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Founding an international workers' party – in the 1930s and today

PLUS: Stuck in the middle - why Blair and Schroder's 'Third Way' is a dead end

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INCORPORATING PERMANENT REVOLUTION

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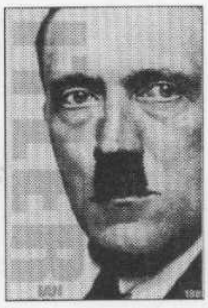

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Where is European reformism going?

British and German social democracy are at the leading edge of modern reformism – the Third Way. **Martin Suchanek** looks behind the rhetoric and discovers an ideology that is pro-business and anti-welfare

Only a few days before the June European elections, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder presented a joint document – "The Third Way/Die Neue Mitte" – to the assembled press.[1]

Over the last few last years, word-processers have churned out a mass of paper outlining the objectives and strategy of the "Third Way" or the "New Centre" as it is called in Germany. Largely written in secretive meetings of the respective think-tanks of Peter Mandelson and Bodo Hombach, the joint statement is intended as an outline of a common policy for a "modern" social democracy in Europe.

Yet it is far from being endorsed by all the mainstrean reformist parties of Europe; the rather harsh responses of François Jospin and Olof Persson to the document testify to this. Of course, these responses were superficial – couched in terms of different "national traditions" rather than open policy differences – since Jospin's record in office does not at differ very much in substance from those of Blair or Schröder.

Nevertheless, there is a real political dispute within European social democracy between the proponents of the "Third Way" or the "New Centre", on the one hand, and of "old" social democracy on the other. In essence it revolves around the key issue of whether the political gap that separates social democracy from bourgeois liberalism can or should be overcome, whether a separate reformist programme based on the organised working class has outlived its usefulness to the bosses.

The ideology of the Third Way

Proponents of the Third Way are aware that the term is as old as the century and has been used to describe quite different strategies. Its recent reincarnation can be traced back to the Democratic Party faction around Clinton the early 1990s as he sought the nomination as Presidential candidate in 1992. These origins are not accidental. The independent working class movement in the USA has always been weak; no social democratic party of any significance has existed since the First World War. In the 1980s, the trade unions, always weak politically and tied to the Democrats, underwent a savage battering and declined in militancy and numbers. At the same time, the Reagan-Bush era was exhausted politically, its economic programme bequeathed the state enormous federal debts as it engineered recovery and boom on the back of enormous government borrowing and defence spending. Finally, it was the first opportunity for the Democratic Party to reflect upon and articulate the significance of the collapse of the USSR for the future of world capitalism.

The Clinton first term administration, under no pressure from the working class and yet faced with inherited and groaning federal debts, was well placed to fashion a "new" ideology that celebrated the universalism of the market economy. It could afford to offer little in the way of redistributive economic policies to the working class but, rather, insist upon the centrality of pruning government (i.e. cutting public spending programmes). In this, the Third Way's American liberal form, nostrums of social justice, or echoes of "socialism" were not entertained. However, across the Atlantic, social democratic parties with meaningful, if varied, ties with their working classes launched the new policies with much more of a "social justice" spin.

The proponents of the Third Way present it as a rational response to the failure or defects of competing political and economic ideas. For political leaders and the ideologues of the Third Way like Anthony Giddens, the argument for the Third Way starts from two interrelated propositions. Firstly, all other social philosophies are outdated and incapable of addressing the key questions of the day. "Marxism" and "communism" (i.e. the Stalinist bureaucratically planned economy) were proven to be historical dead ends because:

> "The economic theory of socialism was always inadequate, underestimating the capacity of capitalism to innovate, adapt and generate increasing productivity. Socialism also failed to grasp the significance of markets as informal devices, providing essential data for buyers and sellers."[2]

There is nothing new in these arguments against planning and scientific socialism. They have been borrowed from a number of liberal and reformist critiques of communism by market socialists and bourgeois economists. Their common features are a failure to take account of the inherent crisis-ridden nature of capitalism and their refusal to consider the rational alternative of an economic model of planning that purges bureaucracy while substituting the dynamism of democratic control for the blind operation of the market.[3]

Nevertheless, it is important to realise the centrality of these assumptions behind the Third Way. They serve to establish a seemingly self-evident common ground between all "reasonable" people. Capitalism may not be the best of all worlds, but it is the only possible one. Moreover, it is argued, there are "undiscovered" and constant sources of dynamism in the capitalist system which have been neglected in the past.

It follows that, if capitalism is more dynamic, efficient and productive than any form of planning, then state interference in the capitalist market economy has to have negative effects such as inhibiting dynamism. The neo-liberals, therefore, were right insofar as they criticised not only "communism", but all the expressions of state direction of markets that were common among "old" social democrats.

The second element that Giddens and the other Third Way ideologues assert is that they are not just pointing to the "outdatedness" of opposing ideas but responding creatively to new developments. They put in a lot of effort to explain their ideas in terms of real or supposed changes in the material world: globalisation; individualism; post-materialism; ecology.

Or, as the Blair-Schröder manifesto puts it: "Modernisation is about adapting to conditions that have objectively changed . . .".

In such a world, the politics of the Third Way are held to be not just the only viable policy but also an expression of humanity's striving for emancipation. Whilst there is relatively little of this to be heard in Tony Blair's or Gerhard Schröder's politics, and even less to be seen in their policies, Giddens' books, or those of his predecessors in the 1980s like the German sociologists Beck or Inglehart, claim that the Third Way is a realistic adjustment to a changed world.[4]

Here, the economic and political development of the last decades is related to changes in the values of the population, the so-called "new individualism" or "post-materialist values".[5] In this way, Giddens tries to present the "values of the Third Way" not only as adaptations to, and results of, objective economic developments such as globalisation, but as something which champions what people want:

"Third Way politics should preserve a core concern with social justice, while accepting that the range of questions which escape the left/right divide is greater than before. Equality and individual freedom may conflict, but egalitarian measures also often increase the range of freedoms open to individuals. Freedom to social democrats should mean autonomy of action, which in turn demands the involvement of the wider social community. Having abandoned collectivism, third way politics looks for a new relationship between the individual and the community, a redefinition of rights and obligations."[6]

It should be clear, then, that, unlike most of the social democratic "Third Way" ideologies of this century (e.g. Austro-Marxism; self management and/or market socialism), this new version does not present itself as a "third way" between socialism and capitalism but, rather, as one between social-democratic and bourgeois neo-liberal management of capitalism. So, while it lauds capitalism, the new social democracy tries to distance itself from neo-liberalism's destructive and disintegrative effect on society as a whole; thus the Blair-Schröder statement insists that they support "a market economy, not a market society." An unchecked market economy, they recognise, inevitably increases economic inequality and with it social exclusion and social disorder. Hence, the state must use its limited resources to promote social cohesion so that everyone has a stake in the continued existence of capitalism.

A labour aristocratic ideology

It is no exaggeration to call the Third Way a sort of "supply-side reformism" designed to appeal to an alliance of skilled, securely employed, upper working class people and the professional middle classes. These are presented as the people who want to see their taxes reduced, who could possibly afford a private pension, have had a higher education and opt out of the NHS for private medical treatment. The Third Way renounces state policies designed to achieve redistribution of social wealth after it has been created, in favour of the promotion of education and entrepreneurship which is expected to allow each individual to achieve as much wealth as possible.

Old social democracy, after the second world war, accepted that capitalism was prone to cyclical crisis and that the working class in whole or in part was its unwitting victim. It was the job of the state to do something to limit the damaging effects of the business cycle on the working class. If unemployment was not the fault of the unemployed then they should receive protection; the cost should be borne by employers, those in work and the government.

The Third Way rejects this. It argues that the state must not be "merely the passive recipient of the casualties of economic failure." Social justice is "more than the distribution of cash transfers". It is argued that universal entitlement to welfare benefits should end in the name of curbing the growth in public spending and "assisting" people to get back to work.

Indeed, much or all of the Third Way strategy depends for its allure on the idea that educational advancement allied to employment advice and removal of "barriers" to employers' willingness to hire people, can replace the welfare state and state-directed job creation.

The new centre wants us to understand that "having the same job for life is a thing of the past". Instead, social democrats "must accommodate the growing demands for flexibility". Through education and training individuals "will be made fit for the knowledge-based economy of the future" and they will get new and better jobs.

There are several objections to this



UNEMPLOYMENT DEMONSTRATION AGAINST EU SUMMIT, 1997

rosy scenario. In the first place, even in its own terms, the Third Way can only work if enough resources – money – are poured into the education sector to provide quality education at all levels. This means not only from basic literacy and numeracy through to post-graduate studies but also repeated returns to education to learn new skills appropriate for new jobs. Yet there are few signs that this is forthcoming. It certainly has not happened in the USA, where Clinton's determination to create federal budget surpluses has meant no substantial change in educational standards over two terms. This lack of progress on a key plank of Third Way policy led to the disillusion of Robert Reich – Clinton's Third Way guru and Labor Secretary in his first administration (1992-96).

In the UK two years of Labour government have seen a marginal increase in pre-school educational provision, a lot of moralising about the curriculum and repeated attacks on teachers' professionalism. Attempts to link business to education more directly, under both the Tories and Blair, have been failures.

A more fundamental objection is that if governments and businesses could predict the future shape of the labour market then the system would not be capitalist. Especially after decades of neo-liberal deregulation and "taking the state out of the economy", the idea that the Third Way can predict what the skill needs of business will be in five or ten years is plainly laughable.

In fact, it is all a cynical ploy and the joke is really on the working class. The joint statement of last June let the cat out of the bag. Job losses are inevitable under capitalism and so are time lags between the destruction of old jobs and the creation of new ones; a blunt, but not untruthful, statement of capitalism. The joint statement then goes on to insist:

"Barriers to employment in relatively low productivity sectors need to be lowered if employees displaced by the productivity gains that are an inherent feature of structural change are to find jobs elsewhere. The labour market needs a low-wage sector in order to make low-skill jobs available."

This is the real agenda on employment. Capitalism needs a minority labour aristocracy of skilled workers rooted in the knowledge-based economy, a layer of semi-skilled workers and a mass of unskilled workers for whom the "knowledge based economy" will remain something they read about, if they have the necessary literacy skills.

The record of the Clinton administration is precisely what the joint statement aspires to: a reduction in high-paid employment and a huge growth in low-paid, relatively unskilled, low productivity employment. In the UK, the priority of Labour's first term has been to get nearly 100,000 youth off benefits and into work schemes; but independent studies have shown that, after two years, the record of training in them, and job security after them, is poor. Labour has also aimed its gun at single mothers, again to get them off benefits and into cheap unskilled jobs, not to invest in "human capital" so that they can be fit for the information technology-driven economy of the 21st century.

In its economic policy, the Third Way's watchwords are "flexibility" and "adaptability". Businesses "must be encouraged to take chances", says the joint statement. Employees, too, must recognise that, in an epoch of globalisation, periods of unemployment are inevitable and that these must be "seen as an opportunity".

The Third Way, then, is a path hemmed in by insecurity and risk. For Blair's mentor and guru Anthony Giddens, "risk" is indeed the central category of the Third Way and underlines the ideology's understanding of freedom and autonomy of action.

"One of the main lessons to be drawn from ecological questions is that just as much attention needs to given to risk [as to security, ed]. The new prominence of risk connects individuals' autonomy on the one hand with the sweeping influence of scientific and technological change on the other. Risks draw attention to the dangers we face – the most important of which we have created for ourselves – but also to the opportunities that go along with them. Risk is not just a negative phenomenon – something to be avoided or minimised. It is at the same time the energising principle of society that has broken from tradition and nature."[7]

For Giddens, risk – its dangers and chances - is the guiding relationship between individuals, the "energising principle" of society, a society composed of millions of individual risk-takers searching for freedom and individual autonomy.

Like bourgeois economists, Giddens the bourgeois sociologist constructs society from a false abstraction, generalising a particular aspect of a given historic society.[8]

This method, typical for bourgeois and petit-bourgeois thinkers of the last two centuries, goes as follows: deal with a number of different subjects (globalisation, changing values, ecology, fate of neo-liberalism, social-democracy etc.) and then reduce them to their seemingly simplest and most essential element, in this case "risk".

Of course, a different sociologist could have taken a different category and thereby constructed a different "energising principle"; let us say "want", "need", "money", "power", "force – the list is as potentially endless as it is arbitrary.[9]

Here, the "philosophical conservative" and pragmatist Giddens follows a typical idealist path.

"This is only giving a new twist to the old favourite ideological method, also known as the a priori method, which consists in ascertaining the properties of an object, by logical deduction from the concept of the object, instead of from the object itself.

First the concept of the object is fabricated from the object itself; then the spit is turned round, and the object is measured by its image, the concept. The object is then to conform to the concept, not the concept to the object."[10]

This is exactly what Giddens does. He does not analyse what "risk" means in a capitalist society, how it is related to the mode of production in which it appears, what it means for different classes, how and why it is a mystifying social relation. Such a study would show that Giddens' "energising principle" is not at all the energising principle of society, which is rather to be found in the accumulation of capital.

It would show that Giddens' observation that risk "unites many otherwise disparate areas of politics" is only an expression of the fact that these different areas of politics – as well as the whole political superstructure – rest on the capitalist mode of production and that their form as well as the values and motives of all classes in society are determined by it.[11]

As Engels pointed out against the 19th century German sociologist Dühring, such an approach leads to a mixture of banality and ideology. The first can be observed when Giddens states, "We all need protection against risk, but also to confront and take risks in a productive fashion" or when he "reminds" us that risk refers to dangers and chances. Such slim generalities are true for each and everyone whether in a capitalist, a communist or the ancient society; they tell us everything and, therefore, nothing.

Whilst such examples demonstrate the theoretical poverty of the Third Way theorists, risk, and categories derived from similar abstractions, have an important function for them. As Engels pointed out, the "object", society, is now to be measured according to the "concept", this "energising principle".

And, if society does not fit the concept, then society has to be changed and remodelled accordingly. Within this methodology, the question whether or not the welfare state encourages risk-seeking behaviour, whether or not a viable policy has to destroy obstacles and barriers to risk-taking, appears as entirely logical.

It is worth looking at two aspects of this "renewal" of social democracy in more detail – first, the "disintegration of society" and, then, the "reform of the welfare state" – since it is here that the high principle of "risk" not only

has to be stressed but its "dangerous" effects have also to be countered.

Social exclusion

"The fostering of an active civil society is a basic part of the politics of the Third Way. In contrast to the old left, which tended to be dismissive of worries about civic decline, the new politics accepts that such anxieties are genuine. Civic decline is real and visible in many sectors of contemporary societies, not just an invention of conservative politicians. It is seen in the weakening sense of solidarity in some local communities and urban neighbourhoods, high levels of crime, and the break-up of marriages and families."[12]

Here the ridiculous moralising standpoint of Giddens' "science" is clearly revealed. He emphatically speaks out for capitalism as the only game in town, but wants to separate it from the results it inevitably brings about. Generalised commodity production necessarily means that all social relations become really or quasi commodified. Hence, tradition, "solidarity in local communities", the family, are necessarily undermined. This is the result of the expansion of the capitalist mode of production.

