end of August, we have seen the biggest attack ever launched by NATO. For weeks the coalition of all the western imperialist powers has been carrying out massive daily bombings of all Bosnian Serb cities. In Bosnia it's a question of being on the side of the Serbs against NATO to help them inflict a military defeat on imperialism.

One has to call on the Muslim, Croatian and Serbian workers to stop their fratricidal war and join together in order to expel imperialism from the region, arms in hand, in order to stabilise Bosnia, Yugoslavia and the Balkans in a united socialist federation.

For this one has to struggle to form soviets and multi-ethnic workers' militias and a revolutionary party. The most elementary reaction of all Marxists or anti-imperialists would be to come out for the defence of, and the victory of, the country assaulted by world imperialism. Nevertheless, the International Secretariat has just resolved that "in the war between NATO and the Srpsk, revolutionaries should continue with a position of defeatism on both sides".

The LRCI considers that this republic is a degenerated workers' state, and as a consequence should call for its unconditional defence in the face of whatever bellicose challenge from any imperialism.

But now that imperialism is united in order to bomb them in an Iraq-type operation, the IS calls for the defeat of both sides.

In a confrontation so unequal this is equivalent to putting oneself on the side of imperialism. At the same time that the IS calls for the defeat of the Bosnian Serbs, it asks imperialism to arm and train its allies in the Croatian-Muslim federation in order that these can obtain a victory over the Bosnian Serbs.

Openly the IS greets the breaking of the encirclement of Sarajevo, asks for more international volunteers, apart from the thousands of Croatian, Muslim fundamentalists and Nazi Ustasha soldiers that arrive in order to smash the Serbian Republic of Krajina and to conquer other areas of Bosnia, calls on imperialism to donate airplanes, tanks and Scud missiles to its lackeys in the region and demands military trainers from imperialism and its intelligence services.

It is not accidental that none of the extensive documents of the LRCI on Bosnia call for the formation of a revolutionary party, soviets or workers' militias. This is replaced by the call for military victory to the government forces of Itzetbegovic.

This is a theological Islamicism that in the 1940s was the party of the Muslim landowners that took the side of the Nazis and Ustashas against the Titoite resistance and later defended large pre-capitalist property and the clerical institutions against women, workers and the Yugoslav revolution.

Itzetbegovic calls publicly for the re-Islamicisation of the Muslims of Bosnia and the construction of the first Islamic state in Europe based on the rejection of socialism and of western institutions. His clerical party defines itself openly as only for Muslims and since coming to power has been discriminating in favour of those who actively profess "Mahonetanism".

The Croatian-Muslim federation headed by Itzetbegovic is as restorationist, reactionary and as guilty of ethnic-cleansing as the Bosnian Serbs. The recent destruction of the Serb Republic of Krajina, and the invasion of other Bosnian Serb enclaves has been accompanied by the expulsion of more than 200,000 Serbs.

Revolutionaries in imperialist countries are obliged to struggle valiantly against local public opinion and repression for the victory of the nation attacked by all the imperialist nuclear powers. When the LRCI refuses to struggle for the victory of the Bosnian Serb degenerated workers' state against imperialism and calls on its own imperialism to pull out its troops in order to arm and aid better its local lackeys this signifies the abandonment of all Marxist principles and an adaptation to ones own imperialism.

This trajectory of the LRCI is not new. For some years we have been combating its increasing turn to the right. In August 1991 we opposed the line of a united front with Yeltsin and the capitalist parties against the Stalinist coup in Moscow. We argued that we should have been against a coup that would have repressed the workers but that we could not unite with the capitalist social counter-revolution.

In order to confront an authoritarian faction inside the workers' state one couldn't make a common cause with the world bourgeois counter-revolution, something that is worse than Stalinism. The victory of Yeltsin and of the bourgeois parties has led to the imposition of an openly capitalist regime and the destruction of the USSR which has given rise to a defeat of incredible proportions at a world level.

The LRCI originally had Trotskyist positions when it called for the unconditional defence of a degenerate workers' state faced with an internal or external counter-revolution but increasingly it has been calling for unity with the capitalist counterrevolution and its parties in united fronts in order to overthrow Stalinism and in order to break up multi-national workers' states and take a step towards new micro-states with regimes that are building semi-colonial capitalisms.

As Trotskyists we fight to the death against the Stalinist dictatorship and we struggle for its destruction by means of a political revolution, but if Stalinism falls at the hands of an openly bourgeois regime, then the cure is much worse than the illness since it begins to destroy an historic conquest and a degenerated form of the proletarian dictatorship is replaced by an incipient form of the dictatorship of capital. We have always defended the view that the united front must be struck against imperialism and the bourgeoisie, but the IS calls for united fronts with the bourgeoisie against the bureaucracy in the workers' state.

Bourgeois democracy, instead of being an advance on a degenerate workers' state, implies a regression since it gives the world bourgeoisie the right to interfere in a degenerate proletarian dictatorship in order to subvert it. Nevertheless, the IS proposed a constituent assembly for the two Germanys in 1989, and for the two Chinas.

This would have implied making the degenerated workers' states subject to a common assembly with the bourgeois forces of the other capitalist country, so that the GDR is more easily destroyed by German imperialism. For us the principal enemy is imperialism and the neo-liberal offensive of savage capitalism.

For the LRCI the main enemy is the absence of democracy. For this reason the leadership of the LRCI prefers the victory of Yeltsin and the Russian bourgeois parliament in 1991 and prefers making united fronts with the "democratic" parties against Stalinism. In the semi-colonial world they call on us to make united fronts with pro-imperialist bourgeois parties for a "genuine" bourgeois democracy.

In 1992 an "action programme for Latin America" was sent to us which was repudiated and dismissed in favour of another one. In it there wasn't a single call for the defence of Cuba. For the IS, Castro was going to fall as a result of a democratic-bourgeois uprising along Eastern European lines.

Due to our pressure on the League, they were obliged to change position, give recognition that one had to defend Cuba, and that although we carry on raising the strategy of a political revolution that will overthrow Castro, in the here and now we did not agitate for his downfall and that we would have to make a united front with him against the gusanos.

Instead of raising, as the central axis for semi-colonial countries, the struggle against privatisation, payment of the external debt and imperialist penetration, it proposed programmes and policies based on the struggle for democratisation (bourgeois).

When Yankee imperialism said every day that it was going to invade Haiti, the LRCI with the exception of the Latin American comrades, didn't make any campaign against this. More, when it finally occurred, the IS said that if the Haitian military organised an armed resistance against imperialism it would call for defeatism on both sides. With this they adopted a pro-imperialist position.

In Rwanda the IS called for the military victory of the RPF. This is an arm of the bloody Ugandan dictatorship that defended the ambition of the old Tutsi elite to re-establish its power. This communalist army was trained by the CIA and was resisted by the bulk of the Hutu majority (85%) of Rwanda's population. When the RPF took power it installed a new communalist dictatorship that succeeded in assassinating more than 100,000 people and ethnically cleansing 2-3 million Hutus such that today there are more Rwandans in exile than Palestinians in exile.

The LRCI supported the RPF because as in Bosnia it was the core of the supposedly democratic and multi-ethnic sector that was favoured by democratic imperialism. The constant massacres that are occurring all the time in Rwanda show the correctness of the position that raised the demand that in a fratricidal war between reactionary ethnic bands the workers and peasants must maintain their independence and opposition and must construct a new pole of attraction based on multi-ethnic councils and militias.

In the case of Bolivia the LRCI imposed a line on Poder Obrero that hindered our work. It was argued that in 1986 there was a historic-strategic defeat, the worst in Latin America and the same as the butchery that destroyed the first workers' state in the world (the Paris Commune). We do not deny that the working class has been strongly defeated and that neo-liberalism has been advancing. For this reason we said that the revolutionary period of 1982-86 was closed with the opening of a democratic-liberal counter-revolutionary offensive.

More, the month long general strikes in 1984 and 1985 proved that Bolivia was one of the few countries in the world that was capable of such actions and that the country's workers' movement is one of those that has put most obtacles in the way of the neo-liberal offensive on the continent. POB felt itself obliged to comply with this line out of discipline.

When the last general strike broke out we were obliged to declare that Bolivia had suffered a strategic defeat and for this reason the line argued had to use minimum and unitary demands that disarmed the section. In a large demonstration the POB militants had to sell a paper in which it was said that we were living through a strategic defeat.

At the same time that the LRCI overestimated the defeat in Bolivia, it ignored the fact that there have been strategic defeats in what the LRCI still calls workers' states where the bourgeoisie has taken power. Despite the fact that the world period is dominated by the tremendous offensive of the demo-liberal counter-revolution the LRCI continues to insist that there has been a revolutionary period for the last six years.

The u-turn of the LRCI is to be explained by the powerful pressures of the imperialist offensive that advances behind the facade of democracy. A decade ago the world's left considered that imperialism was the great enemy. Today, the same left argues that the absence of formal democracy is the worst of problems and for this they have no qualms asking imperialism to help reconquer democracy in Haiti and other semi-colonial countries and restructure multi-ethnic societies as in Bosnia.

The LRCI's main section is Workers Power/Britain. In 1980 it took a tremendous step forward when it broke with "state capitalist" centrism and re-elaborated the thesis of Trotsky for the unconditional defence of the degenerated workers' states. But in this transition from an organisation that called for the defeat of the "socialist" countries in all struggles with imperialism towards revolutionary defencism, there was a minority which devised a hybrid theory sited between the those of Trotsky and Cliff.

During the whole of the 1980s WP, the MRCI and the LRCI built itself around the Trotskyist thesis but since the start of the 1990s the old minority has converted itself into the effective leadership of the LRCI. It is this that explains much of the rightist trajectory of the LRCI.

This layer argued that all the "socialist" countries were "dictatorships of a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie against the working class". One part of the state was completely bourgeois but since the society was post-capitalist then they recognised that Russia was a workers' state.

They accused Trotsky of being a reformist in regard to the political revolution since Trotsky always spoke of regenerating the degenerated workers' state and they called for its smashing. For this minority the bourgeois counter-revolution took power in Russia in 1927 and Stalinism was transformed into a counter-revolutionary force thereafter. All that Trotsky said after the foundation of the International Left Opposition was, as a result, very bad. Trotsky said that Stalinist Comintern was not counter-revolutionary but centrist until 1935 and for this reason they were in its very heart and sought to reorient it up to the point that Hitler came to power.

This position broke with all the laws of the dialectic. They considered that one could have a capitalist state which at the same time expropriated the capitalists and which maintained for nearly seven decades a post-capitalist society. The very reason for existence of all bourgeois states is the protection of the bourgeois class, but for them this same state can take out and put back the bourgeoisie just as easy as one puts on and takes off a shirt.

In the semi-colonial world we can see how the bourgeois state can keep its military, political and bureaucratic apparatus intact, including the same political constitution of the state, when it changes over from a statist model of development to a neo-liberal one. Nevertheless, in East Europe and the ex-USSR we have seen how the re-establishment of capitalism implies a radical purgation of the old state apparatus, the adoption of new constitutions and profound social convulsions, including savage civil wars.

For this layer the term "degenerated workers' state" is not a category that Trotsky used in order to refer to the state apparatus but a term that serves to describe a society that is not based on the law of value. For this reason they still dig their heels in and say that Poland and other countries in East Europe where the bourgeoisie has taken power and where the market is dominant are still workers' states.

With a reformist outlook they saw that the change in the class character of a state is a product of the change of personnel that administers it and the degree of development of the law of value. For them the Chinese, Cuban or central European state is the same state as that of the bourgeoisie or the old pre-capitalist kings, only one that has been purged. The only time that the bourgeois state can be smashed is by means of a semi-state of the "commune" type based on workers' councils and militias. According to this thesis those who reconstructed the bourgeois state in Russia would not have been Stalin, but Lenin and Trotsky since it was they who imposed a single party dictatorship that mutilated the soviets and militias.

This apparently ultra-left analysis has a very rightist implication. Since for them the state in ex-USSR, Central Europe, China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba are capitalist states without capitalism, but dominated by a fascist type dictatorship, then the struggle for bourgeois democracy and a united front with the direct agents of "democratic" imperialism becomes progressive.

In 1980 this layer argued that one should have been in a

military bloc with the reactionary fundamentalist Afghan guerrillas armed and financed by the CIA and defenders of the landowners and theocratic codes, against the "left" government supported by the Soviet troops. While WP correctly called for following the same line as in the Spanish Civil War (to be together with the Popular Front against reaction but struggle for the workers to overcome and defeat the "left" bourgeoisie and the Stalinists) this minority said that we must be the firmest anti-Stalinist fighters in this movement and that they said that this was "national liberation".

The victory of the Mujahedin has brought today a tremendous ethnic cleansing and massacres between the tribal chiefs that fight among themselves for power and to see which theocratic caudillo is the best. The manner of arriving at positions that the old minority raised in Afghanistan is the same today that the LRCI raises in relation to the degenerated workers states. The LRCI wants to be the most radical sector inside the mobilisations organised by the bourgeois anti-communist parties and collaborate with them to bring them to power.

Today, the method of this non-Trotskyist minority has come to dominate the LRCI. It considers that bourgeois democracy plays a progressive role in a degenerated workers state and that it is possible and desirable to make united fronts with reaction against the main enemy, which is Stalinist authoritarianism.

The militants of Latin America and New Zealand were at the head of the struggle to defeat the minority. Despite the fact that the last world Congress defeated the most radical positions of this sector, the minority kept its hold of the leading bodies and its political conclusions continue to direct the international and the bulk of the majority adapts itself to them since they consider us the principal enemy inside the LRCI.

Ten years ago our current was born amid the great miners strikes. Around then WP finished its work of founding the MRCI together with three small western European groups. We started to work with WP and the MRCI since we saw in them an organisation with correct positions and a very democratic internal regime. In 1989 the LRCI was founded whose name was proposed by one of us in recognition that we had become a genuine international with work in the imperialist and semi-colonial world.

But since the beginning of this decade the positions of adaptation to bourgeois democracy and Stalinophobia were pushing the LRCI towards centrism. Today's LRCI is no longer the LRCI that we founded.

WP, who in 1981 (sic) found the courage to agitate for the victory of Argentina in the war waged by its own British imperialism, now calls for the defeat of those who are bombarded by British planes and asks its own imperialism to arm and train its allies in Bosnia.

WP, who in 1980 (sic) struggled together with the Polish workers and Solidarity against the harsh Stalinist coup, but without making a bloc with the church and the bourgeois parties and refused to struggle for the freedom of the KPN and other capitalist parties, now calls for a struggle against Stalinism with and through the bourgeois parties of imperialism.

The original line of the LRCI inside the degenerated workers' states was to consider the capitalist parties and parliaments as the worst of enemies. Later it called for the defence of them. Before, the LRCI had a very broad internal discussion regime. Due to the fact that the LRCI then suffered strong internal contradictions and tried to reconcile two very distinct methods—the Trotskyist one of its original documents (such as the Trotskyist Manifesto, Fundamental Principles of our Programme, and the Degenerated Revolution) and the semi- state capitalist one of the old Stalinophobic minority—internal democracy came to be restricted more and more. Insults, subjectivism against critics, manoeuvres and violations of the statutes have been becoming a norm.

The LRCI was before a great lever for the work of refounding Trotskyism in Latin America and the world. Today it is has ceased to be so. It has turned into an obstacle to our work. They seek to impose political lines on us that disorient us. It is impossible to work with positions such as that which asks for the defeat of a small workers' state against all of world imperialism.

For all these reasons and for others documented elsewhere concerning the violation of the Statutes and democratic centralism, it has been agreed:

•We reject the Congress resolution that says that in Bolivia there has been a historic-strategic defeat.

•We reject the line that calls for the defeat of the Serbs in the face of imperialist bombardment and asks for imperialism to arm and train its allies.

We reject the position of defeatism on both sides if the Haitian military had have organised resistance against the Yanki invasion.

•We do not recognise the resolutions of the last IEC nor the IS elected by it.