The "ideal" family, then, should work like the petit-bourgeois dream of the market

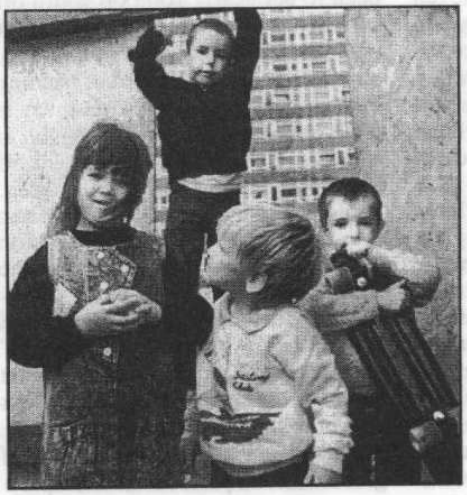
In Britain, the Labour government has only now introduced measures to guarantee a minimum family wage of £200 a week. This is small beer compared to the general trend towards greater poverty in large parts of the country; the decimation of industrial jobs outside the south-east has left wastelands of unemployed or badly paid workers in service sector jobs. People drift to the south in search of work or better pay leaving empty estates, boarded up empty property and rock bottom housing prices.

This is all a function of the unregulated economy that the Third Way promotes. The tax breaks and anti-poverty palliatives have not stemmed social exclusion and in the event of a hard and durable economic recession will not make any difference.

"High levels of crime", too, are an inevitable result of high levels of exploitation and lumpenisation, of capitalism in a period of over-accumulation, when a growing part of the workforce cannot be productively employed anymore.

Criminal behaviour is forced upon the masses and increases when parts of the working class are not able to secure a legal income by selling their labour power.

It is certainly nonsense to be "dismissive" about "civic decline" and rising crime, not least because it is working class communities that suffer most from crime, but the destruction of working class communities as a result of factory closures and unemployment, that is, the operation of capitalism, is the underlying cause of such criminality.



THE THIRD WAY POLITICIANS CLAIM TO WANT TO FIGHT POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION. IN REALITY THEY ARE MOTIVATED LESS BY IDEALS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND MORE BY THE FEARS OF THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY AND MIDDLE CLASS THAT THE POOR WILL TARGET THEM IN A WAVE OF ECONOMIC CRIME

For the working class, the only progressive answer to this decline is the struggle against capitalism itself; the struggle against unemployment, against cuts in social services, for workers' control.

Implicitly, even Giddens accepts that the "old left" was not as dismissive as he suggests. What he really does not like about the "old left" is that it "reduced civic decline to economics". He does not accept this because he rejects the obvious conclusions to be drawn from it: the struggle for working class rights and generalised social security.

He does not like the destruction of the traditional institutions which pacify society from below: the family and the "community". Unlike conservative politicians, however, he can see that the simple defence of the patriarchal family and police harassment to secure law, order and social inclusion does not work. Likewise, he realises that the market on its own cannot create community solidarity.

Therefore, the Third Way is a more "enlightened", but nevertheless completely reactionary, defence of the nuclear family, the charity organisations, the so-called "third sector" and community integrated police forces. Here, Giddens more or less repeats the programme of 19th century philanthropists and social reformers and combines it with calls for equality between different ethnic groups, sexes and a "democratic" and "negotiated authority" over children.

His whole idea serves two purposes. Firstly, it takes up the concerns, particularly of the middles classes and the upper reaches of the "respectable working class" about the growth of "social exclusion".

The alternative to social inclusion is a life behind bars; those of the prison cell for the enlarged mass of criminals and those of the shuttered and padlocked house for the middle classes as they anxiously strive to guard their prosperity from the rest.

Whilst, for the capitalist class proper, contact with "ordinary" workers, and even more with the lumpenised or semi-lumpenised, hardly ever takes place anyway, when education and residential areas become ever more segregated between the classes, this is not the case for large parts of the middle class. Many of them are themselves affected by the "erosion of civility".

Therefore, a "mix" of a new family ideal, charity, voluntary (and unpaid) social work and "soft" police supervision is presented as the solution. Of course, nothing essential is changed by this. Rather, the ideals of the middle strata are to be forced upon the whole society (apart from the capitalist class, of course). This can be best observed by Giddens' description of the "democratic family":

"Democratisation in the context of the family implies equality, mutual respect, autonomy, decision-making through communication and freedom from violence. Much of the same characteristics also supply a model for parent-child relationships. Parents of course will still claim authority over children, and rightly so; but this will be more negotiated and open than before. These qualities do not apply only to heterosexual families – they have exactly the same purchase in homosexual relationships."[13]

The "ideal" family, then, should work like the petit-bourgeois dream of the market. It should be a family with no violence and all heads of households, of whatever gender and sexuality, should be worthy of respect.

"Modernising" welfare

The second purpose of Giddens' attempt to rescue civility is more profound and relates to the "modernisation of the welfare state". Within European social democracy and the social-democratic trade unions, the issue of welfare state reform is one of the most contentious. Here, the Third Way reformers echo the most savage and anti-working class remarks made

by conservatives and liberals throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Blair-Schröder insist that "the level of public expenditure has more or less reached the limits of acceptability" and that the welfare system "puts limits on an individual's ability to find a job". The welfare state is "misused", overstretched and encourages a society of mediocrity, in short, it is supposed to allow working class people to live well as parasites. As Giddens would put it, it inhibits the "energising principle" of society, it avoids risk, rather than encouraging it.

"The promotion of social justice was sometimes confused with the imposition of equality of outcome. The result was a neglect of the importance of rewarding effort and responsibility, and the association of social democracy with conformity and mediocrity rather than the celebration of creativity, diversity and excellence."[14]

By implication, the welfare state is presented as a paternalistic gift, which gives more to people than they originally put into it. This is sheer distortion. It is certainly true that what we now call the welfare state was introduced, in various forms, as a result of working class pressure. This was the case whether the reforms were introduced in order to diffuse working class action and prevent something worse, as in Bismarck's social insurance system, or by reformist governments obliged to implement at least some of their promises, as in Britain after 1945. With the expansion of capitalism in the imperialist countries, the welfare state also expanded as did other parts of the state and public sector institutions.

However, the welfare state and social security systems were always paid for out of a part of the total wage of the working class (the so-called social wage), irrespective of whether this was done via social insurance or taxation. It is a deliberate slander against the working class by hired hacks to suggest that the welfare state gives more to the workers than they originally put in. Whilst there are specific forms of funding that make it appear as if the capitalists pay more than their fair share to the welfare systems, it is not difficult to see through these. For example, the "employer's contribution" (Arbeitgeberbeitrag) to the German social insurance, makes it appear as if the capitalists pay half of the funds of social insurance, whilst in reality it is only a part of the total wage of the working class that is deducted before workers get their pay.

In any case, the "traditional" forms of the welfare system are systems of universal rights for the elderly or the sick, and, only in a much more limited sense, the unemployed. In one way or another, workers pay in for most of their lives and rightly expect that they will receive their entitlements.

The Third Way would change all that. The workers would continue to pay in, but would get less out. Moreover, there would be no automatic entitlement. Rather, the money that workers put into the system would be redistributed not in the form of a legal and general entitlement, but in the form of a service to improve their risk-taking capacities.

"Welfare reform should recognise the points about risk made earlier in the discussion: effective risk management (individual and collective) doesn't just mean minimising and protecting against risks; it also means harnessing the positive and energetic side of risk and providing resources for risk taking. Active risk taking is recognised as inherent in entrepreneurial activity, but the same applies to the labour force. Deciding to go to work and give up benefits, or taking a job in a particular industry, are risk-infused activities – but such risk taking is often beneficial both to the individual and to the wider society."[15]

Here again, Giddens portrays society as a society of individual commodity owners, where the entrepreneur and the workers are really equal. Both take risks. The unemployed "decide" to re-enter the labour market. But the unemployed and the employed alike don't "decide" to sell, or try to sell, their labour power. They are forced to do so. That is their real "risk", a risk caused by and constantly reproduced by the capitalist mode of production. The accumulation of capital permanently repeats it and one objective of working class action should certainly be to minimise that "risk", i.e. to fight against the attacks of the capitalist class.

Of course, the best, and ultimately only, way to fight and permanently offset this risk is to fight against the capitalist system, overthrow it and replace it by a system of planning according to society's needs. But every trade union, every political struggle, every struggle to defend existing working class rights, is a struggle to reduce "risk", a fighting response to the permanent affronts of capital, as Marx put it.

The so-called social investment state is nothing but such a generalised political affront. Its agenda brings together privatisation to create the, "social market", the obligation on people to prove their risk-taking behaviour as a condition of receiving benefits, the creation of low wage sectors and the erosion of working class and trade union rights.

The theoreticians of the Third Way and countless academics paint these things in rosy colours, abstracting from the realities of life. In their scenario they can easily play with the idea that workers are generally in a position to decide when, and whether, to take a "training break" in their otherwise insufficiently challenging and "risk-free" careers.

Blair and Schröder also know how to paint in rosy colours, how to present the interests of the capitalist class in the deluded phrases of the middle strata. However, they also realise that they must reassure capital that the true content of their programme is no threat to the social order.

"In a world of ever more rapid globalisation and scientific changes we need to create the conditions in which existing businesses can prosper and adapt, and new businesses can be set up and grow. (...) Social democrats must accommodate the growing demands for flexibility – and at the same time maintain minimum social standards, help families to cope with change and open up fresh opportunities for those who are unable to keep pace. (...) Constraints on 'tax and spend' force radical modernisation of the public sector and reform of public services to achieve better value for money. The public sector must actually serve the citizen: we do not hesitate to promote the concepts of efficiency, competition and high performance."[16]

Blair and Schröder particularly emphasise that they want to reduce corporate taxes even further and oppose all measures which would increase the "tax-burden" for the big companies and the small/medium businesses.

Most importantly, for them it is not only a matter of words but also of deeds. Blair long ago systematically purged the Labour Party (even though his victory is not absolute and complete). Schröder has still a long way to go, but has achieved some successes, most importantly the ousting of Lafontaine earlier this year.

The joint document of Blair and Schröder is a clear sign that the politicians of the Third Way are willing to take the struggle forward inside European social democracy and to win it. They have found supporters in practically all the parties to one degree or another. In part, this is because they are not the first to push "Third Way" issues. Debates around similar ideas started in most reformist parties as far back as the 1980s, even earlier in some cases.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, reformism suffered important electoral and organisational setbacks. Its leaders, its politics, its declarations moved quickly to the right. Both in the trade unions and in the reformist parties, "new realist" wings emerged within the bureaucracy.

Whilst reformism was not dead in the 1980s and early 1990s – it was clearly in steep decline. This was not because there were no more gains to deliver, but because it had itself strongly adapted to neo-liberalism and was unable to repel attacks on existing working class gains during the 1980s and early 1990s.

In turn, this led to a retrospective glorification of post-war reformism, the popular fronts and bourgeois

workers' governments of the immediate post war period and the reformist governments of the 1970s, by many leftists. It is a strongly held belief both amongst reformist party and trade union leaders and members as well as amongst many of the far left, that this was "real" reformism, which at least delivered "real" gains, whilst nowadays Labour, social-democrat or (post-) Stalinist leaders are just fake imitations of a Willi Brandt, an Olof Palme, a François Mitterand or a Clement Attlee.

In these periods, it is said, working class supporters of the reformist parties, trade union and workplace militants, had "real" or "active" illusions in those organisations whilst nowadays, they are only "passive" or electoralist. Workers are not expecting reforms, but only see the reformists as "lesser evils".

This is the argument of VORAN, the German section of the CWI. They put it like this:

"But Schröder's SPD is not Willi's SPD (Willi Brandt – ed), neither with regard to economic and social background the party is working in, nor with regard to the situation of the party."[17]

What the CWI means by this is revealed later in the same article:

"Twenty years of austerity policy in the country, the Länder and the communities, 16 years of half-hearted opposition, projects agreed with the government in the second chamber like health- and pension reform', privatisation of the post, changes in the asylum-legislation etc. – all this has buried every trace of a policy in the interest of the workers. The collapse of the so-called socialism in 1989 has finally destroyed the last socialist forces and contents within the party."

Related to this is the argument that the historic and organisational links between the parties and the working class have been broken, so that social democratic and Labour parties cannot be characterised as bourgeois workers' parties anymore. According to this view, Tony Blair would be right in his claim that "New Labour" is qualitatively different form "Old Labour". Schröder would be right that the SPD is a party of the "new middle classes" (whoever they are) and not a party that was brought into office by a huge working class vote.

So, are the arguments of the Third Way ideologists and the Blair-Schröder statement proof of a fundamental change in the relationship of the European social democratic parties to their working class bases? Have social democratic and Labour parties been transformed from bourgeois workers' parties into open bourgeois parties?

Pre-war reformism

When dealing with the reformist parties in Western Europe, we have to bear in mind that they differ very widely in their appearances. This is not just a matter of the difference between the Labour Party and a "continental" social democratic version of reformism. If we compare, for example, the German SPD and the French PS we can see a tremendous difference in their history and relationship to the trade unions. Likewise, a number of reformist mass parties in Europe have emerged from the Stalinist tradition and are still more or less affected by it. What follows does not pretend to be a detailed analysis of particular parties, their relation to the main classes in society or their historic and current role in the political life of particular countries.

The reformist parties of the 1920s and 1930s were anything but purely proletarian in their social composition. From the late 19th century onwards, European social democracy attracted a large number of "middle class" members, mainly from the intelligentsia

The link between the organised working class and social democracy is historically pretty obvious for parties like the British Labour Party which was founded on the basis of a fusion between the mass trade unions and petit bourgeois socialism from the beginning. Others, like the German or Austrian social democracy, had to be broken from a revolutionary past and the trade unions themselves played a central role as a right-wing catalyst in this process. Mass working class membership played a central role for the growth of these bourgeois workers' parties (and does so still, whilst in a less significant and obvious way). But unlike, for example, Spanish and Portuguese reformist parties, they did not make union membership obligatory for their members, nor did they have party-affiliated unions as in France.

In short, to fully understand the relationship between social democracy and the working class we need to look beyond simply the ties each party has with the trade unions.

Secondly, the reformist parties of the 1920s and 1930s were anything but purely proletarian in their social composition. From the late 19th century onwards, European social democracy attracted a large number of "middle class" members, mainly from the intelligentsia. This phenomenon strengthened the reformist appetites in the parties and frequently led to political alliances between these strata and the emerging and increasingly self-confident trade union bureaucracy. The bloc between the "revisionists" and the trade union leaders in the German social democracy is probably the best known example, but the Labour Party in Britain was also essentially a coalition of these two forces from the beginning.

What changed during the 20th century was the relationship of these parties to the bourgeois state. Clearly, the political aims of the social democratic and the Labour parties were completely opposed to the Marxist analysis of the bourgeois state and the need for the working class to smash it and take power with a new kind of state structure. In fact, this central aspect of communist strategy was never strongly rooted in any of the socialist parties of the Second International. Even close collaborators of Marx, like Liebknecht and Bebel, never understood or assimilated the lessons of the Paris Commune after 1871. Their whole attack on the state in Germany or Russia was focused on ridding it of the monarchy and the feudal-bureaucratic core of the apparatus, not on smashing it.