• We stand by the Trotskyist Manifesto adopted at the First Congress of the LRCI, together with the Fundamental Principles of our Programme

•We stand by the founding documents of the POB and POP

•We declare ourselves outside the discipline of the leadership of the LRCI and we call on the rest of the members of the LRCI to carry on discussing and move towards a democratic Congress at which the comrades of the Proletarian Faction can also participate and others that were initially attracted towards the LRCI but which were pushed away for disagreeing with its rightist turn.

•In the light of us not being permitted to exercise our right to form a tendency inside the LRCI we declare ourselves a tendency of the international workers' movement.

**September 1995**
**Translated from the Spanish by the LRCI**

# Declaration of the Proletarian Faction

*The first draft of this document was originally signed by two members of the New Zealand section on 22 June. It was to that document that the reply on page 29 was written. The platform printed below is the final amended version adopted by the faction at the end of August and received by the LRCI leadership on 30 August, only days before the faction walked out.*

Like the rest of the post-war Trotskyist left, the LRCI has failed to break decisively from centrism. It moved left from centrism in the 1970's to produce an apparently Trotskyist analysis of the degeneration of the Fourth International [FI] and the Degenerate(d) Workers' States [dws] in the early 1980's. However by the late 1980's, as a small international tendency of around 100, it, along with the rest of the left, was subjected to the massive reactionary pressures of imperialist crisis and the collapse of the DWS's.

The LRCI's Trotskyist "orthodoxy" was shown to be hollow. Its method devoid of dialectics. Its failure to learn the lessons of the collapse of the FI meant that its break from the Cliffites was incomplete and that, rather than developing a revolutionary response to the crisis of Stalinism, the LRCI collapsed back into centrism.

Succumbing to its isolation from the class struggle, and the pressure of democratic counter-revolution, a growing gap between theory and practice has arisen. While the LRCI pronounces orthodox Trotskyist positions on method, political economy and the restoration of capitalism in the DWS's, in reality it has a one-sided abstracted Trotskyism which argues for a "revolutionary period" since 1989 and still-existing "moribund workers' states".

These upbeat historical abstractions coexist with and cover a passive propaganda role in the class struggle which is evidenced by the League's capitulation to the "progressive" nature of democratic imperialism.

The events of this period are every bit as momentous as those after WW2, if not more so. According to the LRCI the collapse of the workers'states would be every bit as catastrophic as the events of the 1930's. As such the end of the workers' states would constitute the supreme test of Marx's dialectical method. But the LRCI has failed to survive the test.

Like the centrist FI after the Second WW, the League's inability to recognise the end of the workers' states and the nature of the period as counter-revolutionary, demonstrates that it has become disoriented by events and liquidated its role as a revolutionary vanguard. That this should have happened comes as no surprise to us, given the history of our relations with the LRCI.

## Method and the Fourth International

When WPNZ/A had its first discussions with the LRCI in 1990 a number of differences existed. The most important were on the question of Marxist method. This was reflected in two areas of difference. The first was a difference over the causes of the collapse of the FI. It was clear to us in 1990 that the LRCI did not see any necessary connection between class composition, method and programme, in causing the collapse of the FI. It did not understand these elementary lessons of history. For this reason, we thought it possible that the League too might become a victim of isolation, bad class composition and Euro-centrism and meet the same fate as the FI. The IS claims that we did not make this a big issue when we joined. Yet we made it very clear that we took this question seriously, and that the purpose of our joining was to win the League to our positions on Marx's method. The subsequent failure of the League to develop dialectics and to confront the collapse of Stalinism with a revolutionary programme, has confirmed our worst fears.

On the question of the FI we argued that, as the result of material conditions of isolation, class composition and European and US chauvinism, serious programmatic lapses during the war caused the collapse of the FI into centrism by 1946. In our discussions, the League took the view that the FI was healthy until 1948 and collapsed and died in 1951. The LRCI regarded the adaptation to chauvinism during the war as a "centrist deviation" which could have been corrected in 1948. Would Trotsky have viewed these lapses as mere "centrist deviations"?

Trotsky made it clear that the war was the ultimate test of the health and hence future of the new international: "Our programme on war is our tactics, our programme on the socialist revolution, our propaganda"... "All the fundamental rules of proletarian "defeatist" policy in relation to imperialist war retain their full force today."

This is our point of departure, and all the conclusions that follow are determined by it" ... "The fundamental strategic question is our attitude toward war, which it is impermissible to subordinate to episodic tactical considerations and speculations".

Should the proletariat attempt at the expense of the clarity and irreconcilability of its fundamental policy to chase after each episodic danger separately, it will unfailingly prove itself bankrupt." ... "defeatism is the class policy of the proletariat, which even during a war sees the main enemy is at home, within its particular imperialist countries. Patriotism on the other hand is a policy that locates the main enemy outside one's own country"..."should revolutionary defeatism be renounced in relation to nonfascist countries? Herein is the crux of the question; upon this issue, revolutionary internationalism stands or falls".

Marxist intransigence, obligatory when realising the united front in general, becomes doubly or trebly so when it is a question of a problem as acute as war". "The future destiny of our organisation, like the development of the FI will depend above all on the existence of an international cadre that understands how to answer the questions of revolution and counter-revolution- especially in their fascist and bonapartist guises— and that understands the question of the war threat and how to implement our slogans and put them into practice."

Trotsky is clear. Under conditions of imperialist war, the failure to fulfil the tasks of the FI programme on war would amount to "bankruptcy". To renounce "defeatism" in countries which are at war with fascist countries is an "obvious lapse into social patriotism". During the war the FI proclaimed its orthodoxy in theory, but in practice several of its leading sections "lapsed into social patriotism". Objectively, despite the fact that the war threw up revolutionary situations, the FI failed to become the revolutionary leadership. Its small size, isolation from the mass movements, and exposure to stalinist assassinations, contributed most to its collapse in Europe (Over 800 executed in Greece alone).

Subjective lapses into social patriotism in the US and Europe, combined with the objective factors to contribute to the "bankruptcy" of the international. We conclude that Trotsky would have taken the view that the new international failed the test of

the war and collapsed into centrism.

The resulting centrist split between "revolutionary" theory and reformist practice put an end to democratic centralism. This prevented any possibility of the correction of the FI's political disorientation after the war.

That is why in our view the FI was not salvageable by 1946. Neither the British Haston-Grant or the US Goldman-Morrow oppositions were capable of correcting the collapse into centrism. Even if these oppositions had won, the FI would have reverted to an equally one-sided fatalism in which post-war capitalist stabilisation included the victory of state capitalism in the Soviet Union.

The only possibility of refounding the FI on a healthy basis in 1946 would have been the democratic centralist "overrepresentation" of the FI in the semi-colonies in those sections which did not adapt to chauvinism and where democratic norms still allowed programmatic criticisms to be raised.

We argue that this was prevented by the bureaucratic measures of the European and US sections which deliberately underrepresented the semi-colonial sections at the post-war congresses and suppressed their criticisms of the collapse into centrism during the war.

What would we have done at the time? Because of the collapse of the FI into centrism, we would have formed a faction to refound the FI on a democratic centralist basis as a precondition for; [1] the full participation of the semi-colonial sections; [2] an honest critique of the collapse into centrism, and [3] the re-forging of the Marxist method and theory of the pre-war period, in order to lay the basis for a correct understanding of the post-war period.

Today the charge is made against the faction that in 1946 we would have abandoned the FI in 1946 as centrist, and the LRCI and MRCI before it too. This is as absurd as a second charge that in a counter-revolutionary period such as the present, we would turn our backs on the class struggle. Quite the opposite, we entered the LRCI to fight for our positions in 1990, warning of the danger of LRCI repeating the collapse of the FI, and prescribing lessons in method and political economy. We would have done the same in 1946.

In our view, in 1990 the LRCI did not understand the historic roots of the collapse of the Fourth International into centrism, and its response to us on the FI shows that it has not learned anything in the past five years. To claim, as it does today, that the degeneration of the FI was "ultimately caused not by class composition, but by politics" is not a Marxist explanation, and worse than that which blames the degeneration on the death of Trotsky. But what are politics if not "concentrated economics"? What are economics but contradiction? What are contradictions but dialectics? What is contradiction but class struggle? How do we understand this?—Marx's method!

With Marx's method it is not possible to separate politics from class composition. It is obviously true that an ideal working class composition of the FI would not have been a guarantee of a correct method and programme. But only logic-choppers look for black and white guarantees. There is ample evidence that Trotsky [and Cannon] saw very clearly the dangers of petty-bourgeois influences on the SWP [see notes below]. The IS/IEC in its reply to the Faction, does a body count of cadres in an attempt to disprove our argument that the FI or the LRCI suffers from poor class composition.

But class composition is not a statistical matter, or an organisational question. Rather it is a matter of class orientation. There is no direct causal relationship between class composition, method and programme. We understand method to be a quality of leadership which must be tested by means of a proletarian orientation towards the working class in struggle, constantly testing theory in practice.

There may be plenty of industrial workers in a party but no proletarian orientation, but you can be sure that if there is a firm proletarian orientation, the petty-bourgeois influences will be minimal.

The IS/IEC argues that there is no necessary correlation between method and programme because what "ultimately" counts is "politics". For Trotsky, and for us, making such a claim is to junk dialectics. Trotsky was very clear on the link between method, theory, programme and practice. In his polemic with Shachtman who claimed that there was no necessary connection between method and politics citing the cases of Plekhanov and Liebknecht.

Trotsky replies: "This argument if it means anything at all signifies that dialectical materialism is of no use whatsoever to a revolutionist. With these examples of Leibknecht and Plekhanov artificially torn out of history, Shachtman reinforces and deepens the idea...that politics does not depend on method, inasmuch as method is divorced from politics by the divine gift of inconsistency. By falsely interpreting two `exceptions', Shachtman seeks to overthrow the rule.

If this is the argument of a `supporter' of Marxism, what can we expect from an opponent? The revision of marxism passes here into its downright liquidation; more than that, into the liquidation of every doctrine and every method."

## Method and Political Economy

The second area of difference was over the related area of the method of political economy. The LRCI and its leading section, the British Workers Power group, had come out of the Cliffite IS in 1975. The LRCI recognised that its position on political economy was deficient, and that it still had to complete its analysis of the nature of Stalinist economies. Both of these areas of difference between the LRCI and us ultimately come back to Marx's method as applied to the understanding of capitalism. Both come back to dialectics.

The LRCI at that time had an understanding of Marxist political economy derived from Fine and Harris's book Rereading Capital. We characterised this method of political economy as ultimately neo-Ricardian. This is a non-Marxist method which does not locate a necessary contradiction at the point of production motivating the 'development' of capitalism and determining its surface appearances, including the state. Failure to understand this leads to neo-Ricardian positions on the state which credit the state with considerable "autonomy" in moderating if not managing the economy.

The LRCI had broken with the Cliffite economics of the Permanent Arms Economy and state capitalism, but in effect they retained the underlying method of political economy. While they rejected the PAE as underconsumptionist, their account of the end of the post-war boom and the crisis of overaccumulation in the Trotskyist Manifesto showed that it had not broken with neo-Ricardianism. For example their explanation of crisis recognises the fact that "contradictions surface again"... Yet they confuse a cause of crisis with one of its effects. "US capital exports lead to underinvestment at home, which resulted in low productivity and hence to a decline in the rate of profit" . This is to reverse the cause-effect sequence. Capital export is an effect of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, not its cause! In our fusion talks we characterised the LRCI's method as "more analytical and descriptive than dialectical". As a result the LRCI did not have a clear conception of the causes of the post-war boom, the crisis which brought it to an end, nor the necessary conditions for a world-wide revival of capital accumulation. Instead there was an impressionistic method which took each cycle and its distributional effects on class struggle in isolation of the deeper processes. This led to the LRCI overestimating the extent of the "world-wide recovery" in the mid 1980's.

An impressionist method, therefore, leads to a revisionist political economy which has very dangerous consequences for workers in struggle. If world capitalism can "recover" without the necessity of re-establishing the conditions for renewed profitability by means of further massive destruction, including war and depression, this leads to a reformist perspective. It means that "democratic" imperialist states can collaborate and resolve their economic problems short of war and revolution. While the LRCI formally rejects this type of revisionism, recognising the "New World Disorder", its method of political economy does not reject the possibility of such a relatively "peaceful" re-stabilisation of the world economy.

The second, related, problem we identified in our fusion talks, was the failure to apply Marx's method to the analysis of the degenerate(d) workers' states. The L's understanding was that the contradiction in the dws was between the law of value and the bureaucratic state. A second contradiction between workers' property and the bureaucratic state, which was the contradiction identified by Trotsky, was also recognised. But this contradiction is trivialised as one between workers' production relations in society and bourgeois distributional relations in the state. This negates the importance of the contradiction internal to the dual state—between workers production relations and bourgeois distribution relations—and its class struggle resolution within the state by political revolution or bourgeois counter-revolution.

As we will see, this meant that the LRCI was unable to apply a dialectical understanding to the relationship between the forces and relations of production in the dws's. This was to have serious consequences when, from 1989 onwards its position on the Stalinist state led directly to a theoretical and programmatic disorientation over the collapse of the Stalinist states and the restoration of capitalism.

Ultimately on these questions, theory and method must be judged against programme. The LRCI characterised our positions as "reductionist" and "catastrophist", taking insufficient notice of the mediating effects of politics and ideology. Yet on the most important political question of the period, it is the LRCI's method and theory which fails to recognise the end of the workers' states and this world historic counter-revolutionary defeat. It is the LRCI's disorientation on the question of the current period that calls into question its method and theory, not ours. The LRCI's impressionistic method means that it cannot theoretically link the fundamental laws of motion of capitalism to everyday surface events. When surface events contradict its blind optimism in objective forces it forgoes reality as in the case of its conception of the "moribund workers' states" and the "revolutionary period".

It is certainly true that world capitalism cannot restabilise itself without depression and war, but these tendencies present in the structural crisis do not yet manifest themselves in the current balance of class forces in the form of revolutionary situations. On the contrary, the collapse of the Stalinist states has shifted the balance of class forces towards counterrevolution, and the character of the period has become that of democratic counterrevolution. The major pre-revolutionary crises are still ahead of us, as is the potential for revolution and counter-revolution, which are the defining conditions of a periodic crisis in the epoch of imperialism. We come back to the question of period below.

WPNZ(A) agreed to join the LRCI in early 1992 on the basis of general agreement with the programmatic positions in the Trotskyist Manifesto and on the understanding that we would fight to overcome our "major" differences by arriving at a common understanding of Marx's method. We were impressed by the Second Congress debate, and the way in which the LA comrades were treated. This allayed our fears that the LRCI was Euro-centrist in its practice.

In discussions since then the League began serious work on Marxist political economy, including crisis theory, imperialism and the nature of planning and the Stalinist states. However, at the same time the LRCI became immersed in the dramatic events surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European DWSs. These events as it turned out were to become the decisive test of the LRCI's ability to develop and apply its Marxist method in practice i.e. of the political economy of the stalinist states and their collapse in practice. As a result of these tests the underlying weakness of the LRCI's method and programme fully revealed itself. It became clear that because the LRCI did not have good analysis of the dws's, it could not predict or intersect the restoration crisis in the USSR. The strategic line of political revolution got submerged in the tactic of critical support for the tactic towards bourgeois democracy on the basis of workers' illusions in bourgeois democracy.

## The Yeltsin Coup

The first major test was the Yeltsin coup. The LRCI's position was confused. On the one hand it recognised correctly that neither those behind the coup nor Yeltsin intended to defend state property. On the other it said, against those who claimed that the coup makers should be supported because they were defending state property, that their reason for defending it, namely their caste privilege, was insufficient. This was a clear break from Trotsky who argued that notwithstanding the Stalinists' reasons for supporting state property, workers must bloc with them in this defence. To the extent that the "parasites" still defended "post-capitalist" property, they should not be supported because they caused the collapse of the "planned economy" in the first place. What this break revealed was a residual Stalinophobia present in the LRCI.

This was further revealed in the nature of the support given Yeltsin during the coup. Both sides were restorationist and both posed a threat to workers. It is wrong to say that Yeltsin's "democratic" method of restoration allowed a "democratic breathing space" for workers to mobilise a political revolution. Yeltsin's method was that of a restorationist "popular front". He wanted to use the widespread illusions in bourgeois democracy as the cover for his restoration. So while the conservatives were against Yeltsin, this did not mean that Yeltsin was for the workers. The whole point is that a fight between the enemies of the workers should have been used by workers to arm themselves against all their enemies. This required a workers' united front against Yeltsin's popular front of democrats, would-be exploiters, nationalists, and more privileged workers. The workers who supported Yeltsin were mainly privileged miners whose union leaders were supporters of restoration. They got sucked into the popular front which is proven by Yeltsin calling off their strike! Yeltsin as agent of imperialist restoration tells workers they are going too far [and his supporters disarm the soviets!] Not all workers got sucked into the popular front. Most stayed at home, but others armed themselves and defended the soviets. They were the vanguard workers who mobilised as a working class united front against the coup, and who also regarded Yeltsin as their enemy.

It was necessary for revolutionaries to expose Yeltsin as the enemy of the political revolution.The correct position was to mobilise workers independently of Yeltsin, an open restorationist. If Yeltsin was serious in opposing the coup we could offer a military bloc with him, but only if he "broke with the bourgeoisie". Revolutionaries would have demanded that Yeltsin not only called for and supported a general strike, but called on the army to defect and arm the workers. Against Yeltsin calling off the strike, we would have called on the miners to break from Yeltsin. This would have helped Yeltsin to expose himself to those layers of workers who saw the need to build an independent, armed workers' movement.

The LRCI called for a "united front" with Yeltsin without conditions. They were prepared to stand side by side with Yeltsin defending the Russian "White House" the symbol of bourgeois parliament. This was capitulating to the illusions in bourgeois democracy by claiming that such "democratic rights" empowered the working class. But talking about democracy in the abstract confuses bourgeois and workers democracy in a degenerated workers' state. The LRCI had strongly argued some months earlier against any concessions to bourgeois democracy, although it was never "against democracy" but rather "in favour of workers democracy". It now abandoned its formally correct position on the grounds that the struggle for bourgeois democratic rights could advance the political revolution . But how is the working class empowered by its illusions in the "freedoms" offered by glasnost and perestroika? This is the path of "democratic counter-revolution" in which workers voted for the end of workers' property in the false hope that it would bring real freedom and economic salvation. Again this showed the tendency to succumb to popular pressure to defend the democratic rights won by workers by appealing to Yeltsin's restorationist friends including the imperialists.

A similar weakness had already become apparent in the

defence of the Baltic states from Soviet invasion. The LRCI correctly called for the unconditional right to self-determination of the Baltic states from the USSR i.e. in the case of Lithuania calling for independent workers state, and opposed the invasion of the Red Army. Yet at the same time it called on aid from imperialist states [without strings!] to defend these states. This is saying that democratic imperialism is better than the Stalinist dictatorship of the proletariat!

The correct position for revolutionaries was to organise an armed struggle for a workers' council state independent of both the Red Army bureaucrats and the nationalists, calling on the Red Army [like Trotsky did on Poland] to turn their guns on the Kremlin. Siding with one set of restorationists against the other does not advance the demand for an independent workers council state. It was also necessary to call on workers everywhere to support the struggle, including the mobilisation of arms and volunteers from outside Lithuania.

## United Fronts with Imperialism

We see here a common problem. With the collapse of the USSR, the defence of workers' property becomes subordinated to the defence of bourgeois democracy. This is justified as necessary to enable the working class to mobilise against decades of Stalinist repression and to overthrow the bureaucracy. But where elements of the bureaucracy are busy becoming would-be bourgeois, posing as democrats and competing to attract imperialist backing, how does "democracy" in the abstract advance the political revolution?

The problem is that is it not democracy in the abstract but bourgeois democracy which reflects at the level of state power and ideology, bourgeois social relations. Here "bourgeois right" already existing in the form of unequal relations of distribution, are extended to represent the "rights" of private property, ownership of the means of production, contract etc. i.e. bourgeois relations of production. Quoting Trotsky: "Things must be called by their right names. What is involved here is not the introduction of some disembodied democracy but returning Russia to the capitalist road"... "But the masses do not want the landowner, the official, or the boss back. One must not overlook these "trifles" in intoxicating oneself with commonplaces about democracy".

Democratic demands such as the calling for 'constituent assemblies' where bourgeois-type parliaments are already in existence are necessary, not because they endorse such parliaments, but because they make it possible to replace parliaments with workers' councils. However the LRCI goes much further than this. Workers are invited by the LRCI not to oppose openly restorationist parties; not to oppose open restorationists—Yeltsins and co—who are openly grabbing more powers and suppressing workers' armed resistance; to bloc with national restorationists against the Red Army and to call on aid without strings from imperialism! Are these not united fronts with imperialism? Or is this to slander the LRCI as it claims?

In the case of the UF with Yeltsin, it was his nominal defence of the White House which allowed him to take emergency powers, including those against the soviets and the communist party, and firming up his imperialist ties, which made him victorious and sped up his seizure of power and the onset of the economic shock therapy. To claim that it was the threat of mass working class support behind the 100's of miners who supported Yeltsin that caused the coup to collapse is false given that it was the "democrats" not the plotters who had most to fear from the armed and organised working class. In the case of the Baltics, it was the promise of imperialist support for independence that aided the victory of the nationalists and rapid privatisation. In both cases the ability of workers to independently fight for the defence of democracy as the means of defending workers' property and of creating independent workers' states was undermined by a popular front with imperialism.

In other words, the democracy that was being defended here was already bourgeois democracy and not workers' democracy. Bourgeois democracy was that defended by the would-be bourgeois Stalinists in the USSR or the openly bourgeois leaders in the Baltics. [The same could be said for EE]. The political rights won under bourgeois democracy, the right for individuals to vote, freedom of speech and assembly etc. were not rights that enabled workers to mobilise for political revolution. On the contrary they were "rights" that represented the "freedom" of workers to vote for a democratic counter-revolution. To the extent that the League gave political support to bourgeois democracy it was strengthening the arms of capitalist restorationists at the expense of workers' democracy. Workers' democracy, on the other hand, was and is the ability to fight to overthrow the bureaucracy by arming the workers, winning over the Red Army and revolutionising the soviets from the ground up. This is the only possible meaning that can be attached to workers' democracy in a degenerated workers state.

Writing in 1936 on the impact of the new constitution, Trotsky states that it is a return to the "system of bourgeois democracy based upon the so-called "universal, equal and direct vote of an atomized population. This is a matter, to put it briefly, of juridically liquidating the dictatorship of the proletariat". And just as these "freedoms" were bogus and served only to "further reinforce the dictatorship" of the Bonapartist bureaucracy, why should the attempts by the collapsing bureaucracy to further such "freedoms" under 1980's glasnost, or of Yeltsin's "democracy", be any less bogus? Yeltsin like Stalin was concerned to liquidate the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in the name of... "democracy".

## The state debate

We have seen that under the impact of the collapse of the Stalinist states, the LRCI has abandoned its formally correct Trotskyist positions on the DWSs, and begun to justify its support for bourgeois democracy by saying that it was more progressive than the stalinist dictatorship. But this left an embarrassing gap between the LRCI's theory and practice. By 1993 this embarrassment motivated an attack on the League's formally correct Trotskyist position to remove the source of embarrassment. The suppression of the contradiction in the stalinist state present in the Degenerated Revolution was now taken to its logical conclusion. A minority in the League wanted the possibility of any contradiction to be theoretically removed. According to this revision, DWS's consist of workers' property in contradiction with a bourgeois state in the form of a stalinist dictatorship. While that position was defeated in 1981, its revival was intended to provide a theoretical revision to justify the League's adaptation to bourgeois democracy in the crisis of the collapse of the Stalinist states.

The revisionist position on the state can be seen to be one mid-way between the Cliffite position of state capitalism and that of Trotsky. The LRCI formally broke with state capitalism in 1981 and as such could not revert to that position. It could not openly revive the junked political economy of state capitalism. But because the League's method separates society from the state, it could revise Marxism to allow workers' property to coexist with a bourgeois state. This was the thrust of the 1981 minority position on the Stalinist state. If adopted, this position would allow the League to explain the relatively peaceful transformation of the state without "winding the film of reformism back". If it was already a bourgeois state, it need change only in its personnel and not its class nature.

While empirically very neat in accounting for the apparently peaceful transfer of power from bureaucrat to bourgeoisie in the collapsed Stalinist states, this revision went too far. It argued that the post-war overturns in which the bourgeoisie were expropriated was performed by a bourgeois state!

The majority could not accept this and the revision was defeated at the 3rd Congress. But the state debate revealed that the majority in the League also had an understanding of the Stalinist state as predominantly bourgeois in form; that already in the 1981 document *The Degenerated Revolution* there was a weakness on the question of the Stalinist state. This is shown by the fact that the class character of the workers' state is submerged into its bourgeois form.

This means that the state becomes a mechanical reflection of

the social relations of production defined economistically as the suppression of the law of value by means of nationalisation, central planning, and the monopoly of foreign trade. The workers' state only comes into existence once the law of value is suppressed, and goes out of existence when the law of value has reasserted itself as "dominant".

Left out of this analysis is the dialectical relationship between the state and the economy in which the state overturn must precede the transformation of social relations in any revolutionary transition. The consequences for programme are obvious. There can be no revolutionary transformations in which political struggle plays a part! History is the result of objective "economistic" laws of change in which the state is a passive partner.

If the Stalinist states were in reality bourgeois dictatorships, then it logically follows that they could be defended with bourgeois democracy, and that open bourgeois parties could be tolerated and united fronts with nationalist restorationists in breakaway republics could be made.

United fronts with democratic imperialism could be justified against the Stalinist dictatorship. This shows why LRCI, while an objective, economist process of restoration was under way in the economy, entrusted the defence of workers' property not to workers democracy, but to bourgeois democracy—that "juridical liquidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat". Which ultimately means no defence at all!

## Revising Trotsky on the class character of the state

The only way the LRCI could characterise the Stalinist states as bourgeois in form was to revise Trotsky's analysis of the class character of the workers' states. Trotsky understood the workers' states as contradictory formations in which workers' property was in contradiction with bureaucratic state power. This contradiction would lead to a crisis of underproduction because, while the bureaucracy used its state power to extract surplus, it could not plan the development of the forces of production efficiently.

The state therefore expressed this contradiction between production and distribution. It had a proletarian character so long as it protected workers' property, and a bourgeois character so long as it appropriated a surplus to maintain bureaucratic privilege. The state therefore has a dual contradictory character. The contradiction would be resolved progressively if workers overthrew the bureaucrats state power; reactively if the bureaucracy destroyed the plan, the monopoly of foreign trade and state property.

As the mechanical materialism of *The Degenerated Revolution* shows, the LRCI never fully adopted Trotsky's position on the state. This was because it could not apply a dialectical method to the relationship of the state and the economy, since it falsely conceived of the contradiction in the DWS's as between the law of value and the bureaucratic state, with a second contradiction between workers' property and the bureaucracy. By making the main contradiction between that of the law of value and the bureaucracy, the LRCI minimises one side of the contradiction—workers' property. This means that the main contradiction is not internal to the dws. It negates the internal contradiction between workers' property and bureaucratic power as it manifests itself in the dual state. In turn it fails to recognise that the class struggle mediated by the Bonapartist bureaucracy takes place over control of the state.

For Marxists the law of value and the bureaucratic state are not the two poles of the main contradiction. The main contradiction is ultimately between workers' property [socialism] and the law of value [capitalism]. But inside the dws's this is mediated by the bureaucracy, in the form of the Bonapartist dictatorship, that balances between the two classes. This means that the contradiction can only be resolved by one or other class taking state power out of the hands of the bureaucracy. Either the working class takes state power and the law of value is suppressed, or the bourgeoisie takes state power and workers' property [plan, monopoly of foreign trade] is suppressed: "The organ of the rule of the proletariat—the state—becomes an organ for pressure from imperialism (diplomacy, foreign trade, ideas, and customs). The struggle for domination, considered on a historical scale, is not between the proletariat and the bureaucracy, but between the proletariat and the world bourgeoisie. The bureaucracy is only the transmitting mechanism in this struggle".

The LRCI therefore cannot understand the dialectics of revolutionary/counterrevolutionary social overturns in which: "The victory of one class over another signifies that it will reconstruct the economy in the interests of the victors". Instead it views the dynamics of both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary overturns as an objective process at the level of the economy in which the state plays a passive role in determining the class nature of society. On this point, the LTT criticism of the LRCI is valid. The failure to understand the role of the state in social overturns leaves a gaping hole in the LRCI's programme. It places a "question mark" over the USSR up to 1928 when the law of value was finally subordinated to the plan; over the post-war overturns between 1948 and 1950 when the plans came into existence in the EE workers' states; in Cuba between 1960-62 before the introduction of the first five year plan. In each of these cases, between the workers' seizure of power, and the subordination of the law of value, what was the class nature of the state?

By 1993 the consequences of this failure became obvious to us. In response to the collapse of the DWS's, the LRCI rejected Trotsky's analysis of the DWS, and separating property relations from the state, found that there was no part of the workers state [Red Army] that defended state property. The workers state was already a bourgeois state and would need to be smashed. It therefore abandoned the most advanced workers defending the "Red House" in preference for the "most advanced" miners who came to the "White House" to join those who supported bourgeois rights of distribution becoming bourgeois relations of production. The LRCI's tactic for political revolution fell prey to the bourgeoisies' strategy of bourgeois democratic counter-revolution which saw bourgeois state overturns after 1990. It now denies that these overturns have occurred still entrusting the defence of state property to some objective process: a combination of worker resistance to the restoration of capitalist social relations, and the development of bourgeois democratic rights which will help facilitate political revolution, and which will hinder the completion of the restoration of the market.

In this way the LRCI adapts to Stalinophobia by making united fronts with democratic capitalist regimes in practice, while at the same time it invokes a formal "Trotskyism" in opposing the restoration of capitalist social relations in the abstract. In giving up the fight for political revolution, it relies on some fundamental economic process delaying restoration to rescue it from the charge of welcoming capitalist restoration. This political capitulation before an objective process has a name in the history of Marxism—it is economism or fatalism. In the history of Trotskyism it has another name—Pabloism. Let's see how the current position of the LRCI on the crucial question of restoration is in fact economism.

## The Restoration Debate: When is a workers' state not a workers' state?

The crunch test for Trotskyism today is the understanding of the restoration process following the collapse of the Stalinist states. It is a supreme test of Marxist method because it involves the counter-revolutionary destruction of the workers' states at the hands of world capitalism.

By any conception of Marxism, let alone Trotskyism, the restoration of capitalism in these states represents a world-historic defeat for the working class. The failure to recognise this and its consequences for programme is disastrous for workers everywhere.

The LRCI's current position on restoration, is that only in the former DDR was restoration completed, and that by means of the physical assimilation of DDR in the re-united Germany. In all the other states, despite the existence of "bourgeois regimes", the economies have not yet seen the law of value dominant.

Therefore capitalism has not been restored. Here we have two things. On the one hand the familiar separation of state and economy allows the LRCI to talk of bourgeois regimes in the absence of bourgeois social relations. On the other hand, planned social relations still exist because the law of value is not dominant, so therefore a workers' state, albeit degenerated to the point of being moribund, still exists.

The absurdity of this position is clear enough. While the state is clearly smashing the plan and recreating the conditions for capitalist property, and is considered a "bourgeois regime", it cannot be termed a bourgeois state because it has not succeeded in completely restoring capitalist social relations. This flies in the face of everything that Marx, Lenin and Trotsky wrote about the state and about the Stalinist state. Logically, while acknowledging that the transition to capitalism will take the form of state capitalism, the LRCI's position makes this impossible. In denying its existence as the "actually existing" capitalism in the ex-workers' states, it excludes the possibility of state capitalist stage occurring. Ironically, this may prove a self-fulfilling prophesy if the "completion" of restoration in these state never achieves the abstract "free market" criteria set by the LRCI's normative method.