Although the orthodoxy of pre-1914 social democracy stressed its refusal to sit in bourgeois cabinets or take responsibility for managing capitalism, this was hardly a difficult choice for them. The ruling classes, including not only the capitalists but, especially in central Europe, the big landowners, saw in social democracy a dangerous revolutionary force and made sure that it was systematically excluded from government posts and the state apparatus. In reality there were already very powerful forces, principally in the trade union bureaucracies, who wanted nothing more than to prove their patriotism and respectability. It was the hostility of the ruling class which impeded the integration of such forces into bourgeois society.

The onset of the First World War in 1914 provided the opportunity for the reformists to demonstrate their allegiance in the most emphatic way. The social democratic parties supported their respective governments' war aims and thereby passed into the camp of social-chauvinism and counterrevolution. Crucially, their passing the test of loyalty set by the bosses of Europe led to a massive integration of the apparatus of the social chauvinist parties into bourgeois state institutions and co-management schemes in the factories producing for the war

economy.

This tendency has been a general one this century, a tendency to almost fuse the labour bureaucracy and the capitalist state. Of course this "fusion" must not be taken in the literal sense of the word, but rather as expressing the strong ties between the layer of union and party officials and state institutions.

This integration has a material base in the stratification of the working class in the imperialist epoch – the creation of a labour aristocracy. Reformism as a political ideology and programme reflects the material position of this layer of the working class, its specific position as a relatively privileged part of the proletariat.

However, in the interwar period (1918-39), the social democratic project came up against important barriers. First, for the ruling classes in many leading European countries even the existence of the reformist parties and trade unions was an obstacle to their aims. Whilst these parties did the bosses a service immediately after the end of the First World War and rescued a number of regimes from being overthrown (most notably in Germany, Italy and Austria), the crisis-ridden nature of capitalism led to the need for leading sections of the ruling classes in several countries to eradicate all organisations of the working class. Hence, the subsequent forcible integration of the workers' movement into the bourgeois state led to a narrowing of the social base of the reformist parties in the 1930s.

The 1930s was a decade in which the social democracies virtually became parties of the labour aristocracy and their middle class and petit-bourgeois fellow-travellers. It was a period marked by splits from social democracy of a left-reformist or sometimes a centrist character.

Whilst their social composition was sometimes worse that that of their "mother" parties, they nevertheless reflected the discontent of the most class conscious reformist workers with their leaderships and the preparedness of the social democratic leaders to expel these workers rather than break their dependency on the bourgeoisie.

As long as the leftward moving workers were under the leadership of the left-reformist and right-centrist leaders of these organisations, the main leaders of social democracy did not have to worry too much.

They were quite aware that these "leftists", for example, those organised in the London Bureau, were themselves opportunist cowards. History confirmed this characterisation since most of the left wing splits eventually returned to the ranks of the main reformist parties during, or soon after, the Second World War.

After the Second World War

After the Second World War, the "stinking corpses" of social democracy and Stalinism rose from their graves and grew once more at a tremendous pace. Even in Germany, where the labour movement had been smashed by fascism and where no significant military struggle against the regime had been waged,18 the SPD and KPD were recreated as mass working class parties within months. Of course, this was done with the assistance of the Soviet Union and the victorious Allied powers together with their agents in the workers' movement in order to prevent the development of independent opposition to the two bourgeois workers' parties. But this resurrection would, nevertheless, have been impossible if the working class itself had not seen the SPD and KPD as the parties by which to achieve its aims.

These hopes were mistaken, but they were very strong because the working class masses did not have any political alternative to the reformists. The far left (revolutionary and centrist) was either annihilated by Stalinism, fascism or the allies, or marginalised by its own errors of political strategy. Therefore, the French and Italian Stalinists could disarm the working class and help re-establish the state's monopoly of armed force. Austrian and German social democracy claimed that they were introducing socialism by their actions and thereby created the pretext for not expropriating the big capitalists and establishing a planned economy. The British Labour Party introduced a number of reforms which laid the foundations of the "welfare state".

Just as after the First World War, the reformist mass parties served their imperialist (or Stalinist) masters very well. But this time it appeared – at least in the eyes of the social democratic leaders – as if the ruling class had also recognised the services provided by encouraging the integration of the bourgeois workers' parties into the state over the next decades. Obviously, because of the Cold War, it was different for the Stalinist parties who could not be allowed to penetrate the executive bodies of the national state. But even there, the hostility of the ruling class was far from absolute and these parties often became respected and reliable elements of bourgeois society. The Italian PCI was probably the most integrated of these (for example, in city administrations). Hardly any barriers were erected in the path of the social democratic reformists as long as they withdrew their opposition to essential elements of the imperialist world order. For example, the SPD in Germany could clearly not be allowed into government so long as it opposed the creation of NATO and called for disarmament.

This integration of trade unions and bourgeois workers' parties was prepared for by the course of the Second World War itself. First, the war had clarified the power struggle between the imperialists. The United States became the uncontested leader of the capitalist world for decades. Secondly, the war also led to the massive destruction of capital, a revolution in production processes, and a massive increase of the rate of exploitation of the working class (including very low wage levels). The bourgeois order was re-established, the monetary system stabilised and the threat of the immediate post-war political crisis was bottled up with the decisive help of reformism. The working class suffered a historic defeat with the creation of this world order which laid the basis for a dramatic economic boom of the capitalist mode of production from the late 1940s and with it the creation of a much larger social base for the reformist mass parties as the working class grew and grew both in industry and due to the expansion of social services and education.

The post war reforms introduced by



BLAIR URGES SCHRÖDER TO POINT THE SPD DOWN THE THIRD WAY

social democracy (or in some cases by coalition governments or governments of open bourgeois parties) were a necessary component of the post-war boom itself, which was strongly marked by an expansion of consumer goods industries and, up to the late 1960s, almost total employment of the labour force in the west. Therefore, institutions like universal health care or education were functional for capital in order to reproduce the labour force it needed.

This, however, does not mean that the "welfare state" – health services, whether as universal entitlement or as an insurance scheme, unemployment insurance, pension insurance or rights, insurance against illness or sickness – have all been created since the Second World War. This is far from the truth. Many of them are much older in a number of countries, others were not introduced in some countries until the mid-1970s. Nonetheless, they were generalised and expanded in this period.

Nor does it mean that even these functional reforms, which served the interests of most bosses, were conceded voluntarily. Here a characteristic feature of the capitalist mode of production itself can be seen, namely that the capitalist class, as a class of competing individual capitals, will only allow for the long term reproduction of the working class as a result of the organised pressure of that class.

The objective conditions established in the late 1940s/early 1950s, meant that social democratic and, to a lesser extent, Stalinist, bourgeois workers parties could establish very strong roots not only in a growing labour aristocracy, but – like the trade unions themselves – expand their influence to broader strata of the working class.

This is reflected in a quite astonishing stability of the reformist parties' electoral support over the last 50 years. Although there were some exceptions, a comparison between the average percentage of social democratic votes in elections from 1945 to 1990s shows this (see Table 1).

The beginning of the 1990s saw massive electoral defeats for the reformist parties. Whilst there have been specific reasons for each of them (ability of the CDU/CSU to capitalise the credit for capitalist unification from the East German working class; disillusionment with Mitterrand in France and decline SP and CP; defeats inflicted on the British trade union movement by Thatcher etc) – the most important reason is to be found in the overall counterrevolutionary climate of world politics in the early 1990s.

This pattern has begun to change over the last three years. The most important turning point in Western Europe clearly was the French mass public sector strike in the winter of 1995-96. A number of social democratic parties achieved tremendous electoral victories, which became even more significant because at the same time the historic parties of the bourgeoisie suffered almost unparalleled defeats (Tories in Britain, CDU in Germany) or were thrown into massive crisis (Gaullism in France, Christian Democracy in Italy).

Could it not be argued that the social composition of the electorate changed during the 1990s? Have workers turned away from the reformist parties and have their membership and voters become more "bourgeoisified"? Some light-minded observers even wondered if the party, or even the trade union, bureaucracies had became a part of the ruling class (e.g. via control of workers' housing associations by the unions). These musings have obviously been encouraged by a number of factors. Firstly, there has been a degree of integration of the bureaucracy in the state at all levels: secondly, the tremendous material privileges stemming from this: thirdly, a number of scandals or speculative adventures undertaken with funds from mass organisations; and fourthly, the actual transformation of some of the party or trade union bureaucrats, particularly in the public sector, into parts of the ruling class.

The real question, however, is not whether an individual bureaucrat can become a capitalist. Of course she or he can. It is not even a question whether this or that bureaucrat has the subjective desire to do so. Naturally, not a few of them have. The question is rather, whether the social democratic or (post) Stalinist party bureaucracy, as a whole, can do so without losing its control over the working class and, thus, the political role it plays for the bourgeois system. This is impossible, since the whole value of this caste for the capitalist class lies in the fact that it can control the working class via its grip on its mass organisations.

A qualitative change in the relationship between the reformist leaders and the working class cannot take place unseen. Far from being an imperceptible transition it would be a substantial, quite possibly explosive, transformation, recognised as such by both bureaucrats and workers alike. It would not be enough for reformist leaders to just cut out the last vestiges of specifically pro-working class rhetoric from their programmes, or that they themselves want to become completely free from the pressure of their base. They would have to carry it out in practice and prove it.

However, there is another important social change going on. Since the 1980s, the relative and absolute size of the industrial working class has shrunk in all European countries and it is doing so at a rate faster than at any

Table 1
AVERAGE VOTES FOR EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY 1945-1990, (%)

Country (Party)	1945-50	1945-73	1960-73	1974-80	1980-90
Belgium (PSP/BSB)	30.2	32.1	30.0	27.2	28.2
Germany (SPD)	37.3	36.1	41.0	38.3	37.9
Denmark (SD)	36.0	37.7	38.7	33.3	32.2
Finland (SDP)	24.8	24.8	24.0	24.9	25.4
France (SFIO/PS)	21.7	17.5	16.8	32.3	34.7
Greece (PASOK)	n/a	n/a	n/a	35.8	42.4
Britain (Labour)	41.5	46.0	45.1	34.3	29.2
Ireland (ILP)	11.2	12.4	14.5	9.3	8.7
Italy (PSI/PDSI)	16.5	17.6	17.3	14.9	16.4
Holland (PvdA)	29.1	27.7	25.9	31.5	31.0
Norway (DNA)	42.3	44.2	42.9	38.7	37.4
Austria (SPÖ)	45.2	44.2	46.3	47.0	44.6
Portugal (PSP)	n/a	n/a	n/a	30.6	27.2
Sweden (SAP)	45.5	4.3	46.8	43.9	44.5
Swiss (SPS)	24.5	25.5	24.3	22.7	20.7
Spain (PSOE)	n/a	n/a	n/a	38.6	44.0
AVERAGE	31.2	31.7	31.8	31.5	31.5

time since the Second World War. This can be seen in Table 2.[20]

However, if we examine voting patterns, there is no question that the bourgeois workers' parties still have a strong hold among blue collar workers. Even during the 1980s, research suggests that it was the office workers and service sector employees who voted conservative and that the blue collar workers generally stayed loyal to the reformists.[21] However, voting patterns are one thing and influence in the party is another. Here, the importance of state employees and wage dependent non-proletarians to the reformist parties has increased greatly.

Historically, capitalism has always produced such strata which do not fit into the working class, the capitalists, the peasantry or the urban petit-bourgeoisie. They do not form a homogeneous separate class, but rather a very diverse layer originating from supervisory functions in the production process (e.g. the foreman and other lieutenants of labour), from managing and commercial functions in the circuit of capital or from state functions (bureaucratic apparatus; police, professional soldiers) and functions necessary for the reproduction of capital in general (e.g. education of the next generation of wage labourers). Whilst some of these are almost permanent feature of capitalist society (those connected with the repressive apparatus like police, professional soldiers, prison guards, lower rank judges and lawyers), most others tend to become proletarians sooner rather than later. This process can be observed, for example, with teachers, doctors, technicians and scientists who form, or are in the process of becoming, a part of usually relatively privileged strata of the working class.

Since the late 1950s/early 1960s, these strata expanded throughout most of the imperialist countries at the expense of the traditional petit bourgeoisie (e.g shopkeepers, self-employed) in the towns and in the countryside. Whilst a number of them have become working class, they generally constitute relatively privileged strata of the class and their consciousness is often full of ideas that stem from their middle class past rather than their working class future.

Many of this layer have become members or supporters of Social Democratic and Labour parties over recent decades and this has given rise to a certain reconfiguration of the membership of, and political support for, these parties (which, however, has not altered their fundamental character as bourgeois workers' parties).[22]

It is these influential social strata whose outlook is expressed in many of the positions and goals of the Third Way. The German term – the "new centre" – is indeed an accurate description of this layer which sees (or rather likes to imagine) itself outside

Table 2
INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYEES AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL WORKFORCE

	1960	1968	1974	1980	1989
BRD	47.0	47.1	46.7	43.7	39.8
Britain	47.7	45.2	42.0	37.7	29.4
France	37.6	38.6	39.4	35.9	30.1
Italy	33.9	37.8	39.3	37.9	32.4

SERVICE SECTOR EMPLOYEES AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL WORKFORCE

	1960	1968	1974	1980	1989
BRD	39.1	43.0	43.2	51.0	56.5
GB	47.6	51.3	55.1	59.7	68.4
France	39.9	45.8	49.9	55.4	63.5
Italy	33.5	39.3	43.2	47.3	58.2

and better than the mere wage labourer. Whilst most of these strata are dependent on earning a wage or salary and more and more become working class, their ideal is a society of independent commodity producers, of small entrepreneurs. The ideology of the Third Way openly identifies with the mentality of such people, as Giddens testifies:

"People in many different walks of life are looking for the opportunity to become entrepreneurs – long-standing as well as newly self-employed people, lawyers, computer experts, medical doctors, craftsmen, business consultants, people active in culture and sport. These individuals must have scope to develop economic initiative and create new business ideas. They must be encouraged to take risks. The burdens on them must be lightened. Their markets and their ambitions must not be hindered by borders."[23]

Here, the Third Way is at its most utopian, promising a policy which would rescue the small entrepreneurs and the independent producer from being wiped out by increasing competition.

In most European social democracies, an important shift of power towards the middle strata and politicians trying to rest upon them has taken place or is taking place. This is a broader social base than that of the "old" reformist right-wing, which based itself more narrowly upon the labour aristocracy within the organised trade unions.

Prospects for the Third Way

A number of real obstacles remain in the path of New Labour or the New Centre.

Firstly, its social base is essentially diverse, weak and constantly fragmenting. It is no accident that "Third Way" politics are strongest in countries where the working class movement has suffered the heaviest defeats and the active resistance in the workplace and on the streets to government and bosses' attacks has been weakest. Therefore, Britain is the bastion of this policy today. In contrast, the Third Way has not found official backing in French social democracy. On the contrary, in ideological terms the important class struggles in France encouraged a leftward move by many middle class intellectuals, the same strata who have become Third Way ideologues in other countries. This again reflects the politically unstable character of this layer and thereby also the difficulty of grounding a decisive strategy in them.

Secondly, the social base of the Third Way will itself be eroded by economic developments in the future. A significant part of the middle strata have been proletarianised already or are in the process of this. Whilst their consciousness is lagging behind this development (and may continue to do so for some time where and while the class struggle remains mute) this will come to an end sooner or later. One of the reasons, particularly for employees in the public and service sector, will be the attacks carried out by the Third Way politicians.