Again the problem goes back to method. How is the capitalist state understood? At the most abstract level, Marxists understand the capitalist state as a superstructural reproducer of capitalist social relations. But this does not mean that the social relations to be reproduced have to be in existence before the state. As we have seen,

"in concrete historical conditions, the state plays the revolutionary role of creating new social relations as a result of the seizure of state power. In the case of the collapsed worker states as they actually exist historically, [as the result of many complex determinations], how would we expect the state to behave in the social overturn which sees capitalist social relations restored? Trotsky had an answer. In the first instance, the state would transform the content while maintaining the form of state property.

Its content would be expressed as state capitalism. But the state would precede capitalism: "The inevitable collapse of Stalinist Bonapartism would immediately call into question the character of the USSR as a workers' state. A socialist economy cannot be constructed without a socialist power. The fate of the USSR as a socialist state depends upon that political regime that will arise to replace Stalinist Bonapartism."

Because the property relations are "indivisibly bound up with the state" this would require first the "replacement of a workers' government by a bourgeois or petty-bourgeois government [which] would inevitably lead to the liquidation of the planned economy and, subsequently, the restoration of private property. In contradistinction to capitalism, socialism is built not automatically but consciously. Progress towards socialism is inseparable from that state power that is desirous of socialism or that is constrained to desire it."

In case it may be said that this is consistent with the LRCI position, it is not: "the property relations which issued from the socialist revolution are indivisibly bound up with the new state as their repository. The predominance of socialist over petty bourgeois tendencies is guaranteed, not by the automatism of the economy—we are still far from that—but by political measures taken by the dictatorship.

The character of the economy as a whole thus depends upon the character of state power... The collapse of the Soviet regime would lead inevitably to the collapse of the planned economy, and thus to the abolition of state property".

The new bourgeois state would cease to plan state property, but by retaining state ownership subject it to the gradual influence of the law of value. "Nationalised property stands or falls with the planned economy". It would have to do this by opening-up the economy to world capitalism and by introducing world money i.e. a convertible currency. At this point the law of value as it operates internationally would impact on the former workers' state and begin to convert output into commodities i.e. having a socially necessary labour-time determined by the world market.

"Once the cash based economy had been established no longer could it be said that any aspect of the workers state economy was left. Any remnant of planning was now swept away by the chase after the highest price. Evidence of this was not long in coming. Within months of the establishment of a cash based economy, scarcity gave way to glut. Whereas in the past we saw long queues of shoppers chasing few goods in the shops, we now saw few shoppers and shops bulging with unsold goods".

The reintroduction of real money does not mean the instant privatisation of land, property, or labour-power. Why should it? The law of value operates destructively at first, using world money to set values, and then constructively to set up increasing levels of competition. As it devalues and revalues commodities, it also creates a bourgeoisie. In a period of world capitalist structural crisis, restoration in the former workers state must ultimately move towards full privatisation, as these states sink into semi-colonial capitalist positions in the world economy.

This unfettered reign of the law of value is the necessary mechanism by which capitalist production in general is restructured to be profitable. But this requirement is not set in concrete and it is not a necessary defining feature of restoration in any given state.

By the most obvious criteria, namely the actions of bourgeois states in suppressing workers' property and introducing a convertible currency, in all of the E. European states, and the former states of the USSR, the transition to state capitalism is complete. This was obviously the case in the former DDR too. It was the convertibility of the Ostmark, not any proportion of privatised state corporations, or labour power, that constituted the decisive, qualitative point at which "A" the DDR, was no longer "A" but "B"—integrated into an existing capitalist state.

In this sense, bourgeois regimes become bourgeois states, not because they merely "intend" to establish capitalist social relations, but because they actively suppress worker social relations, and actively establish bourgeois social relations.

But in none of these states, except the former DDR, by the LRCIs current definition, have degenerated workers' states been replaced by state capitalism. The LRCI attempts to overcome the contradiction between actually existing state capitalism, and its abstract economist criteria of the dominance of the law of value, by inventing the transitional category, moribund workers state. But what is a moribund workers state?

It is the League's confused conception of state capitalism! The LRCI defines "moribund workers' states" as: "degenerate workers' states that have restorationist governments in power which are actively demolishing the foundations of the planned economy.

The objective of all governments inside the MWS is clear: the complete destruction of the system of command planning and the transformation of the economy into a functioning capitalist market economy".

## Democratic Counter-Revolution/Period

The consequences of this mechanical method for the LRCI's programme are clear enough. Despite the current phase of democratic counter-revolution, its "revolutionary period" is kept alive by the historical schema of incomplete restoration held back by the objective process of "democratic" resistance to the neo-right package of free market reforms. This is the idealist shadow-boxing of abstract categories in which the LRCI acts as an academic counsel for the working-class-in-general, rather than as a revolutionary vanguard of workers in the flesh.

In rejecting their method the LRCI accuses us of being pessimists and defeatists. Against Dobbs and other currents who did not adapt to bourgeois democracy, their analysis of democratic counter-revolution in the Stalinist states is viewed as fatalism. But this is empiricist logic-chopping. To understand that the "cold stroke" restoration was achieved by "democratic" means, does not exclude the possibility of political revolution. It means precisely that our programme for political revolution makes no concessions to the democratic counter-revolution.

It means realistically that political revolution would only have been possible by asserting a strong leadership of the best elements in the working class [not the labour-aristocratic leaders of the miners] behind a programme of armed class independence of the bourgeoisie, restorationists, and other agents of imperialism.

Since these conditions were not realised, and the counter-revolution prevailed, we cannot credit any stage in the Democratic Counter-revolution (DCR) as pre-revolutionary or revolutionary. This does not mean that we see the DCR as "inevitable" but, given the objective and subjective conditions, we saw it as very likely. Precisely because we always hold out the hope that revolutionary intervention can change events, our programme would have been to rally the vanguard to defend the gains of October.

As it was workers rallied to the call to defend their "democratic" freedoms from Stalinism, but did not use these freedoms to fight the restorationists seizure of power due to the absence of revolutionary leadership. As a result the "democratic" aspect of the CR was limited to workers struggle to abolish stalinism when the stalinists were already abolishing themselves. Because such "democracy" resulted in the overthrow of the workers' states it is necessarily a counter-revolutionary democracy, because workers peacefully voted for the overthrow of the gains of 1917. Because the DCR led to the end of the workers' states, and to a world historic defeat, we are forced to acknowledge that this opens a counter-revolutionary period in which capitalism is immeasurably strengthened relative to the worlds working class.

Why is there any question that the closing of the chapter of history opened in 1917, is a world-historic defeat? In what way would such an "historic catastrophe" not open a counter-revolutionary period, "democratic" or not?

The material gains of October have been largely demolished. The advances of the planned economies have been smashed by bourgeois states. Workers' living standards, and workers' rights, have been destroyed. The ex-workers' states are being forced to become capitalist semi-colonies, and compete economically, if not militarily, with one another. This creates new sources of surplus-value, and divides workers into capitalist mini-states. World capitalism can now claim an ideological victory over "communism" and further weaken the ideological basis for socialism in the working classes. The petty bourgeois left is reeling in retreat from "post-communism" and falling back into a defence of "market socialism".

But this does not mean that in a counter-revolutionary period all is lost. It does not mean that the world working class has been historically, or strategically, defeated as a class. The destruction of the dws's represents a huge victory for international capitalism, but it cannot solve its fundamental economic crisis. The collapse of the workers' states is part of the world wide offensive of capitalism against workers and peasants to destroy more value and so restore the conditions for profits. In that sense, the collapse of Stalinism is part of the world crisis which cannot avoid further "stagnation and decay" and which can only be overcome by all out "class war" on workers in order to smash their resistance to further destruction of jobs and living standards.

The LRCI draws a straight line from this necessary ongoing "class war" to "revolution", and claims that we are in a revolutionary period. But to claim this we have to have real revolutions, not imaginary ones. The LRCI claims that its programme is one which leads this revolution? Where? In the ex-workers' states, the LRCI fights with a programme to defend and smash the moribund workers' states. It demands: defend state property, but smash the state! In the single most important struggle to defend the workers' states it imagines still exist, the LRCI offers only confusion, disorientation, demoralisation. Elsewhere, as we shall see, the LRCI abandons the class line to fight alongside bourgeois restorationists, and imperialist agents, for .... "democracy"! Against the LRCI's charge that those who say we are in a CR period have no programme, and are passive and fatalistic, we say it is your programme that is passive and fatalistic, in a word bankrupt.

Let us quote Trotsky on the question of tailing "democratic" imperialism:

"As regards the petty bourgeois democrats—conservative and cowardly—they in general cannot imagine any possible role other than that of toadying to the liberal bourgeoisie or the reaction. This is why to them it is absolutely indisputable that anyone who does not go with them tailing imperialist democracy is ipso facto an accomplice of fascism. In other words they start from the total denial of the possibility of an independent proletarian politics—in this lies the entire secret. The rejection of independent proletarian politics is now pressing upon the petty bourgeoisie with particular force as result of the degeneration of the Soviet Union, the defeat of workers in Italy, Germany and Austria, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and so on ..and in view of the fact that the working class of the world has been thrown backward into a totally defensive position. But precisely in such a period, the revolutionary vanguard has the duty with special vigor and implacability to uphold the independent historical truth of the proletarian vanguard. Here opens the unbridgeable gulf between Marxists and the conservative petty-bourgeois democrats who once a week recall that they are socialists."

## Objectivist vs dialectic Method.

Ironically, having accused WPNZ/A comrades of "objectivism" for some years, it is the LRCI's position that reflects this method. What do we find in common in the response to the collapse of Stalinism, in the restoration process, and indeed to the world crisis of capitalism expressed in the present "Revolutionary Period"? In one word- objectivism—the belief that theoretically abstract categories which are unmediated by class struggle, are automatically responsible for historic changes. The classic position in the history of Marxism is that of Plekhanov - the fatalism of evolutionary Marxism, later to become the doctrine of Menshevism and Stalinism. In essence, this is the belief that objective processes, including class consciousness, and class struggle, have a predetermined course, and are not subject to the intervention of the revolutionary vanguard.

Objectivism involves a rejection of marxist dialectics. Dialectics requires us to understand the way reality is transformed as the result of contradictions. But these contradictions are not 'evolutionary'—outside subjective intervention. On the contrary, knowledge allows us not merely to interpret reality, but to actively remake it. The revolutionary party is the essence of the fusion of theory and practice which makes revolutionary politics possible. But if that knowledge is not based upon active intervention in the class struggle, then it becomes dried-up [not succulent!], dogmatic and incapable of informing a revolutionary programme.

## Programmatic Disorientation.

Dried-up, dogmatic programme! Wrong diagnosis, wrong prognosis! The LRCI's diagnosis on restoration is wrong and therefore its prognosis is wrong and its programme is disoriented. Its programme is also revisionist because it adapts to bourgeois democracy in the workers' states; makes united fronts with restorationists and speeds up the process of social overturns; and fails to recognise the overturns; puts forward action programmes under state capitalism which call for political revolution.

Against this bankrupt programme revolutionaries counterpose a transitional programme of demands with the aim of stopping further privatisations by smashing the capitalist state. The state capitalist regimes are capitalist states, not "bourgeois regimes". While the restoration process is incomplete, the content of state property is capitalist. Therefore we are for expropriating "state capitalist property" as well as private property under workers' control. We are for reforging workers' councils [soviets] as the basis of building independent working class organisations for the struggle for power. We also enter united fronts with workers in every arena of class struggle. We fight the capitalist reaction by defending bourgeois democratic rights, opposing pogroms and wars and call on workers of all states to unite and turn the weapons on their ruling classes. Our

aim is to fight for a socialist republic as part of a larger federation of socialist states—a "socialist united states of Europe"!

The LRCI is also wrong to talk about a "revolutionary period" since 1989 in the face of a world-wide democratic counter-revolution. This DCR in many of the collapsed DWS and state capitalist states takes the form of reactionary nationalist wars and pogroms, inspired by imperialist states to facilitate the re-partition of the ex-Stalinist states as new capitalist semi-colonies. Where there is a clear national oppression of one state by another, we are bound to call for independent socialist republics. Where imperialism is backing states and/or those states also engage in national oppression we do not support national independence. Instead we fight for the international unity of all workers in all states to arm themselves and turn their guns on their bourgeois politicians and defend workers' property, or expropriate capitalist property, by a seizure of state power.

## The case of Bosnia

In the case of Bosnia we reject the LRCI line in defense of Bosnia as it is now in a bloc with Croatia and backed by the US and Germany. Bosnia is now clearly engaged in the oppression of other nationalities. We support the original defeatist line on Bosnia and for a workers' revolution and the transformation of the inter-communal war into a war against bureaucracies, restorationists and all imperialist states. Instead of killing each other with the aim of creating ethnic semi-colonial capitalist micro-states the workers from all communities should unite and overthrow their rulers and create a socialist federation. Instead of calling for more international volunteers to support Izetbegovic, we should be for the expulsion of all the Islamic and Croat chauvinist "volunteers", as well as other nationalists, and communalist militia. We should be for workers in other countries to volunteer fighters and arms to build anti-imperialist multi-ethnic councils and militias that should expel all the great powers from the region.

Once more we think that the LRCI is putting the tactic of the right of self-determination before the strategy of political revolution. The whole thrust of the collapse of Stalinism under the combined pressure of imperialism and the crisis of the plan, makes nationalism reactionary in all but extreme cases. In which Eastern European country are capitalist restorationist regimes promoting good relations between ethnic groups? Social counter-revolution produces inevitably ethnic chauvinism.

The introduction of free market and capitalist laws means that capitalism's main enemies are collectivism and working class consciousness, solidarity and internationalism. Individualism, and the right to own private property, is linked with the right to (re-)create ones own ethnic identity and statelet. Imperialism needs to destroy Comecon and the planned economy. World capitalism pressures companies, regions and republics to be profitable. The companies that in the past were under a common plan must now compete to destroy each other. The same competitive destruction is expressed at national/communal levels.

All nationalist/communalist bourgeois movements try to distract the working class. Instead of fighting against their class enemies (imperialism and capitalism), the workers are split according to national/communal lines. With this the proletariat is divided and workers' support is won for national-capitalist interests. The Yugoslav wars were inter-communal wars in which the roots of it were the imperialist and capitalist penetration. Every side is trying to create a communalist bourgeois state ruled by a new class. The arms dealers and imperialist powers increase these rivalries as part of a game around who could have more power in the international arena.

The LRCI had a correct position at the beginning of the war. We were in favour of defending Sarajevo, Tuzla and any multi-ethnic community against the Serbs but without supporting the Bosnian government. We were in favour of defending every community against Muslim, Croat or Serb militia attack. We were for the transformation of the ethnic war in a civil war against bureaucracy and imperialism. We should return to that line. Under imperialist and reformist pressure, the LRCI changed and adapted to "democratic" imperialism.

## The League's retreat into centrism

The structural crisis of the last 20 years has seen the balance of class forces shift in favour of capitalism. Most of the left has retreated from the defeat of "socialism" into some openly bourgeois fall-back position of market socialism. There is the associated fatalism of writing off the Bolshevik revolution as doomed from the start, or at least premature if not adventurist. This amounts to a writing off of revolutionary optimism and the role of the working class as revolutionary agent. For those like the LRCI who formally reject defeatism, it is extremely difficult to resist the rightward pressures of public opinion on the official labour movement.

The temptation is to move to the right to keep pace with the retreating working class, or at least the centrist political groups in practice, meanwhile placing ones revolutionary hopes in the inevitability of revolution. A separation between abstract revolutionary theory and increasingly centrist political practice has taken place within the LRCI. To some extent this is inevitable, because the LRCI is cut off from active participation in the class struggle and as such it is left writing literary commentaries on struggles all around the world, increasingly supporting bourgeois democracy rather than independent working class struggles as the way forward.