The social democrats are fervent advocates of keeping public spending in narrow limits even during an extensive if historically rather shallow economic upswing. The Third Way has yet to be put to its first real test of a serious economic recession in Europe or the USA. What can we expect when it hits? We can predict that the Third Way advocates will honour their pledges that there are "no jobs for life". As unemployment starts to rise again, means-testing will be used to limit claimants' call on the public purse and "assistance" to help the unemployed return to the world of work will become direction onto no-hope, no-future, work-for-welfare schemes.

Thirdly, the weakness of the social base of the Third Way and the still existing vital links with the working class in the reformist parties mean that currently the politicians of the Third Way have to rely on a block with

the "old" right, that is, with a sector of the traditional workers' bureaucracy and a part of the labour bureaucracy in order to assert their leadership.

Fourthly, the retreats and defeats of the early 1990s have also meant that the mass of the working class has lowered its expectations in reformist governments or reformist-led governments. Many workers have observed years of almost daily attacks from, or encouraged by, conservative governments.

The general goodwill working class people often extend to "their" party once it is in power has certainly also helped all reformists in power, not just the more "traditional" ones. Whilst all of them have done a lot to frustrate and attack the workers, the more class conscious workers at least will still defend "their" government when it is attacked by the bourgeoisie.

Fifthly, the compromise between different wings inside the reformist parties has resulted in Third Way governments having to make some minor concessions to the working class, even if these reforms were outweighed by previous concessions made to the bourgeoisie.

Sixthly, whilst we saw an increase in the tempo and breadth of the European class struggle in the mid to late 1990s, mainly before the reformists were brought into power, this struggle did not spawn a left reformist wing on a continental level. Whilst there was clearly a leftist sentiment in the various election campaigns – blame heaped on "killer-capitalism", calls for more regulation of financial markets etc. – the more left wing elements had essentially served their purpose once the social democracy was in government.

The downfall of SPD Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine in Germany – although he was greatly overestimated as a "danger" for European capital – was clearly a signal and revealed the weaknesses and cowardice of the "left" reformist or traditional Keynesians. It signalled that even relatively moderate measures which did not correspond to the interests of the capital markets in Western Europe would meet with massive resistance by the ruling class.

Even the leftist critiques of the Blair/Schröder document are usually defensive. The reason is simple: the reformist left or the neo-Keynesians do not want to take over in most countries, even if they could.

For the immediate future, this gives the Third Way advocates a real advantage. At the same time, however, it also means that as soon as they are forced to mount widespread and concerted attacks on the working class, some parties could be rather weak instruments for carrying them through. This is especially so with the SPD, less so with Blair's New Labour; but even here the real test will come if and when the trade union bureaucracy is forced onto the offensive against a Labour administration, especially during a second term of office.

However, this does not mean that elements of "pan-European" Keynesianism and a "lefter" social-democracy cannot be observed. Unlike the reformist parties of the 1970s, which saw the national state in which they operated as the level at which to implement their political and economic programmes, they are – like their "modernising" counterparts – strongly pro-European.

The development of capital over the last decades has made any nationally centred reformist policy utopian (it was always reactionary of course). Therefore, all major wings of the reformist parties see their future in promoting the EU and even the success of the euro

Indeed, since a number of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois parties – reflecting the interests of historically obsolete petit-bourgeois, professionals and the most backward and weakest elements of capital – are increasingly xenophobic, racist and "anti-European", and since this also affects the traditional political alliances of the open bourgeois parties, the social democrats also see that the time has come to offer themselves as the most reliable and "rational" defenders of the strategic interests of capital in general.

In addition, the recognition that Europe will further integrate anyway, has led to a refining of "classical" social-democratic parties. A quite well known example is presented by Hans-Peter Martin, a European deputy of the Austrian SPÖ and Harald Schumann, a former advisor of Lafontaine inside the German SPD. In their book *Globalisierungsfalle*, they present a kind of 10-point programme for a re-distibutional policy on a European level.

Their basic starting point is that even such large imperialist national states as Germany are ultimately not able to counter the increased strength of financial capital or "shareholder-value" oriented transnational corporations. Therefore, a political and economic strategy which aims to utilise the German national state to counter this is doomed to failure.

Social democracy has to use its combined forces in Europe to economically unify Europe (since otherwise it would fragment), introduce a series of reforms against financial capital such as a tax on speculators or short-term capital movements etc and taxes on luxury goods, extension of labour regulations, encouragement for the unification of unions and democratisation of the EU.

Added to this, is the argument that economic and political unification would serve the needs of European capital so well and increase its competitiveness so much, that the EU could provide the material basis for the reconstitution of class collaboration on a European level. The increase in the rate of exploitation – conceded "voluntarily" by the union bureaucrats and the works' councils – and the increased ability to extract extra-profits from the semi-colonial world, are seen as a basis for a new bout of social chauvinism.

Furthermore, the weakening of the influence of the working class or its representatives inside the reformist parties could have consequences unintended by the Third way ideologues. It has also weakened these parties' ability to control the class when it fights. This can be observed by the development of struggles of the youth in particular, which are often developing outside the labour movements' traditional structures.

However, it can also be seen in the backstairs criticisms of the Third Way by some trade union leaders, by the survival and strengthening of reformist parties to the left of the social democracy (e.g. the Left Party in Sweden or the PDS in Germany). It can be readily seen, too, in the electoral gains of the LCR and LO in the June French euro-elections.

Next, the Third Way is still mainly a British phenomenon: the Labour Party is the only reformist party which has officially adopted this policy. The Labour Party is a "Blairite" Party, whilst the SPD is not (yet) a "Schröderite" one.

The reason for this is to be seen in the class struggle in Britain in the 1980s, in Thatcherism and how it shifted the balance of class forces. Whilst the Labour Party under Blair did adapt strongly to the neo-liberal agenda, it did not carry out the neo-liberal offensive in the country.

On the continent, however, to one degree or another, the conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s did not succeed on anything like the scale of Thatcher's victories for British capital.

Therefore, the difficulty for the continental social democratic Blairs is that they do not only have to transform their parties in order to accept the results of neo-liberalism and "moderate" some of them in line with middle class and labour aristocratic concerns – but they still have to implement many of these measures themselves.

Finally, at the moment, many social democratic governments still try to muddle through this by a combination of piecemeal or watered down reforms, significant attacks plus the aim to integrate the labour bureaucracy (particular the union leaders) in class collaborationist institutions in order to back these attacks.

Such an approach cannot be main-

tained forever. The general economic and political situation will demand an increase in attacks, an intensification of the class struggle sooner rather than later.

In such a situation, the Third Way will prove not to be the future, but another grave-digger for European social democracy.

It will not be a solution to the increasing pressure on the reformist parties from the bourgeoisie and a working class, which is expecting results – it will be one pole around which the leading reformist circles try to muddle through these pressures.

This means that the other pole within social democratic reformism – the more or less left Keynesian and state interventionist wing – will at a certain point re-emerge either in or outside the reformist parties as a "radical" and "realistic" alternative. Indeed, not only left reformists, but most of the centrist left are hoping to reinvent this (capitalist) wheel.

The obverse will also be true. A crisis caused by implementation of Third Way measures could lead not to a "renewal of social democracy", as many envisage, but rather the rupturing of Third Way social democratic parties and the severing of their ties with the organised working class, preferring to fuse with, or replace, bourgeois liberal parties in order to remain true to their programme.

This certainly is one scenario for Blair in Britain. Such battles, however, lie in the future.

Today, the organised and class conscious workers must use what means they have to force the reformist parties in office to break with their openly pro-business policies, to insist on the full implementation of whatever is progressive in the pledges and manifestos they came to office with.

That way a new generation of working class fighters can be reared in firm anti-capitalist convictions, steered away from the Third Way and onto the path of struggle and revolution. ■

FOOTNOTES

1 Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder, *The Third Way/ Die Neue Mitte* can be found at: <www.labour.org.uk/views/items/00000053.html>

2 A Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*. Polity Press, 1998 p.5

3 For a critique of these theoreticians see K Harvey, "Marxism versus Market Socialism", *Trotskyist International* 20 and "Plan versus Market", *Trotskyist Bulletin* 8, London 1997

4 In his book *Risikogesellschaft* Ulrich Beck argues that the working class movement has become less homogenous and is disintegrating because of the so-called "escalator-effect" (Fahrstuhleffekt). This means that as a result of the general rise of the living standard of the working class it has become more stratified, and unwilling and unable to act as a collective social entity.

5 The term post-materialism was introduced by Inglehart in the 1970 and 1980s. His thesis is that the long boom and spread of the welfare state led to a significant shift in values, particularly amongst the youth. Whilst, the "traditional" values were "materialist" – security, social welfare, law and order – predominant in the 1950s and 1960s, "post-materialist" values like self-realisation (Selbstverwirklichung), autonomy but also concern for "global" values and the environment, developed particularly amongst youth, white collar workers and the middle classes. Inglehart's idea was also strongly related to the assumption that the problems which gave rise to the predominance of materialist values – unemployment, poverty, etc. – had been successfully solved by social-democracy, the welfare state and Keynesianism. Therefore, the expansion of "post-materialist" values reflected social progress and their coming into being was related to the early Green movement and the Green Party. The programme of social democracy should combine "traditional" reformist politics with ecological and human rights concerns and a stronger stress on individual values, women and sexual liberation. Politically, it should aim for a coalition between the SPD and Greens. Early advocates of such a policy included a number of theoreticians from the latter day Frankfurt school like Habermas and Offe and SPD-leaders like Eppler, Glotz or Lafontaine.

6 Giddens, op cit, p.65

7 Giddens, ibid, p.63

8 Here we will not deal with Giddens' implicit distinction between a "traditional" and "modern" society. We just want to point out that even the traditions have to be explained as a result of social interaction and interaction between nature and mankind.

9 Of course, Giddens has not invented the concept of "risk" nor is it accidental that he settles on this as opposed to some other principle. Rather, his concern expresses dominant political and economic developments and the ruling ideas of a particular period.

10 F Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Moscow, 1970,p.119

11 The fact that the motives and goals of the working class can and, indeed, do constantly and spontaneously revolt against this mode of production expresses the fact that the capitalist mode of production is itself a contradictory unity (as does the fact that this mode of production can be scientifically understood).

12 Giddens, op cit, p. 78

13 ibid, p. 94

14 Blair/Schröder, op cit, p. 2

15 Giddens, op cit, p. 116

16 Blair/Schröder, op cit, p. 2/3

17 *VORAN*, April/Mai 1998, p12

18 Unlike the Italian or French resistance where the Stalinist parties in particular could reconstitute themselves and increase their prestige.

19 Thomas Meyer, *Die Transformation der Sozialdemokratie*, p. 56 This table certainly has many defects. Firstly, it wrongly brings an open bourgeois party, the PASOK, into the picture. Secondly, it only deals with social democratic parties and leaves out the Stalinist organisations. Thirdly, it does not cover the 1990s.

20 Ferner/Hyneman, *Industrial Relations in the New Europe*. In the 1990's, the trend has accelerated, albeit in part because of sub-contracting out of some industrial employment into the service sector.

21 "In the second half of the 1980s the electoral profile of SPD-voters is hardly any different from the time of Kaiser Wilhelm, of Ebert or Hindenburg. The SPD still primarily rests on the organised trade unionist skilled workers, mainly those living in the urban centers of the protestant regions. Losche/Walter, *Die SPD. Klassenpartei – Volkspartei – Quotenpartei*, Darmstadt 1992, p. 90

In Sweden, the percentage of blue collar workers slightly decreased over the last two decades, but still stood at 63% in 1994 (66% in 1979 and 64% in 1985). See: Christoph Kunkel/Jonas Pontusson, "Corporatism versus social democracy. Divergent Fortunes of the Austrian and Swedish Labour Movements", in: *West European Politics*, Vol 21, No. 2, London 1998, p. 17

22 They are by no means only a phenomenon inside reformist parties. They are important for the political landscape on a much broader scale. They find an important political expression in the Green parties in Europe. Since the Green parties do not have an organised relationship to the working class, which forces the Third Way to mediate its positions, it is natural that they have been moving much further, faster and with hardly any internal conflict to the right than social democratic parties. This is particularly the case on economic issues.

23 Giddens, op cit, p140

US LABOR PARTY

Has socialism a future

Against a background of steep decline in the trade unions in the United States, the formation and growth of the US Labor Party is a sign that militancy and class consciousness persist in the vanguard of the working class. But **Marco Zucci** argues that if big business is to get a real fright then a major shake-up of the nature and direction of the fledgling party is needed

At the national convention of the Labor Party (USA), held in December 1998 in Pittsburgh, the slogan behind the podium was "Let's hammer it out together!"

So far the programme and practice of the Labor Party (LP), founded in 1996, have not lived up to this roaring slogan. The party is actually a pretty weak hammer and has done little to help the working class take on its mighty capitalist enemy, the US ruling class.

The fact that the LP came into existence at all, in the midst of a major decline in working class organisation in the USA, and that it has survived as a reasonably lively organization (the convention was attended by over 1300 delegates) are positive aspects of the party's brief history.

However, the LP has so far failed to prepare for two key and interrelated battles: the struggle against the bureaucracy leading the unions and the more general struggle to break away both the unions and whole sectors of the working class from their subordination to the bourgeois politics of the Democratic Party.

While this is no surprise, considering the the forces which dominate the LP, this central weakness could compromise and undermine the viability of the whole project of building a workers' party in the USA.

The decline in the workers' movement

Since the major set-backs of the late 1970s and early 1980s, culminating in the defeat of the air traffic controllers' strike (1981) under the Reagan presidency, the workers' movement has suffered nearly two decades of decline and retreats.

Under the blows of the US bosses' attacks the working class has been seriously downsized in its historical strongholds. The manufacturing sector has been dramatically cut down and reshaped and now only employs a fraction of its previous workforce, especially in the historically large and militant sectors of the automobile and the mining industries. Millions of workers have been shifted from manufacturing into the service sector, where part-time working, bad conditions, low wages and the absence of unions are the norm.

While they are generally hidden in the glamorous government statistics boasting a powerful, booming economy, unemployment and underemployment have grown steadily to one quarter of the work force. Of this, only 4 % are officially accounted for; the unemployed who cannot claim benefits, the underemployed and those employed but below the poverty line, are ignored!

This enormous pool of "surplus" workers, and the weight of the accumulated defeats, has left the initiative in the hands of the bosses. Not only has there been a 15 % decline in the level of real wages over the last 25 years but other basic needs are also under attack.

Forty three million Americans have no health insurance at all, although the health industry is one of the most profitable in the country. Health plans are systematically revised, increasing the costs at the same time as reducing the entitlements.

This is lowering health standards for the whole working class. The political agenda is dominated by either the attacks on the remaining benefits, like the Social Security system, or by new proposed tax cuts, to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

For the first time in American history, the children of the working class are facing an uncertain future of part-time, poorly paid jobs and sub-standard living conditions, significantly lower than those of their parents.