Its remoteness from the class struggle is a reflection of the LRCI structure and class composition. It is dominated by the British Workers Power group, about 50 strong. It has declined in numbers from about 100 around the miners strike in the mid-80's and now has few industrial workers. Composed mainly of teachers other professionals and students its experience of class struggle is largely limited to the fightbacks in the public sector. This pattern is repeated in the other sections [except for Brazil] who are all predominantly students, middle-class or well paid workers. This in itself is not a necessary recipe for centrism, but unless corrected by an orientation towards the industrial working class, it will lead to more and more adaptation to petty bourgeois prejudices and positions.

The problem is that the LRCI does not recognise the problem. This is rooted in the inability to understand the material basis of the collapse of the FI and a failure of dialectics. Despite opposition inside the LRCI in the period since 1989, it has compounded its errors by prematurely "homogenising" its method and driving out opposition. This meant that attempts to correct the LRCI's method were fruitless. Each mistake saw the LRCI digging a deeper hole for its politics. Dobbs attempt to correct the wrong analysis of restoration saw his alternative analysis rejected on the grounds that it was limited to the level of exchange. Dobbs analysis of the "World Economy" never got the support needed to get published. Nor was his letter of resignation published in an IIB. Johnson's longstanding critiques of the LRCI were often acknowledged by leading members as correcting the L's line, while at the same time his "method" was characterised as "sectarian" by other leading members.

WPNZ/A's criticisms, which over several years have led to the formation of the Proletarian Faction, have met with the standard response—"Spartacist/sectarian". Despite the attempts at opposition, theory and practice has degenerated into an "homogenised" i.e. dogmatic, dried-up, formally revolutionary theory, and a sterile, bankrupt, reformist practice.

## Democratic Centralism

The IS/IEC claims that because we reject the LRCI's conception of Democratic Centralism, that we have abandoned democratic centralism altogether. It is true we have a different conception of democent from the LRCI. The LRCI caricatures our position as one of rejecting democent in the early stages of party building because there are not enough workers. They say that we will have to wait to implant proletarian sections in every country before attempting to build an international tendency. Not at all. We start with the materialist understanding of what caused the FI to collapse and deliberately try to learn from those lessons. Whatever our size, we insist on the necessity to orient to the

workers in order to compensate for the dangers of petty-bourgeois composition and of national narrowness [chauvinism]. The CLNZ came up against this problem in the RCP. Now we come up against it again in the LRCI.

Our experience is that small, isolated, petty-bourgeois dominated tendencies, geographically located in a major imperialist power have yet to find a way to overcome these problems. They will not rise above national narrowness until they recognise that the "solution" is part of the problem. The LRCI instead of recognising the need to fight to overcome these dangers, makes a virtue of necessity. Of necessity revolutionaries have to start with fighting propaganda groups (FPG's) that are small, overwhelmingly petty bourgeois in composition, and which do not represent the major forces of struggle around the world. This was the situation faced by the FI in the early 1930's. But this does not mean that we make a virtue of the propaganda stage of party building, minimising or even fetishising our narrow petty bourgeois composition and national narrowness.

A symptom of fetishing the early stage of party building, is the tactic of splits and fusions among the fragments of Trotskyist centrism with the aim of "rebuilding", "reforging" etc the FI. We reject this tactic as the main orientation of any FPG because the FI is dead and cannot be revived. Such a project wears the history of the postwar FI as a stinking corpse around its neck. None of these fragments seeking to breath life into the corpse have survived the current crisis of Trotskyism. This is what we would expect.

None of the Trotskyist left currents was theoretically armed to cope with the crisis of "Trotskyist centrism" posed by the world crisis of capitalism and the collapse of the Stalinist states. The permanent crisis of leadership was already acute by the 1940's. In the 1990's there is as yet no recognisable embryo of a revolutionary vanguard. To solve the crisis of revolutionary leadership we must turn our backs on the bankrupt method, theory and practice of post-war fake Trotskyism.

## Deja vu

The arguments above have shown that the question of the collapse of the FI, and our fear of the LRCI repeating the same degenerative process, were justfied in 1990. It raises the question as to whether any attempt to build a new international based upon democent can work when an organisation is so small, based mainly in Europe, with few sections mainly of a petty bourgeois composition, and none of them engaged in any systematic direct work in the class struggle. Can democent work when the life of the LRCI is mostly literary uninformed by direct links to the crucial areas of class struggle except in some isolated instances? How in this situation can the LRCI insist that its programme is correct, say in Stalinism and restoration, [though it admits it is incomplete] in its debates with "centrist" groups? Surely what this amounts to is the building of a new international with a very high entry qualification. Does this not dispose the whole organisation to bureaucratic centralism? Is this the approach of Lenin and the Bolsheviks to building the Revolutionary Communist International? Was it the approach of Trotsky in building the ILO and the Fourth International?

We don't think so. The way ahead for small revolutionary splinters is not to set down a new version of the Transitional Programme and expect everyone to agree. This is to beg a number of more fundamental questions about Marxism, dialectical materialism, and the living links between theory and practice which need to be tested out in struggle. This is neither a recipe for passivity, nor for a retreat into the libraries as the LRCI claims. On the contrary, by facing reality squarely and calling things by their right name we can approach the task of rebuilding the revolutionary tradition all the more seriously. The crisis of Stalinism and the breakup of the rotten centrist tendencies will create small left-moving splinters. It is necessary to develop a method of bringing these groups together as the embryo of a new revolutionary, Fifth, international.

Regroupment must flow from a reforging of Marxist method and theory tested in practice. Our main orientation must be to the working class in struggle, to youth, and other oppressed groups. Left-moving centrist splinters who get involved directly in class struggle can be won to a revolutionary programme. But only if our main orientation is to such struggles in the first place. In this way theory and practice are united even at the earliest stages of party building.

This is the method on which regroupment can take place on a democratic centralist basis on a number of levels of joint work, leading to fusion, but only on the basis of a high level of programmatic agreement tested out in revolutionary praxis. ■

# Reply to the Proletarian Faction

*Resolution of the International Executive Committee of the LRCI 10 July 1995*

Two comrades in the New-Zealand section, Leo and Juno, have declared a faction on the basis of a faction platform. The IS has reinstated Goldman, suspended from the WPNZ/A for disloyal action, to full membership since he too has declared his support for this faction. The IS has recognised the platform *For a Proletarian Faction* as a legitimate declaration within the statutes of the League. However it comes only eleven months after the Third LRCI Congress, at which a number of the positions repeated in the platform were overwhelmingly defeated. It also comes after a long discussion process going back to the Second Congress during which some of the signatories, despite various statements that the League was at a turning point, or that its revolutionary character was in jeopardy, repeatedly refused to form a faction. The IS warned the League more than once of the dangers of secret factionalism, though it is true that these warnings were aimed mainly at comrade Johnson.

The Proletarian Faction (PF) platform has a number of underlying themes. They indicate an extraordinarily high level of difference with the LRCI on matters of programme, tactics, organisational principles, and the history and achievements of the LRCI and its predecessor the MRCI. Moreover, they do not relate to a recent major event of the class struggle which might have exposed the scope of these differences. Rather, they relate to events as long ago as the Baltic States crisis of 1990 and the Yeltsin coup of 1991. Even the overthrow of the DWS the signatories (now) consider happened several years ago. Also, curiously for a faction platform, the PF does not propose any major re-orientation of the practical work of the League or its sections. The momentum for this faction declaration clearly does not come from events in the world class struggle, nor from the failings of the public work of the League. It comes from what its signatories regard as internal problems in WPNZ/A and by extension in the League as a whole .

This faction has been declared only after disciplinary measures taken by the IS as a result of the discovery of a disloyal and Abernite communication from the most recent of its signatories, Goldman, in which he talked openly of splitting the League. This E-mail was addressed to Johnson and transmitted by Leo (both had read this document "albeit cursorily"). Taken alongside Goldman's documents for the NZ/A conference, this makes it clear that something approaching an undeclared faction existed in WPNZ/A, at least shortly before this conference, and that it gained a relative majority for its positions and a majority in the leadership without openly telling the WPNZ/A membership what was at stake.

Whilst the IEC believes that these matters are far from irrelevant to the development of this factional struggle it will concentrate its attention on the platform in which they are alluded to only at the end and then in a quizzical manner.

The Faction notifies its disagreement with our historic positions on Stalinism, the history of the FI, the method and the results for analysing the restoration process, the practice of the League and its sections in the class struggle. It criticises the effects of the non-blue collar, productive worker composition on the League's sections and it questions the possibility, and even the desirability, of the existing democratic centralism of the League. Moreover, it characterises the League as centrist and its membership and leadership as petit bourgeois who have succumbed to alien class pressures, formed united fronts with imperialism etc etc.

The key themes, borrowed from In Defence of Marxism (IDOM), are method and class composition. By method its signatories seem to mean fundamentalism in political economy, a wild oscillation between pessimism and optimism in perspectives, disappointed and dejected Stalinophilia when it comes to the restoration process and reductionism and economism on programmatic and tactical questions.

On class composition the comrades have stolen what they believe were Trotsky's positions in IDOM. The supposed problem is that the League is petit bourgeois in its class composition. Without a substantial implantation in the blue collar working class (and specifically in its productive sector) democratic centralism itself is impossible in a revolutionary organisation. Even a programme is necessarily abstract under such circumstances. And the pressure towards objectivism, stemming from petit bourgeois pressures subverting the Marxist method, is also inevitable.

The historical reference point for this theme is the post-war Fourth International. It collapsed (by 1946 according to the platform) into bureaucratic centralism and objectivism (fatalism) because of its bad class composition. The comrades write off the struggle to build/reconstruct the FI in the 40s and to build the M/LRCI in the 1980s and 1990s.

In response to this we characterise the PF's positions as fatalistic objectivism, a failure to understand the basic stages of party building, an arrogant dismissal of the experience and achievements of the League in building national sections and an unhealthy fear of living and functioning democratic centralism. All of this goes under the cover of a sub-syndicalist workerism (a distinctly petit bourgeois characteristic) and a national centred approach to party building. The PF call into question the very possibility of anything more than an international discussion framework of national sects, each awaiting their fusion with their own blue collar productive workers. This is the method of the enemies of the LRCI, the LTT and the LCC. It is a mimicking of the federalism of the ISO and the USFI. It is a declaration of opposition to our brand of democratic centralism - democratic centralism adopted and agreed to only after the establishment of fundamental programmatic agreement within the MRCI. As such, like all those who build international discussion partnerships, the PF's platform is an expression of opposition to the Trotskyist Manifesto, not a defence of it against an IS that has caved in to the pressures of democratic imperialism.

## The Restoration Process: a key test of method

The PF argues that this is "the crunch test for Trotskyism today." Here we have the first revolution in Leo's thinking. Until the platform appeared, Leo had never expressed significant disagreements on this question. Not when WPNZ/A joined the League as a section in July 1992, nor at the Second Congress when Dobbs put forward the position Leo has now adopted. At the IEC in January 1993 Leo voted for the resolution on Russia which embodied the LRCI's position on restoration.

In his May 1994 proto-factional platform Leo did not include the LRCI's analysis of the political economy of restoration.

At Congress one year ago Leo neither moved an amendment on this nor spoke in the debate. Most recently, six months ago he voted for the final resolution on the political economy of the restoration process at the last IEC which then appeared in TI16. Leo has now decided that capitalism was restored in Russia and elsewhere a long time ago. Of course any and every comrade has

a right to differ with the majority over the restoration process, over what constitutes the qualitative turning point, or over when and where this has occurred in particular cases. But after a record of accepting our analysis surely Leo owes the League an explanation, especially now that he warns of such dire consequences for the League's political heath which flow from it. Did he not notice before ? Or did he choose to bide his time?

The PF now claim that our restoration analysis is part of a passive processism which underpins a facile optimism. In fact we have never suggested that capitalist restoration has been long and difficult because of some disembodied economic process. We have pointed to the specific political (class and inter-state) barriers that have impeded the necessary measures being pushed through which would radically transform the accumulation process. It is true that we have also abstracted out from these class barriers to study what the basic, minimal changes are that have to be imposed on the operation of the enterprises. But these cannot be achieved "automatically" as it were; on the contrary, they are the result of a bitter and protracted struggle between workers, managers, bourgeois politicians and bureaucrats.

Ironically Leo has now been converted to the 1991-2 RTT (USA) position that the introduction of a convertible currency was the decisive measure in capitalist restoration. Ironic because Leo has lectured us often enough about the need to base one's analysis of political economy on production and accumulation. Now, however, shifts in the character of the means of payment between the DWS and the west—exchange relations—are presented by the PF as the decisive ones. The PF say that with trade and price liberalisation "the law of value as it operates internationally would impact on the former workers' state and begin to convert output into commodities . . . " (p4).

Whilst it can and does *begin* to convert output into commodities it cannot be the decisive factor. A convertible currency is treated in this theory as the independent variable in the process of restoration whereas it is only a dependent variable. It can assist the commodification of output and labour power if certain conditions are met: if there is complete free access to hard currency and open free trade with the west which effects the formation of prices of production of the enterprises in the DWS; if the purchase of hard currency for trade is limited by controls by money issuing agencies in the DWS.

In this situation—which prevailed for years—the exchange rate between domestic and foreign currencies does not measure the relative labour productivities of each country. Nor, therefore, can the relative value of the commodities traded between the DWS and the west reflect global socially necessary labour. Exchange of commodities therefore does not act to impose western prices of production on inputs and outputs in the MWS. The real merit of the LRCI's analysis over the last four years has been to demonstrate the uneven and protracted nature of gradually imposing the law of value over the capital formation, reproduction and destruction; that is, over the whole circuit of production and exchange in the MWS. Unlike the RTT position, which the PF have picked up, it has provided a far better—indeed, the only—guide to understanding the social and political conflicts of the last three years.

It is no accident that since the RTT first announced their discovery to the world in 1992, they have not attempted to analyse the conflicts inside Russia in terms which are compatible with the existence of state capitalism in that country.

The faction takes issue with our term "moribund workers' state" (MWS) and suggest that we have invented this concept to hide (from ourselves) the existence of state capitalism. The PF are impatient with the formulation of new concepts that express real stages in a protracted transition process. As with their insistence on "counterposing" workers' democracy to bourgeois democracy, or production versus distribution, they show an incapacity to think dialectically. For all the talk of method the PF operate with binary and mutually exclusive categories which aid such wooden counterpositions at all levels of politics.

It pre-disposes them to post-festum discoveries that fundamental changes have already occurred without their noticing or predicting them. Leo is much happier to have "discovered", after so long, that the shift from workers' state to state capitalism took place all at once in a leap. What we mean by MWS is exactly what we said in the IEC resolution which Leo voted for: namely, a specific stage in the degenerative process of the planned economy whereby, "a DWS . . . has a restorationist government in power which is actively demolishing the foundations of the planned economy." (IIB 81, p1 of resolution).

## Bourgeois and proletarian democracy

The LRCI is charged with having "abandoned the political defence of state property (workers' democracy), in favour of bourgeois democracy, which by definition no longer defends workers' property and is in fact the method by which restoration was introduced before 1989 and completed after 1989."(p3) It is perverse to suggest that we failed, during and after 1989, to advance a programme of political revolution (i.e. for workers democracy) to rescue social ownership from the disorganising grip of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Our action programmes for the GDR, for Russia, for the Baltic republics, for Romania, as well as our more general statements, put this programme at the centre of our propaganda. Leo betrays a tendency to think purely formally which leads him into the following errors: he fails to distinguish between a fully-fledged regime of bourgeois democracy and bourgeois democratic rights. The PF fail to distinguish between certain rights which can assist the working class in its collective struggle and those which can only assist the social counter-revolution. The PF therefore doesn't understand that certain bourgeois democratic rights are not negated by workers' democracy *but enlarged* from a formal right to a material right for all (e.g. the right to publish freely). Some bourgeois-democratic rights are not an obstacle on the way to workers' democracy but could help on the way to political revolution.

Bourgeois right is not something imported by restorationist forces into the degenerated workers' states. It is an inheritance from bourgeois society after the bourgeoisie has been overthrown and the capitalist class expropriated. Leo has always interpreted Trotsky's analysis of the bourgeois character of the workers' state under Stalinist rule to mean only that the caste appropriates a surplus to maintain bureaucratic privilege. On the contrary, it is important to start from the partially bourgeois character of all workers' states, both healthy and degenerate, in the aftermath of the overthrow of capitalism. This character flows from the fact that the transition to socialism implies a regime of inequality and a state which defends inequality is in that sense still a bourgeois state.

But, naturally enough, bourgeois right in the workers' state is not identical to that in capitalist society. There can be no right to ownership of the means of production; no right to exploitation. Nor can this find a constitutional expression. It is incompatible with the transition to socialism and is an example of a narrow, class right. It is in total contradiction to the Leninist attitude to bourgeois right in the transition which is to free such rights from the "yoke of capital". The Stalinist dictatorship does not transcend bourgeois right. It frees it from the "yoke of capital" only to make it the servant of a usurping caste of oppressors; a caste which plunders the planned economy. There is no longer the right to inequality based on the unequal contribution to social labour but an illegitimate, hidden set of privileges. Let us be clear: these privileges are worse and far wider in scope than the system of generalised and transparent bourgeois right that must exist at first in the healthy workers' state.

And what of bourgeois democracy? It has no place in the transition to socialism. Bourgeois democracy represents the equality of private property owners; it is the generalised political expression of the right to buy and sell commodities and then use them unhindered. It includes the right to exploit labour power. Bourgeois democracy, with its atomisation of the citizens along these lines is the rule of capital. It is superseded by workers' representative democracy, i.e. a working body that fuses all branches of government and makes them immediately responsive and answerable to the direct producers and consumers. What the LRCI has learned from experience of the death throes of Stalinism, however, was that this propagandistic

counterposition of models or principles was insufficient to the tasks of the political revolution in the present period. It needed to be supplemented by tactics which enabled the working class to come to the forefront of the struggle for democratic rights and strive, in the process, to break its own illusions in these rights and create fighting organisations and a conscious understanding of the necessity for independent working class power.

Leo has held the view that bourgeois democracy is inextricably linked to capitalist restoration. This is true. A regime of bourgeois democracy which is a systematic expression of the rights of private property owners cannot long co-exist with social ownership of the means of production. Nevertheless, bourgeois democracy is not the only suitable political vehicle for restoration, nor even the most effective. Nor is it without its contradictions, some general to all bourgeois democracy (BD) and some highly specific to it in a MWS. These can and indeed have to be used to aid the fight against the restoration process. Hence a phobic and one-sided estimation of the dangers bourgeois democracy presents to the working class will lead to tactical bankruptcy and a passive propagandistic self-sidelining of revolutionaries from real political struggles that could decide the fate of the restoration process. It is clear to the LRCI that bourgeois democratic forms have predominated (albeit hemmed in and curtailed by bonapartist measures) for a number of reasons. In 1989-90 it was needed to mobilise mass working class sentiment against the Stalinist dictatorship under the banner of "for democracy against tyranny". Thereafter the fragmentation of the ruling bureaucracies and the emergence of proto-classes required a forum within which they could debate out their restorationist programmes without recourse to the masses on the streets. The working class would only tolerate the privations of restoration (unemployment) for a period in the name of new political freedoms (the right to make a public protest against unemployment).

Against these social and political necessities after five years of restoration we can also say that it has certainly ensured a very slow and drawn out character for the process. This compares unfavourably, it seems, with the Chinese restoration process under full-scale Stalinist dictatorship. Thus there is no reason to think that democratic forms are the instrument of restoration par excellence. Changes of government; fractious, small political parties without a meaningful social base—all have led to inertia, a parallelogram of forces that have obstructed a decisive resolution of some of the major obstacles in the path of capitalism (e.g. subsidies, tariffs, unemployment, welfare arrangements).

Some of the key economic measures have been hampered by the dispersed and fragmented character of political power under the emerging bourgeois democracies. In conditions of restorationist bureaucracy and of new restorationist classes, we defended democratic rights for the working class as more advantageous than a dictatorship whether by a Deng Xiaoping or a Yeltsin.

### United fronts with imperialism—where? when?

The PF returns to the well worn issue of the August coup of 1991 in the USSR. Leo has always recognised that it was possible to "offer a military bloc against the common enemy" but he attaches to it a caveat "—on condition that Yeltsin called for a general strike and armed workers' militia". In fact Yeltsin did the one explicitly, though not the other. Would Leo have held out for this second demand, broken his military bloc with Yeltsin and gone home, or gone to the workers on strike and told them to break their bloc with Yeltsin? We would have continued to support the defence of the White House, the Leningrad Soviet etc etc. and we would have continued to call on Yeltsin to arm the workers. We suggest that Leo, Juno, and Goldman, in future discussions, spell out what the practical differences were and exactly how our willingness to concert our forces with the defenders was a united front with imperialism, and how if Yeltsin had called on workers to arm themselves or distributed arms to them this would have made a military bloc with him more principled.

The PF platform also accuses the LRCI of "a clear break from Trotsky", because we argued in our August 1991 statement that the coup makers' defence of their own caste privileges was insufficient reason for us to support them. The PF seem to think that because Trotsky said he was willing to form a united front with Stalin when the Stalinists defend the planned property relations, despite the fact that they were doing so only in order to defend their privileges, we cannot reject the defence of their privileges. But the bureaucrats' privileges were never the object of defence. These privileges are not part of the nature of a workers state and we defend only solely and exclusively those things which are. Again Leo is drawn to the dual nature of the bureaucracy—its partly proletarian character. Surely if it defends its privileges within a workers' state it must be defending the latter as well. Trotsky never said this any more than he said that the Stalinist Bureaucracy had a dual nature as the IST/IBT tradition claims.

These two defences can coincide but they do not have to coincide. What the LRCI statements said was that Yanaev and co. were only defending their bureaucratic privileges by crushing the workers' democratic rights. They were precisely not defending the workers' gains and that was why we opposed them. Fifty years on all significant leaders and factions of the bureaucracy, Gorbachev, Yanaev and Yeltsin, had despaired of the planned economy as a viable source of their privileges.

In 1991 moreover they were faced not with the threat of overthrow and liquidation by a fascist imperialism, but with the invitation to join the world market economy courtesy of the USA, the EU etc.

For this reason 1991 was radically different to 1941. The central error of the schematic method of the Faction is that, in essence, they do not understand the fundamental role the working class must play in the political revolution.

We fight for and defend each and every democratic right which makes it possible for our class to discuss and to organise itself. Particularly, if most workers have many bourgeois-democratic illusions it is essential that there exists political freedom because these are better conditions in which to discuss and convince workers than conditions of Stalinist dictatorship. So it is completely counterproductive and, indeed, reactionary to support a hard-line wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy against a politicised and fighting working class—even if it has bourgeois democratic illusions. In the end one has simply to ask him/herself: what conditions are better for the class to win its independence? Our answer is: The more democratic freedom the class has the more and the better it can fight against Stalinism and capitalist restoration; the better it can test (and lose) its illusions in the market and in the bourgeois democracy through class struggle. A hard-line Stalinist backlash against the working class would worsen these possibilities.

As the experience of Poland 1981 demonstrates, a hard-line Stalinist putsch (i) ends in capitalist restoration because of the appetite of the bureaucrats, (ii) strengthens the pro-market and bourgeois wing inside the workers' movement and (iii) smashes all democratic rights and weakens the left wing inside the workers' movement.

It is only the working class which can be the subject of the political revolution—and not the Stalinist bureaucracy against the working class.

So how was our tactical military bloc with the Yeltsin-led forces a bloc with imperialism? Did we advocate such a bloc? Our statement said Yeltsin's calls —for active resistance to the coup, for a general strike against it—"needed to be supported and taken up by workers' organisations, which at the same time needed to retain their political independence from the Yeltsin restorationists. The greatest danger to the working class now that the coup has collapsed is Yeltsin. The greatest tragedy for the Soviet working class would be to hitch itself to the wagon of Yeltsin or the Democratic Forum." (August 23rd statement of the IS)

In addition our statements clearly and unequivocally spoke out against restorationism, for the defence of the planned economy, for workers' councils, for an armed workers' militia

etc, as have all our statements and action programmes since.

It is outrageous to say, as the PF does, "when it comes to workers exercising their democratic rights, they are invited to form united fronts with imperialism."

The only logic which can convict us of such a united front is that used by the Spartacists who said that if you supported Solidarnosc in 1981 you were in a united front with the Catholic Church and the CIA. It is the same logic which says that you can't call for critical support to the reformist parties without demanding that they "break with the bourgeoisie first".

No, a three day limited military bloc was not a popular front with imperialism, no matter how many telephone calls Yeltsin made or received from Bush or Major.

If every League member will go back to the copies of TI, of the TB, or of Workers Power at this time, and for the four years since, they will realise that the statement that we "called for a united front without conditions" or that we "succumb(ed) to popular pressure to defend the democratic rights won by workers by appealing to Yeltsin's restorationist friends including the imperialists" is an outright slander. Come on comrades show us these appeals? Show us just one! We can show you dozens of warnings, dozens of slogans aimed against Yeltsin, against restoration and against imperialism; before, after and, to our own great credit, *during* the Yeltsin coup. The rest of the international centrist and sectarian kept quiet until the results of the August events were clear.

## The Period—a revolution in Leo's political economy

A year ago Leo considered that the LRCI designation of the present period as a revolutionary one was correct as far as it went. He accepted that since 1989 there was an intensification of a counter-revolutionary phase but that "in the next three years, pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations will be posed." Today, however, the PF platform states, "We subscribe to the analysis of Dobbs on the nature of the period . . . "(p5). That is, that the period is a counter-revolutionary one. There is no explanation for this astonishing revolution in Leo's thinking. What lies behind the shift? We believe that it lies in the nature of Leo's conception of the relationship between economics and politics. This was, and remains, one-sided and wooden; it yielded up the most telescoped and catastrophic of predictions in the early 1990s. They have failed to materialise and Leo has flipped over to an equally one-sided and wooden alternative.

Methodologically, Leo sees politics as following hard upon economics. Essentially, he argues that political periods are the conscious formulation of anti-working class attacks by bourgeois governments that flow from the need to address the problem of the over-accumulation of capital in each country. Recessions get deeper and longer because the scale of successful attacks on the working class in the previous cycles was insufficient to overcome the problem of over-accumulation. Hence, the attacks must get sharper and more drastic. Leo is guilty of reifying the over-accumulation of capital, investing it with a power to make the political representatives of the bourgeoisie act in accordance with the "needs" of capital. This is not how the relationship between politics and economics works.

The collapse of Stalinism created revolutionary and pre-revolutionary situations in a number of countries. The simultaneous end of the Cold War amplified the differences between the major imperialist powers and contributed directly to the collapse of the political system in Italy and its severe rupture in Japan. Within Italy we have seen the dramatic rise, fall, and rise again of Berlusconi in the space of two years and the collapse and revival in the fortunes of the left. We have witnessed the paralysis and discredit of global institutions (UN); we have witnessed the complete transformation in the character of liberation movements in Ireland, Palestine and South Africa. We have seen rise of fascism in Eastern Europe and Russia. We have seen the political instability of bourgeois regimes in eastern Europe. In the space of one, two, or three years, we have seen the fall of ruling Stalinist parties, then their reformation and rise again as parties of opposition (Poland, Germany). In Mexico and Brazil we have seen sharp rise, fall and rise in the fortunes of the established bourgeois parties and the left in the space of one or two years.

The difference between the LRCI and the faction is not in the first place over the political economy of the long period of depressed accumulation since 1973 nor over any theoretical appreciation of the nature of crises in the imperialist epoch. But what we have never agreed upon is how these determining features of the period of protracted over-accumulation work through to the surface of society. For Leo and the PF the path from economics to politics is a one-way street. Crises get deeper and the attacks more frenzied. But the relationship between economic crises and political stability is not at all linear. Neither the balance of class forces nor the tasks appropriate to the day can be simply "read off" from the nature of the economic period.

Naturally enough, when predictions are made on the basis of the economic situation, without tempering them with a consideration of the superstructural and conjunctural, everything is exaggerated and telescoped. In 1992 Leo argued that the underlying crisis of profitability affecting all imperialisms meant that the crisis of Stalinism and restoration would mean that these states would become battlegrounds on which imperialism would play out its rivalries: "The major determinant of this situation is that the imperialist powers must now become direct rivals to recover profitability. Each will want to destroy the other's capital to increase its share of the world market and its share of a re-established market in the former Stalinists states." Or again: "The UN will fall apart as EU and Japan pull out in the land grab for the eastern Bloc and ex USSR." And as if this were not enough: "Spontaneous civil wars will break out in resistance to restoration, which will again provoke imperialist powers to intervene to pick off new semi colonies."

In 1990 Leo predicted: "The tendency of the rate of profit to fall and the state managed counter-vailing tendencies have brought the FRG (West Germany) to the limit of its ability to restore profitability without recourse to massive depression and civil war." Is this what have we seen? On the contrary, we have had a cyclical recession and recovery within a unified German capitalism and the restoration of political equilibrium on the basis of the defeat of the East German working class and continued compromises with the leadership of the West German workers' movement.

And what of restoration? Leo now says it is long behind us. What then ever happened to the predictions about wars of imperialist intervention and civil wars to secure capitalism?

## The Fourth International , the LRCI and International Democratic Centralism

If the history of the FI was a major and long running difference between the PF comrades and the LRCI you would expect there to be a history of documents and resolutions on the subject. But the actual history of relations between the IS, the LRCI as a whole, and the WPNZ/A leadership is somewhat different. In particular, Leo, with whom the IS has had most dealings, has never raised the issue in the LRCI since the WPNZ/A joined the League (July 1992). The IS has, writing to Leo on this very subject. We still have not had a reply.

The faction platform states: "We explained the collapse of the 4I as the result of material conditions, of isolation, class composition, and Euro- and US-centrism. The resulting split in theory and practice led to disorientation after the war. For us the 4 I was not salvageable by 1946. The League took the view that the 4 I was healthy until 1948 and collapsed and dies in 1951. Given the League's understanding, this posed the question as to whether it too would become a victim of isolation, bad class composition and Eurocentrism." (For a Proletarian Faction p 1 ). They go on to draw from this conclusions not only about the League's supposed political degeneration (or failure to break with centrism in the first place) but indeed of the impossibility of small fighting propaganda groups building a democratic centralist international tendency, based on a common programme, without prior strong roots amongst blue collar workers "at the point of production and subject to intensive struggles over the rate of

exploitation." (ibid p6)

Let us look at the charges Leo and Juno raise against the FI and thus by analogy the LRCI.

First, chauvinism: Leo says, in his December 1990 letter that both the European and US sections of the FI collapsed into chauvinism. No reading of the history of the FI could lead any sane person to make this charge against either the European or US leaders of the FI. Throughout the war they were internationalists. Evidence of their internationalism is well documented in texts and in the number of lives sacrificed in the struggles against imperialism. What the US, British and French Trotskyists were guilty of, to different degrees, was a centrist vacillation away from consistent revolutionary defeatism. Overall they took a position similar to Trotsky's in 1914-1916 rather than Lenin's.

The signatories of the Platform put down the degeneration of the FI to its isolation from the working class, its lack of a worker membership etc. This is as factually untrue, as it is methodologically false. The SWP, Bolivian Trotskyism, Vietnamese Trotskyism, British Trotskyism and even sections of European Trotskyism, had large percentages, and in some cases, a majority of industrial proletarians as members and leaders. The SWP grew to its largest number of industrial members ever. This proved neither that these sections were on the right track, nor on the wrong one. It proved simply that after the war small sections of the working class were sufficiently radicalised to embrace Trotskyism.