This material decline is reflected in the continued erosion of working class organisation, now at an historical low of 14.5 % union density, and the number of strikes, 29 in 1997 as against 222 in 1960. This sharp decline in the strength and consciousness of the working class has left the union bureaucracy floundering. Indeed, one of the most visible indicators of the crisis of their leadership is the speed with which most of them

in the USA?

are running for cover - straight into the arms of the bosses themselves. This "strategy" generally takes one of three forms:

- continuing and renewing their ties with the Democrats, because there is "no other place to go". In the last presidential elections, the unions spent more than $35 million to get a Democrat re-elected and this is likely to happen again in 2000;
- taking the business unions solution, that is, promoting a unionism completely tied to the bosses and defending their profits as the "base of the union". All kinds of new contracts which are to the advantage of the bosses have been agreed by the bureaucrats along this line, particularly in the car industry;
- playing the Republican card against the Democrats. Already large amounts of union money are channelled to Republicans who play the role of "friends of Labor", despite the obvious dead end that this move represents.

There are some bureaucrats who follow a different line. They recognise the need to rebuild the unions from below, using tactics, including mass mobilisations and strikes that have led to serious conflicts with the bosses and their allies. Two events in the 1990s graphically illustrate their impact: the election of Ron Carey to the head of the Teamsters in 1991, and the UPS strike in 1997.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters is one of most powerful US unions, with over one million members. For several decades, however, it was best known for being completely controlled by a bureaucracy closely intertwined with "the mob", the mafia.

The lifestyle of these top bureaucrats was in itself an insult to the workers. The union owned a fancy jet for their trips, conventions were held in holiday resorts like Miami or Las Vegas and more than one hundred bureaucrats were paid in excess of $100,000.

In 1991, after a strong campaign by Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a reforming opposition with important roots among sections of the rank and file, the government stepped in and organised the first elections for the top positions in the union.

To the surprise of many, it was not an old guard bureaucrat but Ron Carey, president of a New York UPS local (branch) who won. This led to a process of limited reform in the union, stopping the most blatant cases of bureaucratic control and the abuse of the funds.

The new leadership was also central in the successful UPS strike of the summer 1997, when UPS workers took on a powerful company, resisted all attempts to break the strike through scabbing and finally won a significant victory.

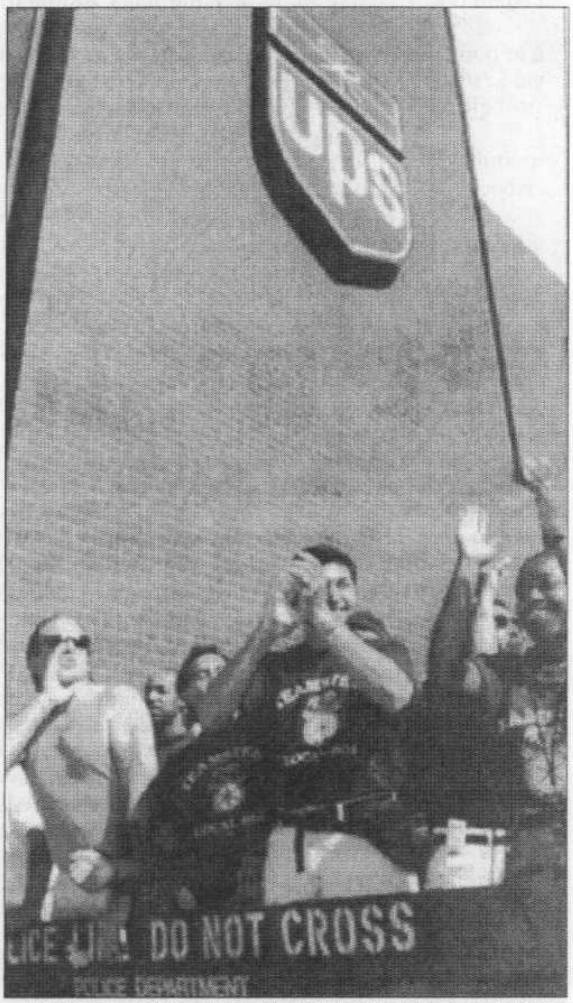
The key to this success was the new leadership's mobilisation of the rank and file in the strike, where they ran strong and determined pickets. Above all, what the strike underlined was the potential combativity of union members when rallied behind a leadership that had shown that it was prepared to fight, at least over immediate issues.

However, this success revealed the weakness of the whole Carey period - the weakness of a bureaucrat prepared to use the rank and file against the "old guard" union leaders and, in certain circumstances, the bosses, but not prepared to subordinate his leadership to the rank and file and to real workers' democracy that alone could free the union from the state.

Government control of the union's affairs, which had opened the way to Carey's election, now provided the means to get rid of him.

He was accused of involvement in shady deals with the Democratic Party in which members' subscriptions had been diverted in exchange for support for Carey. Three of his "political consultants" pleaded guilty and this resulted in a rerun of the union elections.

In the end, James Hoffa Jr, son of the one of the most famous mob-connected Teamster leaders, was elected. This ended the reform season and led to many contracts being signed, which seriously worsened workers' conditions, without any real struggle.



UPS PICKET 1997: THE TEAMSTERS WON THE STRIKE

The Labor Party

It was out of this reforming layer of the middle bureaucracy of the Teamsters and others unions, a layer not entirely corrupted or completely cut off from the rank and file, that the Labor Party originated.

For decades, tiny groups of leftists and union militants kept alive the slogan of a workers' party in the USA to represent and defend the interests of the workers against the bosses. Historically, the lack of such a party has been a sign of the weakness of the workers' political. Revolutionaries have been right - historically and today - to raise the slogan of a workers' party in the US as a means of fighting for the political independence of the working class.

At the beginning of the 1990s, a group of unionists led by Tony Mazzocchi, national secretary of OCAW (Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers), launched a campaign to build what they saw as a preliminary organ-

isational basis for a workers' party.

They deliberately kept the political content to a minimum, calling only for support from the unions for a party that would be independent of the two main parties. They even went so far as to avoid taking political positions on current workers' struggles, leaving all such questions for the future party to resolve.

After some initial successes in building the "Labor Party Advocates" (LPA), by 1994, the project was stagnating. In fact, the leadership's goal of 500,000 members (for an annual fee of $20) was too high and risked delaying the actual launching of the new party forever.

A change of approach was needed to attract new layers of activists and workers: in 1994, chapters in a number of cities and states were recognized by the LPA leadership. In June 1996, the decision was taken to found the party at a national convention in Cleveland, Ohio, attended by 1367 delegates from 46 states.

The delegates represented 36 chapters and the newly born party could boast the endorsement of a wide range of modest-sized, but not unimportant, unions: OCAW (80,000 members) being the main support and contributing over 200 delegates.

The Western Longshoremen's Union, the United Electrical Workers, the rail-workers (Brotherhood of the Maintenance of the Way Employees), the United Electrical Workers (30,000) and the Californian Nurses' Association (28,000). The United Mine Workers (40,000) joined later in 1997.

The membership basis of these unions surpassed the million mark while LP individual membership was over 100,000. Moreover, the new project attracted the sympathy and the energies of more than 180 individual locals (the base organisations of the unions in the workplace) and many unorganized activists.

The Labor Party Programme

At the founding convention, discussion centred on the adoption of the programme, "A Call for Economic Justice", a set of demands which is intended to meet the needs of the working class.

As with many reformist programmes of this kind, many of its individual demands are not only supportable but necessary. However, the whole perspective of the working class taking power to put into practice those demands is completely absent from the programme. While the words, "struggle" and "fight" are used frequently, no concrete examples are given of how to struggle and to what end.

The whole programme fails to identify the role of the party in the struggles of the working class and, more generally, in American political life. This reflects the compromise upon which this party has been founded, as we will see later.

The tone and content of the programme reveal a lot about the moderate ideology shared by the union bureaucracy in the leadership of the LP and by the union leaders and members they are targeting for recruitment.

For instance, far from denouncing the arch-reactionary role of the USA in the world, as the most powerful and greedy imperialist country, the programme simply presents its supporters as "keepers of the American dream of opportunity, fairness and justice". This short sighted position on international issues is even more explicit in the LP "Fair Trade Campaign" against "trade policies, treaties and treaty organizations like NAFTA, GATT and the World Trade Organization (WTO)".

While a resolution on this issue recognises that "our fight is against multinational corporations, not our brothers and sisters in other countries", it then proposes to the workers the fairy tale of a "new fair trade policy" calling for the application of the ILO conventions whose central point is the following:

"No goods should enter this country unless the conditions of labour producing those goods adhere to ILO conventions. For example, no product should be allowed into the country that is made from child labour. In addition, no product should be accepted into the country that comes from countries or factories, in which workers do not have the real right to organise or where those that do are intimidated, threatened or coerced."

While the resolution calls for new rules for working people to become directly involved in the enforcement of this policy, it leaves the question of the nature of these new rules (who should adopt them? how should workers organise to enforce this ban?) wide open.

But, above all, in defending this rejection of international treaties, the arguments put forward by the LP go a long way toward justifying the idea that millions of jobs have been destroyed in the USA because of these treaties. This reinforces the dangerous ideology of a nationalist perspective for assuring a high standard of living to the American working class.

It panders to the right wing union leaders' constant calls to "put America first". It ignores the fact that job destruction began before these treaties and will continue regardless of them. It lets the US bosses off the hook for the devastation they are responsible for.

This is particularly evident in the LP press. For instance, the March 1999 issue reports on the actions of steelworkers who are demanding that Clinton stops the import of steel:

"Several thousand Ohio valley steelworkers marched to Bill Clinton's doorstep on January 20, angry at the administration failure to staunch the flood of cheap steel imports that have caused thousands of steelworkers to be laid off in recent months."

The rest of the article does nothing to argue for a class struggle, internationalist alternative to the "ban imports" lobby and suggests only that the LP would be more ready to enforce this kind of "national" workers' demand.

The role of the US government in



defending, or even putting in power, the very same dictators who violate human and union rights is never denounced.

There is no mention of the millions of jobs that are destroyed in other countries, particularly in the semi-colonies, through the application of the neo-liberal policies of the IMF and the World Bank, or to the systematic plundering of the natural resources of the same countries.

This line of argument is merely a slight shift to the left from the AFL-CIO mainstream positions :

"In the longer term, we need a new internationalism — a rewriting of the rules of the global economy to make it work for working people. This will require bold new ideas, new initiatives and new institutions. Controls must be devised to limit capital speculation; to make currencies more, not less, stable; to make corporations more, not less, accountable. Global arrangements for trade and investment must leave nations free to follow different paths to prosperity." (from *The Global Economy : the need to act*; J. J. Sweeney, 13-03-1999)

The same conscious strategy, of adopting timid positions so as not to shock the TU bureaucracy who the party is wooing, can be seen in the LP's discussion on women's right to abortion.

While the Californian Nurse Association called for free access to abortion to be included in the party programme, rather than the vague "unimpeded access to a full range of family planning and reproductive services for men and women" of the proposed document, this was defeated by the convention.

Valdemar Velasquez, president of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, explained candidly that he and his organization believed that life began at conception. "The right to continue or terminate a pregnancy" was not included in the programme until 1998.

This certainly shows that a lot of patient discussions are needed to break away some sections of workers from such reactionary ideas, but it should not be used as an excuse for adopting fudged positions, especially in conditions where the struggle over abortion rights is such a major issue of political conflict with the forces of the influential religious right.

On international trade and on women's rights the LP has shown itself to be hidebound by the prejudices and political cowardice that have bedevilled the US labour movement for decades.

Historically - with only partial exceptions - the unions have based themselves on a white, male labour aristocracy and have tailored their policies accordingly.

For a party that claims to represent the working class and its historic interests to do the same is a bad omen for the fate of the party. It is a strong hint that, like the bureaucrats it woos, the party leadership will be content to tread the reformist path, limiting class independence to an organisational break with the traditional bosses' parties but not a political break with US capital.

Labor Militant; silence over crucial questions

The approach to the LP of the Labor Militant (LM) group, section of CWI, is an example of the weakness of centrism when confronted by the reformist leadership of the workers' movement. Since the beginning, and rightly so, the LM has supported the LP and helped build it:

"A dream shared by many working people is starting to become a reality: the creation of a political party of our own, a Labor Party. The building of a workers' party, independent of big business, is a necessity if workers are to seriously challenge the corporate dictatorship over politics." (Labor Militant #46 summer 1996)

However, LM has very little to offer in terms of a perspective to build the LP as a revolutionary party. Consequently, it has failed to develop a critique of the course of the current leadership. LM is, of course, able to make some "orthodox" formulations like:

"The international experience of the past few years points to the need for a programmatic struggle against the dictatorship of capital and the market and the need for a bold socialist and internationalist strategy and tactics to win the support of the majority of the working class." (ibid)

But the programmatic struggle boils down to advocating yet another version of the LP programme:

"In order to build support, a programme must be created that breaks away from the 'what-is-good-for-business' mentality. We need a political party that puts what is good for workers and their families first and foremost. The starting point should be a living wage or income, decent health care, secure pensions, decent and affordable housing and much more. In order to begin to achieve this, our party must demand that a massive public works programme be launched to create new jobs and rebuild cities, the infrastructure and clean the environment. In addition we need a programme that also includes a $12.50 an-hour minimum wage or $500-a-week income, a 30-hour week with no loss of pay to create jobs, a huge house building programme, free college education, free national health care and child care and equal pay for equal work. The money and resources for a programme like this can come from increased taxes on the rich and cuts in war spending." (ibid)

What this series of demands forgets is the central point of the revolutionary programme - struggling against the bourgeois state machine and the very foundations of the rule of capital and organising the workers to build their own state in the process. Far from breaking the workers from reformism this sort of left reformism can only strengthen the illusions of the masses in the state and in the possibility of reforms.

By eliminating completely any form of transitional demands from their "programme", LM give no real programmatic alternative to the course of the leadership.

They are left then only with a feeble critique of the leadership decision not to stand in elections without any explanation as to why this is the case:

"The last three months have convinced many Labor Party activists that we cannot afford to allow another electoral season go by without running independent labor candidates opposed to the Democrats and the Republicans." (LM #48 Nov 1996)

Clearly, the future of the LP does not depend fundamentally depend on whether or not it stands in elections but in a decisive battle against its bureaucratic reformist leadership. This requires proposing an action programme for the American working class as the key agitation and propaganda tool to build the party, clearly challenging the bourgeoisie's control over society, not a minimal reformist set of demands like those of LM.

The problem is, the LM comrades are operating a schema, not a revolutionary strategy. For them the revolutionary programme is redundant because they are not fighting to build a revolutionary party.

At the international level, the CWI are proposing reformist workers' party projects, since they see such organisations as appropriate to the existing level of consciousness of workers and believe that they are a necessary stage that must be gone through before the working class can even think of building revolutionary parties.

With this schema in place LM will never mount a serious challenge to the LP leadership, they will be its footsoldiers, its occasional left face and will be kicked out with nothing to show for their efforts when the bureaucrats decide they know longer need them. ■

The Labor Party and the unions: a rotten compromise

What all this reveals is that the foundation of the LP was a rotten compromise between the top union bureaucrats and the leadership of the LP. One the one hand, the bureaucrats agreed not to attack the LP, either directly or through the state apparatus, and even helped it survive

with a little money and support. On the other, the LP agreed not to challenge the union bureaucracy either inside the unions, by organising a rank and file struggle for democratisation, or in the general class struggle by challenging the positions or the actions of the union leaders.

Crucially, they did not attack the top bureaucracy for giving enormous sums of money and support to the Democrats: to the point that most LP endorsing unions still maintain their traditional "Political Action Committee", mainly for lobbying Democrats. Alongside this, the LP has not stood candidates for elections, which would have forced the union leaders to make a clear choice between Democrats and Labor.

The reasoning behind this "non-aggression pact " is that the top bureaucracy believe they can use the LP to pressurise the Democrats, winning small concessions by threatening to increase their support for Labor.

The rationale of the LP leadership is similar: they see the LP as a long term project aimed at creating a reformist party on the model of the British Labour Party, with many years of patient work to gain support from the rank and file and to gently convince the top bureaucrats that the LP could do a better job for them than the Democrats.

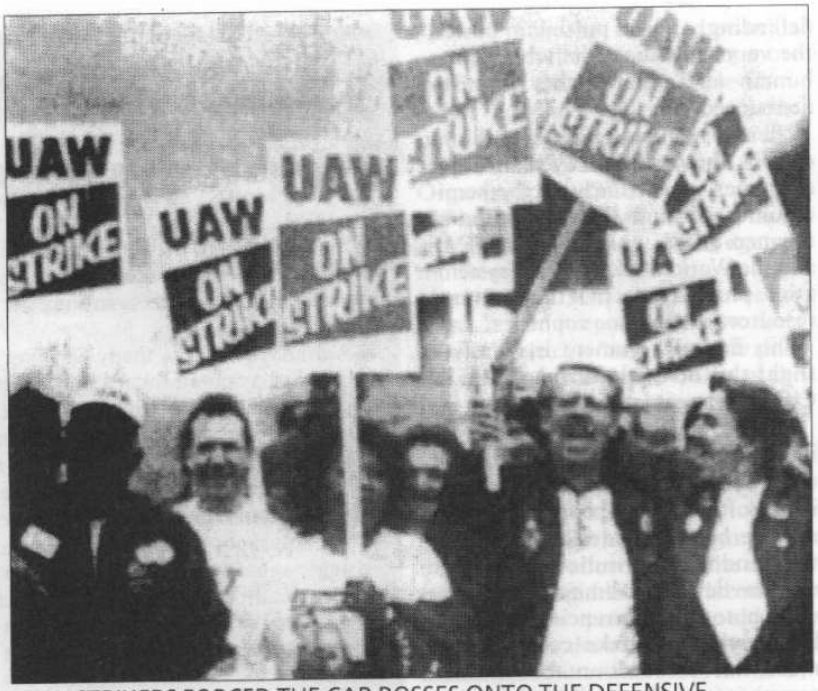
This was summed up by Bob Wages of the OCAW at the end of the last convention:

"If we remain non-electoral for the near future, and have discussions that leave room for fusion candidates, running both on our line and that of the Democrats, I think other unions will be interested."

This strategy is pure illusion. The combination of parliamentary centred politics, a reformist programme and a rear-guard oriented ideology, cannot but generate a climate of passivity, discouraging workers from turning to the LP in significant numbers rather than inspiring them to join in a new political project.

The decision not to stand independent Labor candidates, wasted important opportunities to build the party and to raise its visibility both locally and nationally. Similarly, the decision not to defend an independent point of view against the union leadership, and more generally in the class struggle, deliberately restricted the LP press to the realm of political abstraction.

The dangers of this were revealed in the party's response to the UPS strike, which began just a few months after the its foundation and grabbed the attention of masses of workers, not only in the USA but all around the world.



UAW STRIKERS FORCED THE CAR BOSSES ONTO THE DEFENSIVE

What did the party press say? Close to nothing. Its November 1997 issue simply commented on the anti-union Taft Hartley laws which, since 1948, have restricted the rights of workers to organise and respond with immediate strike action to the bosses' attacks.

While there is every reason to mount a campaign against the anti unions laws in the USA, there were many other lessons to be learned from the UPS strike, above all the fact that well organised and determined workers can win.

The LP decided to remain silent on the question. This is a graphic example of the classic reformist position which separates economics from politics, union work from party work.

In general, this always weakens class consciousness and helps to prop up the capitalist system, but in the case of the LP in its infancy it is even more of a problem, because its political activity is itself very weak. The adoption of this course was clearly leading the LP nowhere.

Going nowhere?

Since its founding convention, the LP has, effectively, stagnated. While a few more unions endorsed it, there was no breakthrough and the bigger, more powerful unions like the Teamsters' or United Auto Workers, did not show any interest in it. The AFL-CIO bosses are already geared up to support Gore for president next year and see the LP, at best, as a nuisance.

At the same time, the leadership based their project to build the party on a propaganda campaign for the "Twenty-Eighth Amendment to the Constitution". This would enshrine a right, "guaranteeing everyone a job at a living wage". The thinking behind this is that such an amendment would, "force Congress to find ways to implement it."

This kind of campaign, based upon collecting signatures and putting some pressure on local congress members, was certainly not a great propaganda weapon for the LP but it reflects the bureaucracy's conception of political activity.

Indeed, the bi-monthly LP press, while ignoring most of what happens both in the class struggle and in the unions, regularly features reports from the "Capitol Hill shop steward", a union Political Action professional, which covers parliamentary and government affairs.

The whole attitude of the leaders of the LP towards the local organisations, the chapters, has been very defensive. At the conventions they only allow one vote per chapter - unions have bloc votes. In some cases, the LP leadership has appointed union bureaucrats to chapter leaderships against the will of the rank and file.

Finally, at the 1998 convention, new internal rules were adopted that require at least 250 members for one chapter. Even the most lively chapter, New York, would not be recognized on this basis! It is no surprise that from the 30 or more chapters originally set up 1994, the number is now down to less than 10. This points to the need for a battle inside the LP for democratic control of the party by the rank and file.

Despite its relative weakness, the 1998 convention had 1400 delegates. A decision was finally taken to run candidates in elections, although the number of checks and the restrictive criteria of the resolution adopted on this are such that the leadership can live in peace for the next few years.

The date proposed for the next con-

vention was 2003! The leadership clearly does not see any urgency in building the LP and is content to leave it in semi-lethargy, as a tool for their use but clearly not as a tool for the daily struggle of the working class.

What can be done?

The LP today is a long way from offering a vibrant new class struggle approach to politics in the USA. That is why it is not attracting the scores of union activists and unorganised workers that it should. Its very survival in the coming years is far from certain.

However, sectarianism towards the project - and the US left is, as a result of its years of isolation from the working class deeply scarred by sectarianism - would be a mistake.

For the first time in many years a forum, involving several trade unions and a national network of members, formally committed to an independent union based party has been set up. Militants should intervene in this forum fighting for their ideas and perspectives.

This fight should combine a thorough critique of the leadership's mild reformism and of its bureaucratic approach to party building, and offer a new perspective based on an action programme for the North American workers.

The future of the LP is not yet finally set. The course taken by the leadership is clearly leading down a dead end reformist path. No large union has been convinced to endorse it and activity on the ground is declining, as testified by the dwindling number of chapters.

It is the task of revolutionaries today to fight to take the Labor Party out of the hands of its present leadership, turn it into a real challenge to the bosses' order

The proposed mix of a national propaganda campaign and abstention from an active intervention in the class struggle has already shown its inadequacy as a way of mobilising the workers.

However, if the next recession in the US economy is deep one it will profoundly alter the situation, shaking the whole foundation of the workers' movement and giving a mighty boost to the class struggle.

The rise of the mass workers' strikes in the 1930s, as the class recovered from the heavy blows of a terrible recession, is a powerful example of what can happen in the coming years.

Then, the working class forged new organisations, the CIO, which came closer than ever before to breaking the unions from the bosses' parties as well as leading to the significant growth of the then revolutionary Trotskyist party, the SWP (US).

It was thanks to the influence of Stalinism on the workers' movement – which at the time opposed the creation of a Labor Party and favoured political support for the Democrats as part of the popular front – together with the eventual rapprochement between the bureaucrats of the AFL and those of the CIO, that blocked the move towards the creation of a real workers' party.

It is the task of revolutionaries today to renew the fight against the same treacherous leadership and to fight to take the Labor Party out of the hands of its present leadership, turn it into a real challenge to the bosses' order by rallying millions of workers to its banner and win it to a revolutionary programme for the destruction of US capitalism. ■

LEAGUE FOR A REVOLUTIONARY COMM

An ongoing

The LRCI was founded ten years ago. **Richard Brenner** draws a balance sheet of our fight for a re-elaborated Trotskyist programme and a new democratic centralist international

"Revolutionary Marxists find ourselves thrown back into a position of a small and persecuted minority, almost as at the beginning of the imperialist war. As all of history demonstrates, beginning, say, with the First International, such regressions are unavoidable ... today we are once again only an international propaganda society. I do not see in this the slightest reason for pessimism ... Do we need a platform of transitional demands? We do. Do we need correct tactics in the trade unions? Unquestionably. But it is possible to discuss these questions only with those who have clearly and firmly decided for what ends we need all this ... We must first entrench ourselves on principled positions, take a correct starting point, and then proceed to move along tactical lines. We are now in the period of principled self-clarification and merciless demarcation from opportunists and muddlers. This is the only avenue to the highway of revolution."[1]

These are the words of Leon Trotsky, writing in 1929, at the beginning of a ten year struggle to recreate a revolutionary international. Ten years ago the League for a Revolutionary Communist International was founded to continue that fight.[2] The assembled delegates had drawn, both from their own political experiences and the history of the class struggle in the twentieth century, certain firm conclusions that shaped the organisation they launched.

The first was that the decline of the Soviet Union into Stalinist dictatorship and economic stagnation proved that the construction of a socialist society could only be assured if working class revolution succeeds in several advanced countries.

The second was that, for this task to have a chance of being realised, the revolutionary communists must be organised internationally to fight for a new world party of social revolution.

The third – and this was the idea that distinguished the Congress delegates from other tendencies on the far left – was that nationally-based revolutionary groups should establish the highest level of international organisation from the outset. The Leninist method of organisation – democratic centralism – should be applied at the international level in the new organisation.[3]

To be effective, an international tendency would have to shun a loose federal relationship between autonomous national groups. Equally, it should also safeguard against an undemocratic structure in which one national group dominates through setting up satellite or franchise groups in other countries.

Finally, the delegates were convinced that such an organisation would only succeed in taking forward the struggle to build a new world party of socialist revolution if it could overcome the failure of the surviving fragments of the post world war two Fourth International to re-develop a revolutionary programme.

The process of founding the LRCI involved the democratic discussion, amendment and adoption of an international programme, a common set of tasks, and the election of an authoritative and accountable international leadership.

Ten years on, how has the LRCI fared? Today it is larger, both in the number of its national sections and of its militants, than at its first congress in 1989. The organisation embodies greater experience of struggle, expresses a higher level of common campaigning action and has further developed Marxist theory to address a range of new and complex problems. New organisations, in New Zealand, Australia and Sweden, have joined its ranks; it fully expects to add a section in the Czech Republic this year. Its German and Swedish groups have grown significantly through fusion with other groups of revolutionary communists.

The LRCI also suffered reverses. A sustained intervention into Russia in the early 1990s failed to establish a section. The League lost both its sections in Latin America – the Bolivian and Peruvian groups – in a damaging split in 1995. Efforts to reach a principled agreement for fusion with the PTS of Argentina and its fraternal groups in Brazil, Chile and Mexico have not produced any significant progress after four years of exchanges.

The end of the twentieth century should be a time when the idea of a centralised and disciplined international organisation is widely accepted on the left. The globalisation of capital, the emergence of European, American and Asian trading blocs, increased co-ordination of trade union

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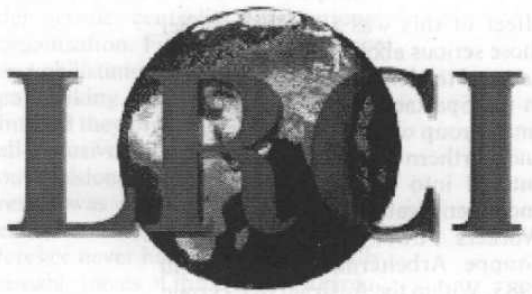
history



struggles across national borders (Liverpool Dockers, Renault), the horrors of nationalism manifest in brutal regional wars, the complete and humiliating defeat of the Stalinist project of "Socialism in One Country": all of these factors should make the urgency of achieving the highest possible level of international working class organisation obvious.

And yet, perversely, for the far left the opposite appears to be the case. The SWP (GB), despite a large network of groups around the world which support its ideas, persistently refuses to organise its international current on democratic centralist lines. The consequence is that affiliates of its International Socialist tendency must toe the line of the "parent" (i.e. British) section or relinquish their international ties.

The justification for this approach is that it is "first" necessary to build strong national parties. But if consistently applied, the same logic would block efforts to set up a democratic centralist organisation at the national level too.

Strong organisations would first have to be built in each of the main regions of the country. A simple comparison of these two arguments, and the fact that only one of them is advanced by the SWP (GB), reveals the deep seated national centredness that really underlies the argument against international democratic centralism as a necessary method of revolutionary organisation.

None of this is to suggest that a democratic centralist international tendency can simply be called into being or declared without years of struggle to create the real political and organisational conditions for its existence.

This article will examine the history of LRCI to draw out the way in which the political and organisational foundations of a principled international tendency were laid down. A combination of ongoing refinement of programme and agreement over tasks – each involving sharp internal struggle at times – has helped the LRCI build successfully on these foundations and orient its cadre to the new millennium with revolutionary confidence.

The pre-history of the LRCI

Five years before the foundation of the LRCI, four organisations set up its precursor – the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (MRCI). Established at a meeting in Conway Hall, London, during 21-23 April 1984, around twenty delegates from the British Workers Power group, the Irish Workers Group (IWG), the Gruppe Arbeitermacht of West Germany and Pouvoir Ouvrier of France agreed a statement of common aims. The MRCI Declaration of Fraternal Relations stated:

"The building of a revolutionary international cannot be put off until national parties have been built. The international must be built by revolutionaries simultaneously with the building of national parties. It must be founded on the basis of an international programme guiding and informing the work of the national sections. On this basis it can and must be organised as a democratic centralist international."[4]

The organisations had no illusions that they had already developed such a programme. All traced their origins to splits from organisations like the Socialist Workers Party in Britain or the Spartacusbund in Germany which they believed had failed to meet the revolutionary challenges of the 1970s – a period of mass anti-war movements, militant strike activities, in which throughout Europe, organisations openly describing themselves as revolutionary or Trotskyist had won tens of thousands of workers, students and other youth to their ranks.

But in the late 1970s and early 1980s all these organisations came up against the limitations of their politics. They suffered decline or splits because of either their sectarianism or opportunism towards the trade unions or the mass reformist parties, which despite waves of rank and file militancy maintained their grip on the great majority of workers. At the same time far left organisations which had grown during the same period in the semi-colonial countries revealed similar defects in relation to bourgeois and petit bourgeois nationalism and Stalinism, in particular in the face of the Nicaraguan and Iranian revolutions of 1979.

"The building of a revolutionary international cannot be put off until national parties have been built. The international must be built by revolutionaries simultaneously with the building of national parties."