As for Eurocentrism, in fact the FI continued for a few years to believe that Europe would witness revolutionary events on a post First World War scale and that the unbroken and massively unionised US working class would play a central revolutionary role. But this was Trotsky's perspective in 1940! Was he a Eurocentric or a US chauvinist? As the FI reconstructed itself after 1945 it re-knitted the links, broken by war, and addressed itself to the problems of the colonies and semi-colonies. That the answers it came up with by 1951 were to rapidly evolve into a third worldist location of the "epicentre of world revolution" in the semi colonies and the Asian DWS speaks a lot of Pablo and Mandel's political degeneration but not for their Eurocentrism. The degeneration of the FI resulted from the wrong politics - which evolved throughout the 1940s as anybody who has read The Death Agony of the Fourth International knows - not being corrected between 1948 and 1951, but being compounded.

Class composition is not the ultimate deciding factor. Politics is. You can have the best class composition in the world and still make fatal mistakes. Of course, none of this is to celebrate bad class composition. All of us, we are sure, want to win workers to the organisation. But the organisation we want to win them to is defined by its politics. If you win a thousand workers to a centrist programme you won't necessarily save your organisation from centrist degeneration. We hope that Leo, Juno and Goldman will draw the lessons for building in New Zealand today and revise their views on the impossibility of building internationals until strong well rooted blue collar proletarian sections exist. This was not Trotsky's position and would have prevented him from building the ILO, the MFI and the FI itself on the basis of democratic centralism.

## Class Composition, Party Building and the International

The faction's position is that the League's social composition is petty bourgeois; therefore it has degenerated and will continue to degenerate politically; either we break through to the masses and thus regenerate ourselves politically or the whole attempt to build democratic centralist parties and an international is doomed. This claim and this prognosis is false all the way along the line. Let us look first at their methodology on the question of class composition. The PF comrades are guilty of a vulgar materialist and demagogic approach to this whole question. Demagogic because they do not tell us how their own class composition has enabled them to become "the proletarian faction" without themselves being proletarian (as far as we know so far it consists of two univerity level lecturers and a post-graduate research student). In their own terms this should disqualify them from the start. In fact these comrades' class position is indeed irrelevant to the correctness or incorrectness of their ideas for the simple fact that individuals can and do desert their class position politically and go over to that of the proletariat. In a disciplined proletarian organisation, by fighting for the working class's historic and immediate goals and those of the oppressed, and by shedding all claims for privileges, such individuals become fully proletarian revolutionaries.

Next the PF ignores the role of individuals recruited from non-proletarian strata in the development of Marxist theory and the building of a revolutionary party. Our *Theses on the Early Stages of Party Building*, based on Lenin and Trotsky, recognise that in a fighting propaganda group, especially in its very earliest stages, socialist intellectuals, whether of proletarian or of petty bourgeois origin play a very important role, as theoreticians, propagandists and polemicists. Why? Because in the first stages of creating or renewing the programme and theory of the movement, especially after a long period of degeneration, or after heavy defeats, these tasks are particularly important.

Our tasks in such periods (and we are in just such a one after the collapse of Stalinism) is to extend and develop Marxism to explain the catastrophes and point out the new possibilities. It is to re-elaborate the programme and to win, by propaganda and involvement in ongoing struggles, the best cadres from existing organisations, the trade unions, the reformist and centrist parties and the thinking and most combative elements of the youth.

The starting place for such struggles however, nationally and internationally, will not usually be one where we already have deep roots in the masses or where many of our members are blue collar workers. Should this be used as an alibi for not being involved in the struggles of blue collar workers, or of refusing to recruit them? Not at all. But what it does mean is that our class composition too did not fall from heaven, nor is it a result of the policies or capitulation to imperialism of a supposedly petit bourgeois IS. It is a product of the tasks we have set ourselves, of the stage of FPG construction, of the defeats the working class has suffered in New Zealand, in Britain, in Bolivia.

It is undoubtedly true that the League is poorly implanted in the blue collar, productive working class but it is not an organisation dominated by petit bourgeois elements—not by any scientific Marxist criteria. No one has ever concealed our poor implantation in the productive sector and we all agree that it is our task to transform this situation.

If the faction were proposing concrete steps to achieve this it would be contributing to the debate on how to carry forward our trade union work. It would be helping fulfil the tasks set out in the Building the League document adopted at the Third Congress. But it does not contain a single suggestion on this score. Maybe Leo, Juno and Goldman think they have discovered in "Workers Forums" the answer for the League as a whole. If so, let's discuss the experience of this perspective. It is one that the IS commented on positively in its response to the perspectives adopted at the WPNZ-A conference.

Unfortunately we do not think this is the objective of the Proletarian Faction, despite its grand name which clearly expresses aspiration rather than reality, plus an unwarranted hostility to other comrades no different in class origin and position to themselves. Its purpose is not so much to come up with a policy of proletarianisation for the League but to argue that the LRCI is led by petit bourgeois intellectuals who out of class instinct oppose building the LRCI through involvement in working class struggle. And the PF are one hundred per cent wrong on this. Their evidence for the charge is the WPB group. They point to its slow decline in numbers over the last five years and tell us that it is composed "mainly of teachers, other professionals and students, its recent experience of the class struggle is largely limited to the fightbacks in the public sector."

WPB has, always fought shy of boasting about its experience as an organisation or that of its leadership. But when statements such as the above are made it is time to set the record straight.

WPB has the most extensive experience, both in timescale and in scope, of practical involvement in the class struggle (economic and political). It is true that the experience of com-

rades from Latin America whether from the early seventies or the mid-eighties is of undoubted importance, particularly, of revolutionary, pre-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary situations. WP(B) however does have the experience of building a stable FPG through daily, systematic intervention into the class struggle over a period of twenty years as an independent group, and before that as a faction in a much larger and more blue collar one (the International Socialists).

WPB is not as the PF claim dominated mainly by teachers, 'other professionals' (?) and students. It is predominantly made up of public sector workers (many of whom are now grouped in one union - Unison) . . . . .[*details of membership that follow have been deleted for security reasons*-LRCI].

We would like the British section to have a lot more industrial workers in it. But, in the context of developments in the British class struggle (explained in PR 10) and the composition of the British working class itself (explained in PR 7) the weight of the public sector members in WP(B) is not surprising.

Indeed it is the same in the bigger groups. Both Militant and the SWP are now mainly composed of white collar public sector workers. In fact does the British section have an unhealthy or bad class composition in the sense that it should have a better one but does not do so because it evades involvement in the struggles of these workers? We think the answer is decisively no!

But the whole definition of class struggle advanced by the faction is wrong. Class struggle does not only take the form of "intensive struggles over the rate of exploitation" amongst "industrial workers at the point of production". Such a definition would cut down the working class to a minority fraction of the population of Europe, North America and Japan and a tiny part of the world's population overall. In addition it would mean that the class struggle would be absent from large tracts of the world for considerable periods.

The working class struggle is, thankfully, broader and richer than this ultra-economistic definition of it.

The IS, through its connections with WP(B), has been able to learn from and, indeed participate in those struggles. Two IS members have recently led strikes in their workplaces. One IS member is also the WPB full timer in charge of the section's trade union work and has experience of blue and white collar workers in struggle over two decades. One IS member regularly participates in the group's biggest branch, another is connected with the production of a paper which is intimately connected with the struggles of WP(B)'s members. This is how proletarian leaders participate in the class struggle. Were Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky not such leaders because they were never on strike themselves "at the point of production" or because for extended periods, ten years or more at a time, they were in exile and 'reduced' to theoretical work, newspaper production, party organisation etc?

Last but not least the charge against the League and its leadership is that it is Eurocentric. Is this a political or a geographical charge? Does it mean that we are centred in Europe or that we want to remain so? Presumably this is a political charge that we consciously ignore, neglect or downplay the importance of the other continents. This is plainly ridiculous. Before the LRCI was founded we won a comrade who was to remain a member of the IS for over a decade, Stefan. Though a political exile he was, up to the time we met him, an active member of the FIT, a Latin American based tendency based in Argentina (and Bolivia and Peru etc).

Our active involvement in the splits of the Lambert international, the USFI the TILC etc brought us into repeated contact with revolutionaries from other continents. In the mid to late eighties we contacted c'de Johnson. The IS participated personally in the winning of the Bolivian group through visits long and short by IS members to Bolivia and by discussions on return visits by the comrades. C'de Johnson tends to present the history of 1985-1992 as if he were the sole founder of two sections. In fact the personal and material resources invested by the IS was enormous given our size and all the other areas of intervention. As well as LA we maintained political relations over a long time with Winter (in his journey through more than one organisation) and played a major role in founding the RTT. We discussed at considerable length with Southern African groups and individual militants.

Whilst Russia, Poland and Yugoslavia are geographically in Europe, in terms of experience of a "different reality" they are much farther away than New Zealand. Again IS members past and present and WP(B) and ASt leadership members paid extended visits to all these situations. The fruits of all this beyond the experience have so far only been a few contacts and a potential sympathising group in Poland, this is true, but the historic defeats being suffered in these countries has meant that even the largest centrist groups have had either no success or very limited ones.

Last but not least, guided by these experiences, by visits and face to face discussions, the IS wrote articles, polemics and eventually an international programme. It has developed action programmes and translated them into the languages necessary. These achievements appear to mean nothing to the PF comrades. It should be readily admitted that compared to Trotsky and the FI our experience is tiny. But we believe it is sufficient to have created the first revolutionary international tendency based on democratic centralism since the FI's collapse. We note that the fruits of the PF's depreciation of the Leagues efforts, of the international experience of its leadership, is to suggest that maybe international democratic centralism is not possible. The cry that it all ends up in bureaucratism in such circumstances is evidence of a lack of real internationalism and the recognition that this requires discipline on an international level as on a national one to make it work. The PF platform's criticism look all too like a pretext for a retreat into national centredness.

Eleven months ago we had a sharp debate at Congress over Democratic Centralism and Bureaucratic Centralism. Comrade Johnson opposed the Statutes of the LRCI on the grounds that they contained the danger of bureaucratic centralism. Every other delegate to congress rejected comrade Johnson's views. Every delegate but he voted for the Statutes, recognising in them a healthy democratic centralist constitution. That included comrade Leo. Now it may be that since congress he has had cause to change he is mind. There are two possible causes of such a change of mind.

The first is that the new statutes have proved themselves, in practice, to be open to a bureaucratic misuse by the leadership, specifically the IS. But can the PF give us a single example of this? Perhaps, then the WPNZ/A comrades who have signed the faction feel that the IS has intervened bureaucratically into their section. Despite our concern at the documents produced by Goldman in that section's debate over perspectives, and despite the abnormal procedures involved in that debate (PC members not raising their differences clearly on the PC before taking them to the membership as a whole) the IS responded in a constructive fashion to the section's agreed perspectives. Look at the letter we wrote. Was there a trace of bureaucratic interference in it? No! Thus no evidenced case can be made that there exists any tendency to bureaucratic centralism in the League.

The second reason that may have caused Leo to change his mind, however, is that he believes democratic centralism is impossible in the League. Again he should explain why he has changed his mind so dramatically in less than a year. What has happened in that time to cause him to argue against democratic centralism? All we can go on is the PF's curious questions. What can we deduce from those questions? That the PF is profoundly defeatist in its approach to party building. If democratic centralism cannot operate within the LRCI then we can only assume that it cannot operate within its sections either, for the same objections (weak implantation, danger of petit bourgeois corrupting influences etc) apply. As we said at the beginning, this is the road to the LTT and LCC discussion group approach. And it is this that leads to the passive propaganda and literary commentary approach that the PF take us to task for. Because they do not have programmatic unity they do not even want to have democratic centralism. The result is that on international crises they cannot intervene, and they don't. We, on the other hand, on the basis of sound programmatic agreement and the

democratic centralism that flows from this have intervened, directly, over the last period; in Russia, Poland, Argentina, Bosnia (through Workers' Aid), South Africa, Spain - the list could go on.

## Conclusion

In summation the analysis of the PF platform leads nowhere. Or rather it leads to a deep pessimism about the possibility of developing a revolutionary programme ("how in these circumstances can the L. insist that its programme is correct") and about constructing around it a democratic centralist international ("surely what this amounts to is the building of a new international with a very high entry qualification" as compared to the CI, the ILO and the FI). One can plainly see the conclusions. Plainly because they have been long the coinage of major groups like the SWP-B/International Socialists, and in varying degrees the WIL/LTT, the GOR/TLC etc. The argument goes that because we are still propaganda societies, with weak roots in the working class we cannot put our programme to the test of "real struggles", where our cadres actually lead them and therefore our differences over programme can never be resolved. They will just be debated endlessly. But why should this argument apply only on an international level? If we have a "bad class composition" then maybe we cannot demand too high qualifications nationally either. Maybe we cannot even hope to produce a national action programme?

This aversion to centralised and disciplined organisation has appeared in a number of forms in the history of the revolutionary movement; Anarchism and Libertarianism, Economism, Menshevism, Liquidationism, Shachtmanism etc etc, It is always marked to a greater or lesser degree by either avoidance of a materialist explanation or a vulgar materialist one that explains nothing because it tries to explain everything.

Thus any enforcement of discipline is seen as an unbearable tyranny, a denial of rights etc. or the most minimal and ill-paid fulltime organisational apparatus is seen as a monstrous privileged bureaucracy.

Trotsky and Cannon experienced and counterattacked both these petty bourgeois tendencies in the 1940 faction fight. It appears Leo, Juno and Goldman have joined, in spirit at least, those, i.e. c'de Johnson and leading PO(B) members, who for several years have been trying to "decentralise the LRCI".

Hostility to democratic centralism has a class character—it is politically petty bourgeois whatever the class origins or position of its practitioners. It is rooted in the intellectual's, small proprietor-like attitude to the works of her/his own brain, to their local or national peculiarities, to worship of "their reality" which is unique and incomprehensible to outsiders.

Discipline, all such people feel as an alien, external compulsion. They habitually confuse organisation and discipine with bureaucracy. This is totally unlike the worker who learns from the discipline of the workplace (be it factory or large scale office), that he or she can only fight alienation, tyranny and exploitation collectively, by submitting his/her will to a common democratically decided discipline.

The class conscious worker readily grasps the non-local, indeed the international scope of their own exploitation and the need to fight it at that level. Democratic centralism is the natural fighting method of the proletariat and of all those intellectuals who have adopted body and soul the outlook of our class. Indiscipline and disloyalty is an abomination to the working class and to everyone who dares to call themselves a Bolshevik.

The PF's deep pessimism is rooted firstly in the evaporation of their hopes of an immediate catastrophic capitalist slump which will free the workers from commodity fetishism, democratic illusions and reformist leadership in one blow and turn them to the revolutionaries who predicted it. Secondly it is rooted in the collapse of Stalinism and the DWSs without a fight, which given the mistaken belief in the former's dual nature is thus seen as a product of the overwhelming strength of imperialism and the virulence of its democratic and nationalist ideology. Thirdly it flows from shock at the East European workers' "lack of class consciousness"; i.e. an under estimation of the Stalinists counter-revolutionary work stretching back to the twenties and thirties and of the depth of the crisis of leadership (the subjective factor).

All this pessimism results in the gross exaggerations of our isolation and "petty bourgeois" class composition, and is based on an economistic definition of the working class and of the class struggle itself and a failure to understand the stages of party building. Out of these crushed hopes has come a raging factional irritability, "who slipped them the salt", who betrayed them to democratic imperialism. Hence the tendency to blame the LRCI for their own failure to fully understand the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism,

To summarise; the PF represents a far-reaching Stalinophile sectarian and deviation. Furthermore, its open questioning and implicit criticism of the fundamentals of democratic centralism and its scepticism to the revolutionary programme represents a developed stage of political degeneration which we have seen in many centrist enemies. The politics and the method of the PF are alien and, in the end, incompatible with the LRCI. We ask the comrades of the PF to re-think their serious errors once more, to break with their pessimism and to come back to the policies of the LRCI.

The LRCI believe that we can build in the present period, despite its evident difficulties, which we are far from oblivious to. We have consciously adopted tactics which are suited to defensive and democratic struggles but which prepare the working class for serious social upheavals ahead.

We are not complacent about our weaknesses—neither our lack of blue collar militants or of sections in Africa and Asia as well as Latin America. We are doing everything within our power to overcome them.