Between 1979 and 1982 there was a series of attempted unifications and further splits among the fragments of the Fourth International. This experience convinced the four groups of the MRCI of tthat the existing international tendencies lacked both the political capacity for self-reform and the democratic structures to enable others to join them and help refound a Trotskyist international on the basis of a newly elaborated transitional programme.

Of the four founding groups, only one – the French – had been formed by former members of the British organisation. From the foundation of Workers Power and the IWG in the mid-1970s, the two groups had worked together on all our major political projects. In the early 1980s they participated together in the international conferences organised in Britain by the Workers Socialist League (WSL). There they made contact with the Austrian IKL and the German Spartacusbund.

The WSL's initiative produced the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC). This organisation proved short-lived, replicating as it did the loose federal structure of the larger "Trotskyist" organisations. Differences between its constituent parts plunged it into internal crises, its British section undergoing several splits before eventually merging with the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI). Among some members of the groups who attended the WSL sponsored conferences the attempt to discuss and reach agreement on aspects of an international programme had a significant effect. Militants had come into contact with each other. Discussions had been started, experiences exchanged. The

effect of this was to rally together those serious about building an international tendency. In Germany a split in the Spartacusbund gave rise to a small group of militants in Frankfurt and northern Germany who quickly entered into organised discussions and then fraternal relations with Workers Power. They formed the Gruppe Arbeitermacht (GAM) in 1983. Within the Austrian IKL certain comrades developed a strong commitment to forcing their organisation to take international collaboration and discussion with Workers Power/IWG/GAM seriously.

At the same time a former member of Workers Power living in France, who had been translating and publishing its material, began to make contact with and win over some young French militants, founding Pouvoir Ouvrier.

In 1984 the four groups decided that what was needed was an international tendency able to fight simultaneously in several countries, seeking out like-minded groups and individuals around the world. To achieve this would require a series of steps to establish clear political demarcation, discussion and common work.

The declaration said:

"...prior to [the] foundation of a New International there must exist a more embryonic organisation whose purpose is to develop [a revolutionary] programme. We call such an organisation an international tendency. Such a tendency would be characterised by:

(i) the recognition of the need to elaborate a world programme on the basis of the 1938 *Transitional Programme*.

(ii) proven agreement between the component sections with regard to the fundamental tenets and tactics of Marxism and therefore agreement on how to proceed with the necessary programmatic work.

(iii) proven agreement with regard to the application of such principles to conjunctural crises of proletarian leadership both historical and contemporary.

(iv) an established and recognised democratic centralist leadership – necessary organisational structures."[5]

In the 1960s and 1970s an upsurge in class struggle around the world saw many fragments of the Fourth International grow from groups of dozens to ones of hundreds or thousands.

Theoretical foundations

The nascent organisation turned to major programmatic and tactical questions. Foremost among them were the nature of Stalinism, the meaning of its post-war expansion and the political collapse and organisational disintegration of the Fourth International.

In 1982 Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group had published *The Degenerated Revolution* – a book that analysed the rise and nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the 1920s and 1930s and then the expansion of Stalinism after the Second World War, in Eastern Europe, China, Cuba and the Indo-Chinese revolutions. It showed that the Stalinist bureaucratic caste had not somehow thrown off its counterrevolutionary character by "making socialist revolutions". Although the Stalinists overthrew capitalism in these countries, the working class was totally excluded from power in these states from the outset. The Stalinists blocked an essential prerequisite for socialism: the political rule of the working class itself through a semi-state based on the soviet form. Democratic planning never emerged – the planned economies of Eastern Europe had profound bureaucratic deformations built into them from their creation during the period 1947-51.

Nor could Stalinism be "structurally reformed". Unless the workers carried through a violent political revolution to drive the bureaucracy from power, eventually the ruling caste would lead the bureaucratically planned economies to stagnation and collapse. At the same time, the book predicted, they would bring further political disasters down on these states (wars, brutal repression, national hatreds, even genocide) and lead those sections of the working class movement influenced by them to further defeats around the world.

The IWG and Workers Power had also analysed the collapse of the Fourth International (FI) in their 1983 book, *The Death Agony of the Fourth International and the Tasks of Trotskyists Today*. The FI, increasingly disoriented by Stalinist-led overturns of capitalism (Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia, China) decided at its Third Congress in 1951 that sections of Stalinism had ceased to be counter-revolutionary, and were becoming centrist again "under the pressure of the masses". In turn, these centrist parties could be pressured to reform as could the states they set up. Trotsky's programme of political revolution was abandoned.

In the subsequent years a general accommodation to Stalinism, the left-wing of social democracy and to petit-bourgeois nationalism swept the FI. First Tito, then Mao, then Castro, then Ho Chi Minh, were to play the role of "blunt instruments" or "unconscious Trotskyists". The need to accommodate to specific Stalinist or petit-bourgeois reformist or nationalist tendencies in different countries and continents – whilst still retaining whichever isolated elements of Trotskyist orthodoxy that did not directly impede this adaptation – had the effect of fragmenting and splitting the FI.

In the 1960s and 1970s an upsurge in class struggle around the world saw many of these fragments grow from organisations of dozens to hundreds or thousands. Yet while they tried to reunite "the Fourth International" they did so only on the basis of their accumulated errors and their common methodological collapse into centrism in 1948-1951.

The MRCI discussed and assimilated the theoretical insights of these two books. But the first collective work of the four MRCI groups was the elaboration and adoption of theses on the nature of modern Social Democracy and on the tactics which could be adopted to break its hold on the working class, and a variety of forms of the united front, including critical electoral support. Related to this was the adoption of theses on the anti-imperialist united front in the semi-colonial countries.

Over the next five years these organisations held quarterly meetings at which they adopted a series of resolutions on the major events in the international class struggle of the period: Poland 1980-82, the Nicaraguan Revolution 1979, the Iranian Revolution 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war 1980-82, the US invasion of Grenada 1982, the Malvinas War between Britain and Argentina in 1982, the upsurge of the South African workers' struggle against Apartheid. In April 1989 the MRCI adopted Theses on Women's Oppression.

The purpose of these common resolutions was to establish - and develop - a common programmatic method. Only by submitting our programme to the test of the major class struggles of the both the recent past and the present, could we ascertain whether we were really in agreement. Too many organisations had been cobbled together on a hastily written abstract programme, only to then split as a result of sharp differences when that programme was applied to the class struggle - the USFI over Nicaragua, the TILC over the Malvinas war, the Morenoite/Lambert organisation over reformism in power. We were determined to guard against this fate, as far as possible, by assessing whether we could reach programmatic agreement based on the application of Marxist demands and tactics in particular class struggle situations.

A major preoccupation of the MRCI during its brief existence was analysing the significance of Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union after 1985. In a series of resolutions the MRCI rejected the pro-Gorbachev stance of the large "Trotskyist" currents: the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, the Lambertists and the Morenoites. We warned of the Stalinist bureaucracy's rapidly evolving tendency to surrender the remaining gains of the working class – the planned and statified non-capitalist economy – to imperialism. But we rejected the tendency, most crudely

expressed by the Spartacists, to turn to the hardline Stalinists and back their brutal repression of the working class wherever it fought for democratic gains.

Instead the MRCI re-elaborated a programme for political revolution which understood the importance of fighting for the democratic freedoms of the working class: freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and press, trade union rights and national self-determination. Such demands, the MRCI was sure, would stand in the forefront of the struggle once the crisis broke in the Stalinist states. The workers would inevitably fight for such freedoms, and securing them was inseparable from the fight to recreate workers' councils and a revolutionary party. The validity of the MRCI's conclusions were put to the test when Stalinism entered its death agony in the convulsions of 1989-91.

The growth of the MRCI

In 1985, as part of the discussion on Social Democracy, delegates from the MRCI were invited to a conference of the Austrian IKL. The outcome of the conference was a split in that organisation by a group of comrades who agreed with the fundamental line of the theses on social democratic reformism. This nucleus went on to form a group, Arbeiterstandpunkt, which became the first new section of the MRCI since its foundation.

In the same year, as a result of articles in Workers Power on the significance of the revolutions in Bolivia in 1952 and 1971, the MRCI made contact with José Villa, an expelled member of the Bolivian POR led by Guillermo Lora. A revolutionary period existed in Bolivia from 1982-86, which culminated in the occupation of La Paz by the country's tin miners in mid-1985; however, it was tragically betrayed an ended in defeat.

Several visits by MRCI members to Bolivia, and Peru and visits by Bolivian comrades to Europe eventually led to Villa joining the MRCI. But political and party-building differences, plus the demoralisation of the post-1986 mass closures of the mines and factories, meant that the Bolivian comrades did not join at this time.

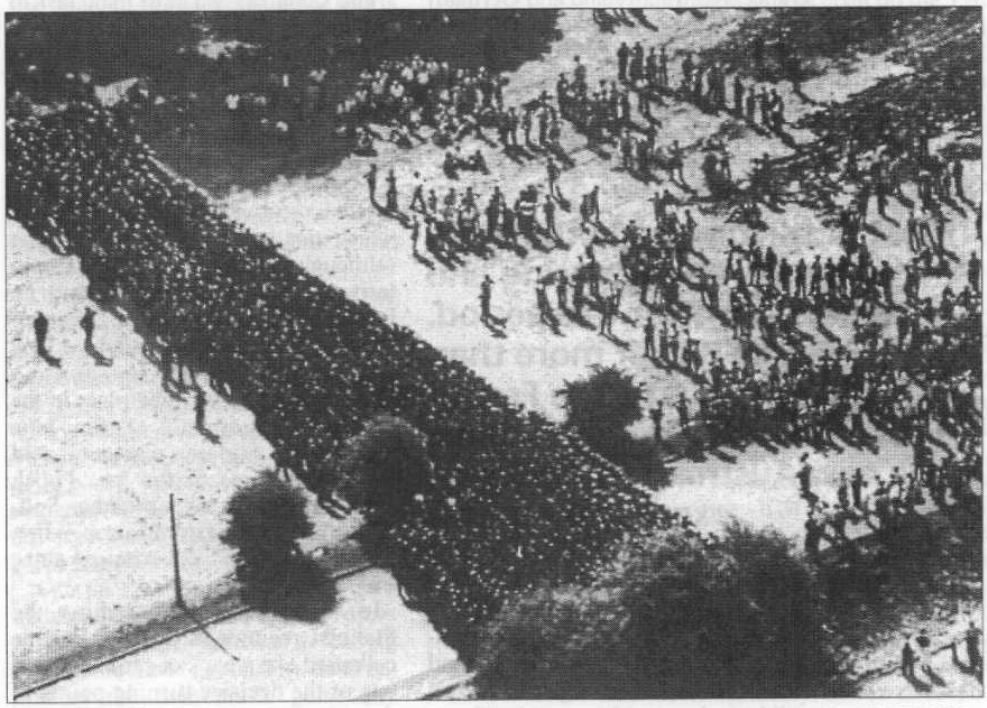
From the late 1980s the comrades were never persuaded of the strategic defeat that the Bolivian miners had suffered in 1986 – so similar to that suffered by the British miners one year previously. Nor could the MRCI and later LRCI persuade them of the need to re-orient tactically in such conditions. The most that was conceded was that this was an "interrevolutionary period"; to concede more, namely that a revolutionary period had ended, it was wrongly suggested would condone propagandistic passivity.

But all this revealed was an inability to distinguish the face of a revolution from its back – a fatal weakness for a propaganda group that needed to steer its militants away from a diet of agitation and mass activity towards serious propaganda to a more restricted audience. Their failure to undertake this reorientation would lead to persistent low grade agitation and difficulty in distinguishing themselves from their much larger centrist rivals, especially Lora's POR.

At this time Peru too was undergoing a deep economic crisis under the presidency of Alan Garcia and the Sendero Luminoso guerrilla group was growing. José Villa returned to his native Peru and formed a small group of MRCI members there – Poder Obrero (POP). The experience of this work with POP, the discussion of their opportunities and difficulties, was of great value to the hitherto entirely European-based MRCI.

The sudden explosion of Gerry Healy's International Committee in late 1985 caused ferment in "Trotskyist" groupings around the world. For two years there was endless talk of an open conference of all Trotskyists to discuss the question of international regroupment. In this period the MRCI entered into discussions with the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (LTT) of the USA. We renewed our discussions with the IKL and the Italian GOR as well as with former TILC affiliates such as the RWL in the USA. We attended the US Trotskyist Open conference held in San Francisco in 1988.

The very existence of the MRCI enabled us to intervene collectively and effectively in this ferment. Our assessment of the major issues and trends in the "world Trotskyist movement" was embodied in a set of Theses in Defence of Trotskyism (May 1987).[6] However, most of the groups involved in this process rejected the idea of serious programmatic clarification and steps towards a disciplined democratic centralist international organisation. Filled with impatience and philistinism, they regarded such a painstaking approach as "sectarian". Instead they proposed a broad, open, all-inclusive discussion process, without decisions or commitment. The end result was a series of manoeuvres, exclusions and splits. The open conference never happened. The initially sizeable forces of the Workers Revolutionary Party were frittered away and organisations like the IKL (later RKL) and the GOR underwent a process of rapid political degeneration; neither now consider themselves Trotskyist.



POLICE PREPARE TO ATTACK MINERS' PICKET AT ORGREAVE DURING THE 1984/5 STRIKE

To intervene in this flux in 1986, the MRCI set up a permanent secretariat and decided to draft a programmatic manifesto which would form the political basis for the MRCI to move to a democratic centralist structure.

In this period – a period of intense class struggles compared to most of the 1990s – sections such as WPB and the group of comrades around José Villa in Bolivia gained invaluable experience of fighting alongside workers – particularly miners – in major class battles which decided the direction of national workers movements for long periods to come. There were rich lessons to learn – in terms of militant organisation, courage and self-sacrifice – from the miners of Oruro and South Yorkshire. But also there was the lesson to learn of maintaining in the heat of these struggles an unsparing criticism of the leaderships: of the FSTMB (Bolivian Miners Federation) or the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) of the TUC or the COB (the Bolivian trade union federation).

Latin American comrades partici-

pated in the entire heroic "March for Life and Peace" where ten thousand miners marched towards the capital La Paz, only to be turned back by government tanks and troops. They won a hearing for a strategy that could have overcome these obstacles and enabled the miners to return to the offensive.

Likewise in Britain in 1984-85 Workers Power in Britain was shoulder to shoulder with the miners on the picket lines, in the front rank at major battles such as the miners' attempts to close the Orgreave coking plant. In France, Austria, Ireland and Germany the MRCI organised solidarity with the British miners, collecting money, organising meetings of workers and students addressed by miners and representatives of the women's movement, mainly made up of miners' wives and partners, that had grown enormously during the strike. Visits to pit villages became part of the "holiday itinerary" of European MRCI (and IKL) members. WP began to recruit striking miners and won a significant hearing amongst a militant minority in some pits in South Yorkshire, Warwickshire and North Derbyshire, laying the basis for the launch of a long running miners' paper, The Red Miner.

Most of the groups in the MRCI grew rapidly during and immediately after this period. Workers Power more than doubled in size, the French group recruited new militants, the new Austrian organisation expanded rapidly.