But we are convinced that only revolutionaries, united by a common programme and organised within a democratic centralist international tendency have to conquer those difficulties. It will never be done by a federalist organisation of non-democratic centralist discussion clubs. And if that is what the Proletarian Faction want to turn the League into the League must reply with a firm no. ■

**International Executive Committee 10 July 1995**

# A Cowardly Desertion!

## A split in the New Zealand section of the LRCI

*International Secretariat of the LRCI September 1995*

A split has taken place in Workers Power (WPNZ-A), the LRCI's section in New Zealand—Aotearoa. A substantial minority, including a prominent member and founder of the group, have walked out of the organisation.

This grouping formed the "Proletarian Faction" (PF) in July 1995, submitting a platform to our International Executive Committee (IEC) in that month. The IEC made a detailed reply to their platform, ordered its translation into Spanish and French and outlined a series of aggregate meetings of the membership in all sections prior to next December's meeting of the IEC. Indeed the walk out of the PF came one day after the second of these aggregates in New Zealand and three months prior to the special conference of the section fixed to decide the final position of the section.

Discussion took place in a comradely fashion. The faction did not encounter the slightest restriction in expressing its views. Yet on 4 September in a terse statement, which concentrated on the items of WPNZ-S property they intended to keep, the faction announced its withdrawal from the League and the section. A few days later they submitted a short letter of resignation outlining the political reasons for their desertion.

Bureaucratic centralism?

All the rights of the PF were accorded it under the democratic centralist statutes of the LRCI, statutes which the future faction leader had indeed voted for at our 3rd International Congress in Summer 1994. These rights were not mere formalities. They meant hard work for the great majority of the League who disagree strongly with the faction's arguments. Our French section had already translated the documents and our Latin American comrades were translating them into Spanish. All sections had timetabled aggregates.

The PF now write in their letter of desertion that they "reject the formal timetable assigned by the IEC to debate the Proletarian Faction. It may have suited the centrist talkshop but it does not suit our plans as a revolutionary tendency". Since their leading member was a willing party to drawing up this "formal timetable" in July, their petulant tone rings hollow. So too does their parting demand, "in the interests of democratic centralism we request that the LRCI circulates via the International Internal Bulletin all of our documents, in German and Spanish translation".

Clearly these people do not understand the first principles of democratic centralism. Its members abandon a loyal debate yet continue to demand their "rights" *after* walking out of the organisation. For any organisation which aspires to base itself on Bolshevism, rights are inseparable from duties. But without a single concrete complaint about our democratic procedures, after admitting that all their democratic rights were available to them, they complain that they "do not wish to be subjected to what we regard as 'bureaucratic centralism'". Clearly they regard elementary duties as an intolerable "subjugation" and all centralised organisation as "bureaucracy".

Their letter provides a further cruel self-exposure of the splitters. The problem they faced, is that they were in a tiny minority in the League as a whole. They obviously had no confidence that they could even hold onto their present numbers as a result of a serious discussion in New Zealand. They admit that our International Executive Committee "rejected the faction platform at the July 1995 IEC with only one vote in favour", that there is no prospect of "any serious challenge to the LRCI positions coming from within the rank-and file membership", and that "it is clear that the Proletarian Faction will fall far short of the 25% of members required to justify a special congress in December 1995". They were a minority bound by the decisions of the majority in a democratic centralist organisation—it is this they found intolerable.

In their resignation letter they say they did not take the decision to leave lightly. This statement is not credible. In fact their behaviour over the past year has been marked by a totally lightminded attitude to their own organisation. This attitude to the party has a class character. It is not proletarian in any way. It is in fact a petit-bourgeois attitude. Thus their choice of name proves to have been inadvertent self-mockery.

### Unprincipled manoeuvres: unprincipled politics

The key individuals who launched the faction, despite having—so they claim—held these views for some time, even if they expressed them more diplomatically, did not seek to form one in the optimal period for such a political struggle, i.e. in the LRCI's pre-congress discussion period (July 1993-July 1994). Instead in the year after the Congress these comrades began to create a *secret* faction in New Zealand and to seek to extend it to other sections behind the backs of their leaderships and memberships alike.

Their first open move was to launch an unexpected fight in the New Zealand section over a draft of its national perspectives. This was sharply factional in style and marked by personal accusations. They suddenly accused the half of the membership who disagreed with them of being "in flight from the working class", of "abandoning the Marxist method", and of being "petty bourgeois". An infantile workerism dominated their polemics, all the more ridiculous if one knows the background of the comrades concerned.

Unbeknown to the rest of the League they then began to canvass support for this "struggle" with individuals they thought might be sympathetic, by spreading gossip and suggesting that they had been subjected to slander and persecution. Moreover before any debate had taken place and without an established political basis they discussed splitting from the League. This classic Abernism further testifies to the petit-bourgeois political character of the PF.

Unfortunately for them their secret factionalism came to light before they were ready to move on an international level.

A scandalously disloyal letter from a leading member of the subsequent PF was inadvertently made available to the leadership and thence to the membership of the LRCI. It revealed that plans were under way to launch a faction fight with the aim of splitting the LRCI. It was only when the League took disciplinary action against such unprincipled manoeuvres and insisted on an *open and properly organised* political debate that the grouping reluctantly took up its democratic right to form a faction, guaranteed by our statutes. Once they had done this all disciplinary measures were revoked.

### Madness in their Method

From such an inauspicious starting point the PF set out to find a sufficient basis for a split. It assembled a platform of positions formerly (and at the time quite properly) raised within the LRCI. These included an abstentionist position on the Moscow hard-line putsch in 1991, and support for national self-determination in the USSR only if it was made conditional on a prior pledge to defence of the planned economy. This *de facto*

refusal to champion the democratic and national rights of the working class and oppressed peoples in Stalinist states has been overwhelmingly rejected as Stalinophile and sectarian by two LRCI congresses. Now they call our positions, which they knew all about when they joined the League, "a united front with imperialism."

Related to this is their false understanding of the national question in general and their extreme reluctance to defend peoples against national oppression. Recognising the enormous eruption of national and ethnic struggles since 1989, they tend to see them as simply tools of imperialism for undermining the workers' states or anti-imperialist struggles. Thus they have taken up abstentionist positions on the genocides in both Rwanda and Bosnia. They accuse us of capitulating to imperialism because we will not allow imperialism's crocodile tears over these to drive us into sectarian neutrality.

Far from the LRCI having slackened its fight against imperialism by one iota, we have maintained the proud record of our sections in the imperialist states; a fight which includes intransigent opposition to "our" armies interventions whenever and wherever they occur. The LRCI and its predecessor the MRCI has militantly opposed French occupation of its South Pacific colonies, Britain's long war in Ireland and the Malvinas war against Argentina, as well as the US and Allied interventions from the Gulf to Somalia and Bosnia.

The faction also rejected our analysis of the restoration process, holding that capitalism had been restored in early 1992. They rejected our designation of them today as "moribund workers' states" and suggested that we had only invented this concept to hide (from ourselves) the historic defeat represented by the restoration of (state) capitalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

In fact this was a new position for the PF members who had hitherto not criticised the LRCI's analysis or the several action programmes it developed in the years 1991-1994 to defend the historic gains of the working class as they came under attack from the bourgeois restoration. They have suddenly picked up a theory developed three years ago by an ex-LRCI member Brian Green, which sees the transition to capitalism as synonymous with the introduction of a convertible currency. This is dangerous un-Marxist nonsense, locating a fundamental change in production relations in a change in the sphere of exchange. No wonder the entire LRCI rejected this in 1992 and has done so again in 1995.

A year ago the future PF's leading figure considered that the LRCI's designation of the present period as a revolutionary one was correct as far as it went. Indeed he clearly thought it did not go far enough. He himself predicted that "in the next three years, pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations will be posed." In July 1995 however, the PF platform stated that the period is a *counter-revolutionary* one. This somersault comes from the catastrophism which the League had criticised when the forerunner of WPNZ-A, the Communist Left of New Zealand, entered into discussions with us at the end of the 1980s.

This "method" holds that crises get deeper and the attacks of the ruling class more frenzied because of an unmediated operation of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall. In 1992 the leader of the future PF held that the crisis of Stalinism and the failure of the restoration process dictated that these states would become battlegrounds on which imperialism would play out its rivalries: "The UN will fall apart as EU and Japan pull out in the land grab for the Eastern Bloc and ex USSR."

Nor was this catastrophism limited to the Stalinist states. In 1990 the same comrade had predicted: "The tendency of the rate of profit to fall and the state managed countervailing tendencies have brought the FRG (West Germany) to the limit of its ability to restore profitability without recourse to massive depression and civil war."

The total failure of these "optimistic" predictions of catastrophe has now led the PF into making deeply pessimistic ones. But the *catastrophist method* remains the same. In drawing up perspectives they fail to take into account that long term tendencies always manifest themselves through the particular cyclical swings of world economy. These may counteract or intensify the deeper tendencies. Deepening inter-imperialist rivalry, political clashes, the class struggle, in turn modify and act back upon economic developments. The PF see the political class struggle as a shadow play of economic laws, or rather one economic law. Once they saw only the approaching revolution. Now they see only the catastrophe of a historic defeat for the working class due to the restoration of capitalism.

Thus they have rejected the LRCI's perspective which holds that since 1989 we have entered a new, highly unstable period; one which has commenced with a phase marked by victories for the counter-revolution but which will create revolutionary situations. This perspective they reject in favour of one which sees a long and deep counterrevolutionary period ahead.

From their deep pessimism undoubtedly flows their negative attitude to developing a transitional programme today and the possibility of creating an international democratic centralist organisation. Hence too their outburst of factional irritability. Suddenly they went hopping mad, uttering cries of "capitulators to imperialism!", "centrists!", over issues which before they had hardly raised or raised in a calm and rational manner. As Trotsky said of similarly disoriented sectarians who deserted the FI in the 1930s, they are desperate to find out; "who slipped us the salt?". The answer is that the PF swallowed it themselves falsely believing it to be The Marxist Method.

## National-centredness and international discussion clubs

The PF demonstrated a profoundly national-centred attitude to the organisation of which they were for three and a half years a part. Without having discovered any other international tendency with which they have principled agreement, they have split from the League without a serious struggle to convince their fellow members in nine other countries.

They gave as the main reason for their sudden resignation that they wished to orient directly to the working class, not to a struggle within our ranks. Indeed they wrote just prior to their desertion that they now rejected "the tactic of splits and fusions"; i.e. winning groups of comrades from centrist organisations or fusions with other organisations on a principled, programmatic basis. They rejected the very method which has built the LRCI so far, "because the FI is dead and cannot be revived. Such a project wears the history of the post-war FI as a stinking corpse around its neck. None of these fragments seeking to breath life into the corpse have survived the current crisis of Trotskyism. ..... In the 1990's there is as yet no recognisable embryo of a revolutionary vanguard."

Yet suddenly, after their departure, this disdain for discussion with their erstwhile comrades in the LRCI no longer extends to the "corpse" they so colourfully dismiss. In their resignation letter written only two weeks later they explain that "staying in the League until the December International Executive Committee would mean cutting ourselves off from the wider debates involved (sic) many other groups on the Left."

It will be instructive to see which international groupings they turn to for these discussions— whether they do in fact centre on the urgent necessity for a "Fifth International". Whilst the LRCI—in contrast to the PF's insinuations—holds that the Fourth International died as a revolutionary International in 1951 (why else was our book on the subject called *The Death Agony of the Fourth International*?) nearly all other "Trotskyists" insist on the need to rebuild, reforge, or reconstruct the Fourth.

In fact the PF, for all their bluff and bluster, never devoted either a specific meeting or a specific new document to a critique of the LRCI's position on the FI. Suddenly "founding a Fifth International" is a task so urgent that not a single month can be lost in discussing this issue with their own comrades. Who will they find to discuss it with, we wonder?

Again the reasons given for the PF's split can be seen to be unprincipled and a cowardly evasion of debate.

## Ditching a revolutionary programme

What the PF already shares in common with the scorned

"fragments" is the view that it is impossible (and "arrogant") to attempt to create an international programme and that real international democratic centralism must be bureaucratic in the present period. In their Declaration they say;

"The way ahead for small revolutionary splinters is not to set down a new version of the Transitional Programme and expect everyone to agree."

What this centrist formulation is designed to conceal is the PF's sudden and unexplained abandonment of a revolutionary programme, the *Trotskyist Manifesto*, with which they had previously agreed (and also incidentally a nearly completed draft of an *Action Programme for New Zealand -Aotearoa*.) For all the trumpeting of the superiority of their method, it is unable to guide them to produce a programme, either national or international. Bereft of a programme, they consequently abandon all hope of building an international democratic centralist organisation in the foreseeable future.

In both their Platform and Declaration they muse "as to whether any attempt to build a new international based upon democratic centralism can work when an organisation is so small, based mainly in Europe, with few sections mainly of a petty bourgeois composition, and none of them engaged in any systematic direct work in the class struggle."

Leaving aside this dismissal of the LRCI's composition and record of work in the class struggle, which even our declared opponents will recognise as a plain lie, the faction's pessimism and defeatism are here clearly revealed. Worse, here is the old centrist argument mobilised by the London Bureau groups against Trotsky and the FI in the 1930s and still used today by the Socialist Workers Party (Cliffites). You are too small; you do not have enough roots in the working class. First build strong proletarian parties on a national terrain and then we can have a programme and democratic centralist international organisation.

But if a weak implantation in the working class presents an absolute barrier to developing a Trotskyist programme and building a Leninist party on an international scale, then why does this not apply to the national terrain as well? Maybe here too we have to wait for a programme and a party until we have won masses of workers in each country. But what strategy shall we win these workers to, and on what principles shall we organise them?

Trotsky stressed time and time again that if organisations are built in national isolation they will inevitably adapt to the distortions which occur "spontaneously" on each national terrain and in all national labour movements. Proletarian composition alone will not save them. In essence the PF's entire workerist approach is a species of "tailism", adapting to the existing consciousness of the working class—or what they imagine it to be. Such workerism is itself a petit bourgeois phenomenon.

The accusation that the LRCI is Eurocentric comes strangely from those who deliberately abandon a discussion which would have involved our comrades in Latin America and Australia. Such disdain for them and for the non-English speaking comrades in Europe is worse than Eurocentric. It is sheer New-Zealand isolationism. Their tendency is marked from birth, not only with political cowardice, but with a headlong retreat from operative internationalism as well.

The PF backdate their opposition to "the League's failure to break with centrism" to opposition to our moves to develop and consolidate democratic centralism—what they called "super-centralisation", "bureaucratism" etc. They object violently to the attempt to homogenise the method and practice of the League.

In reality of course the League is not trying to impose a monolithic uniformity on its sections. Quite the reverse: it has encouraged each to study in depth its own national terrain and produce Action Programmes. What we have set ourselves the goal of doing is to become a truly united world organisation. For all who aim to build a "world party of socialist revolution" in earnest, this is an indispensable step.

## Where Next?

Despite being offered all the resources of a democratic centralist discussion, the *Petit Bourgeois* Faction fled rather than face a discussion or answer direct questions about their international political collaborators. Despite hurried claims of bureaucratism they do not dare to suggest that their rights had been infringed in any way. Thus they have no political alibi for their cowardly act. They are obviously light years away from Bolshevism.

We are well rid of people who are incapable of elementary party discipline and comradely loyalty. Their chosen path will lead them, twisting and turning between sectarianism and opportunism, into oblivion.

This act of desertion will not deflect the LRCI from its tasks, either in New Zealand-Aotearoa or elsewhere. Under the direction and advice of the LRCI, WPNZ-A had already doubled in size since joining us in 1992. The split leaves the LRCI with ideologically cohesive and dynamic groups in both New Zealand and Australia, neither of which we had prior to the founding of WPNZ-A in 1992. The splitters, by contrast, have left with nothing more than they had when they joined us.

We will go forward committed to Bolshevik principles of democratic centralism and the revolutionary programme. ■

**International Secretariat 14 September 1995**