Most of the groups in the MRCI grew rapidly during and immediately after this period. Workers Power more than doubled in size, the French group recruited new militants, the new Austrian organisation expanded rapidly. The only partial exception to this was the German section. The dispersal of its small membership over a large country meant that it was not able to create a national leadership – a problem rectified by an international intervention into the crisis of East Germany after 1989.

The increasing activity and political homogeneity of the MRCI enormously helped the national sections. The MRCI ended this period with two new sections (Austria and Peru). The experience of these five years was invaluable; step by step we re-elaborated the building blocs of a revolutionary programme, we learnt to know and trust one another – not of course without conflicts or misunderstandings. The MRCI was in Lenin's phrase "a school of comradely feelings" in which national-centred prejudices were in large measure overcome. It remains a model of how to achieve programmatic agreement and democratic centralism and will – we are convinced – be repeated on a larger scale in the future.

The founding of the League

In the summer of 1989 a nine-day congress in Britain agreed to transform the six organisations of the MRCI into the League for Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI).

This Congress had as its main task to debate, amend and finally adopt a common programme – which was duly published as the Trotskyist Manifesto. On the basis of this achievement it was possible and necessary to elect the bodies for a functioning democratic centralist organisation – an International Executive Committee (IEC) on which members from each section sat (although not now narrowly representatives of them as before) and an International Secretariat (IS), responsible for administration and day to day political guidance.

The First Congress took place in the immediate aftermath of the June Tiananmen Square massacre and around the time of the first Polish "free elections". In September Solidarnosc formed Eastern Europe's first "non-communist" government since 1947.

In November and December the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed like a pack of cards. Clearly, one of the decisive turning points of the twentieth century had begun, similar in magnitude to 1914-18 and 1945-48. Would its immediate effect be revolutionary or counterrevolutionary? What would be the longer term consequences, and what reordering of the world order would result?

The LRCI insisted that the years 1989-91 saw a series of political revolutionary crises; with the correct leadership they could have led to one or more successful political revolutions. Unlike the sectarian and Stalinophile sects (such as the Spartacists and their offshoots) the LRCI did not view the loss of power by the Stalinist bureaucrats as constituting per se the end of the degenerate workers' states and the restoration of capitalism; in short, a successful counterrevolution. But, unlike the USFI, the Lambertists or the LIT (Morenoites) neither did we ignore the danger presented by the masses' strong illusions in bourgeois democracy and the market. Above all, we were aware of the crippling effect of the near total absence of any sort of anti-capitalist leadership in the working class.

Faced with the downfall of Stalinism we neither sank into despairing passivity nor did we have a naive optimism that was shattered by the defeats that were inflicted on the workers of the region without a serious class-wide fightback over the next three years.

The LRCI was not surprised to see the USA and its European allies once more assume the role of world policeman and launch a brutal assault on Iraq in defence of "its" oil fields in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in 1991. Instead it set to work to fight against imperialism.

The sections of the LRCI – working with organisations with which we were in political discussion in the USA (Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency) and Italy (GOR) – campaigned vigorously in defence of Iraq in the long build-up to the short and devastating Gulf War, opposing the imperialists' invasion and calling for an Iraqi victory in the war. We were also in solidarity with the Kurds against Saddam's genocidal revenge attack in the immediate aftermath of his defeat by the US-led coalition.

Imperialism, motivated entirely by the defence of its world order (the diktats of the IMF and the multinationals, privatisation and austerity worldwide) was coming into armed conflict not with genuine mass anti-imperialist movements as it had done in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (the Vietnamese NLF, the Sandinistas) but with its own Frankenstein's monsters: reactionary dictatorships it had sponsored but which had now "got out of control".

Thus ethnic cleansing, brutal national oppression, attempted genocide were all played out by brutal regimes, from Iraqi Kurdistan and central Africa (Rwanda) to the Balkans, where a series of savage wars broke out in 1991.

Though these real crimes against humanity were invariably the result of the economic and political pressures of the neo-liberal world system, including the restoration of capitalism from 1988 onwards, their executioners were independent actors like Saddam Hussein or Slobodan Milosevic.

Moreover, "democratic imperialism" – once such crimes came to light – set out to use a humanitarian ideology to justify the assertion of their New World Order, in which the sovereignty of smaller states was entirely relative. It was vital for revolutionaries to defend the oppressed nations against genocide by these regimes without giving an inch to imperialism's claims to be acting out of humanitarian concern.

Generally speaking the "Trotskyist" centrists fell over in one direction or the other – either downplaying or ignoring imperialism's role or treating the Saddams or Milosevics as bona fide anti-imperialists and regarding the victims of genocide as so much "collateral damage" in the struggle

against imperialism. This "anti-imperialism of fools" found a distant echo in the LRCI's own ranks in the form of an unwillingness by a small minority to act in a united front with the oppressed against their oppressors, especially once imperialism began to show a self-serving and cynical interest in restraining the crimes of the oppressors.

Likewise, in the Soviet Union rapid economic breakdown led to national revolts in the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia and later Chechnya) and in the Baltic states and the Ukraine. The LRCI defended the rights of these oppressed peoples to self-determination up to and including secession without preconditions.

In 1990, we were able to work with other leftward moving tendencies particularly the RTT. We sent a member of the British section at the time of the anti-Gulf war movement to assist them in effectively founding their organisation and launching its publication.

A member of the International Secretariat visited the RTT for discussions and we received several visits from them in return. Across Europe in late 1990 and early 1991 there was a large anti-war movement. In London over 200,000 marched on the last demonstration before the fighting started followed by weekly demonstrations of over 20,000.

In this period LRCI members also visited Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania and Russia. But we were only able to concentrate serious long-term resources in East Germany (DDR). Here we established a permanent presence in east Berlin and sold huge numbers of bulletins in the period from the collapse of the Berlin Wall, through the last DDR elections, to German re-unification in the summer of 1990.

Years later when the unification seems such an unalloyed triumph for German imperialism, people too easily forget that the masses of anti-Stalinist workers and youth who thronged the streets, who gathered in large conferences and forums to debate what to do after the fall of the Wall were by no means all supporters of capitalism and tens of thousands snapped up revolutionary socialist publications and newspapers.

The result of persistent work by a team of Austrian, West German and British activists was recruitment of East German comrades and the creation of first an East German section of the LRCI and then its fusion with the Gruppe Arbeitermacht.

Also during 1989-90, as the result of an extended visit to Bolivia by a leading member of the Austrian section, the comrades founded a group and in 1991 Poder Obrero Bolivia joined the LRCI.

The August 1991 coup in the USSR

In August 1991 the revolutionary situation in the Soviet Union came to a head. The coup attempt launched by Yanaev and Pugo rapidly collapsed in the face of mass resistance. Boris Yeltsin put himself at the head of this movement by raising the call for a general strike.

The LRCI immediately took the position of supporting resistance to the Yanaev/Pugo coup. Two LRCI members were actually in Moscow at the time and participated in mass actions in defence of democratic rights.

The International Secretariat of the LRCI responded to the events by calling for mass working class opposition to the attempted Yanaev coup – alongside pro-Yeltsinite forces such as the miners – though in no sense accepting Yeltsin's leadership, let alone his ultimate goals. This was made clear in a declaration on 22 August 1991 – the day after the failure of the coup. The LRCI said:

"Our task is to get the working class to defend their post-capitalist property relations in the context of defending their democratic gains. The destruction of the democratic gains [by Pugo/Yanaev] would have made it impossible to raise the consciousness of the masses to a level adequate to this task".

Far from sowing any illusions in Yeltsin or seeking to help him attain his political objectives, we warned the Russian workers:

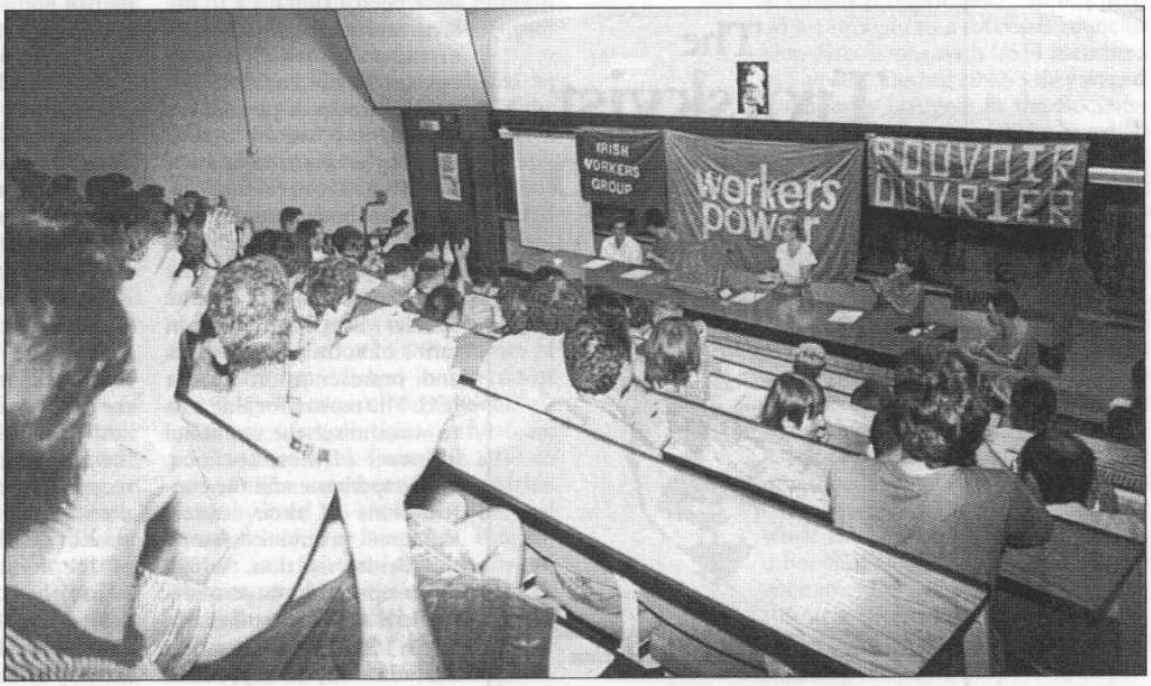
"The greatest danger to the working class now that the coup has collapsed is Yeltsin (...) Yeltsin is no friend of the working class. He represents all the elements in the former bureaucratic caste who have abandoned the prospect of bureaucratic parasitism on proletarian property relations in favour of becoming the new ruling class of a restored capitalist Russia.

"His pro-capitalist policies spell mass unemployment and the destruction of social welfare for millions of workers; he wants to open up the 120 million Soviet workers to unbridled imperialist exploitation... the events of the past week, whilst they have blocked the road to a Stalinist bureaucratic counterrevolution, have acted as a catalyst to speed up the social counterrevolution; the cause of the democratic restorationists has been immeasurably advanced. The tempo of the demise of the nomenklatura has likewise been accelerated".

We went on to call for "workers' councils elected in every workplace and region of the USSR" and "proletarian political revolution to smash the dictatorship of the Stalinists and prevent the restoration of Stalinism."[7]

Thus we resolutely opposed Yeltsin's counter coup – from the dissolution of the CPSU to the dissolution of the USSR itself – which unleashed the process of capitalist counterrevolution.

In the same month the LRCI suffered a heavy loss. Dave Hughes, who had been seriously ill for over six months, died suddenly on 13 August. His funeral took place on the day after the Yanaev coup collapsed. As a



DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS AT THE FOUNDING CONGRESS OF THE LRCI IN COVENTRY UK, AUGUST1989

founder of Workers Power (Britain), the MRCI and the LRCI, and as a Russian speaker and writer on Russian history and politics, he had laid the foundations of our method and programmatic positions on this central question in the 1980s. This work provided the LRCI with a rich inheritance with which to address the many and varied political problems opened up by the seizure of power by the Yeltsin pro-imperialists.

Serious differences emerge inside the LRCI

The events in Russia led to the eruption of a major political struggle both within the LRCI and with two organisations in discussions with it with a view to joining: the Communist Left of New Zealand and the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency of the USA.

The RTT denounced the League's position on the August events as centrist and asked to join "in order to fight this centrism" and "overthrow the leadership of the LRCI." Earlier in the year the RTT had declined to join before its Second Congress, scheduled for late 1991. The LRCI wisely now declined this request from an organisation with whom it did not have programmatic unity. We did however invite the CLNZ to observe the congress; despite the fact that they were also critical of our position on the Yanaev coup they did not consider either the LRCI or its leadership to be centrist.

Within the League it soon became clear that the Peruvian and Bolivian sections had also taken a sectarian attitude to the Yeltsin-led resistance to the Yanaev coup during 19-21 August. They rejected unity in action with the Yeltsin-mobilised workers and students in favour of what they called "independent" opposition to Yanaev and Yeltsin. They insisted that our position somehow meant we had supported or been complicit in Yeltsin's coup. In fact what this showed was their differential sensitivity towards the Stalinophile groupings, from the Spartacist tradition and from groupings like the GOR and the IKL.

The Second Congress of the League – held in Birmingham in December-January 1991-2 – was undoubtedly a congress of crisis. At the root of this crisis lay sharp disagreements between the two Latin American sections and the sections in Europe over the events in Russia. They, together with the representatives of the CLNZ, recently renamed Worker Power (NZ), sought to persuade the League to admit the RTT and thus maximise the Stalinophile forces within the organisation. The congress refused. At the end of the congress, the WPNZ delegates announced that they wished to join the LRCI and a New Zealand section was recognised and one of their comrades was elected onto the IEC.

But superimposed on the disputes over Russia was the fact that the delegates from the Peruvian and Bolivian sections were discontented with the functioning of the League, and sought, by organisational measures, to magnify their influence within it. Several times over the next few years they tried to weaken the central bodies of the League, especially the International Secretariat, proposing that it assume a semi-federal character. In reality this would have been a step back to the structure of the MRCI – an arrangement which would have given the Latin American comrades a permanent veto over positions agreed upon by a clear majority of the LRCI.

As it was the first congress of the LRCI had voluntarily created a system of deliberate over-representation of the smaller sections both in terms of votes at congresses and representation at the IEC. The reason for this was to maximise the political influence of these sections, their experience and the contributions of their leaderships, and to diminish that of the British section, which made up nearly three quarters of the entire membership of the LRCI at this time. We did not want to reproduce the "parent-child" relationship of many of the centrist tendencies calling themselves Trotskyist, especially those from the IC (Healy-Lambert-Spartacist) tradition.

At the second congress this "positive discrimination" was further increased with the aim of expressing as strongly as possible the political differences within the quarterly to six monthly meeting IEC, even though this meant over-representing even more the sectarian and Stalinophile tendencies. Was this wise? Probably not. Its purpose was to maximise the exposure of comrades in disagreement and who at the same time had material difficulties in participating fully in the internal life of the LRCI through its discussion bulletins. However, the cost was high: it condemned the LRCI to several years of internal struggle, despite the fact that the disputants remained a tiny minority of the League's membership.

But our overwhelming aim was to succeed in integrating our sections in Latin America into the democratic centralist functioning of the League. A large measure of the failure to understand what democratic centralism meant lay in the strong influence of the pre-existing political traditions of the members in Peru and Bolivia (those of Lora, Altamira, Moreno and Healy). This required us to lay a heavy emphasis on democracy and inclusivity at the expense of centralism and organisational efficiency.

The Congress thus elected four members of the Latin American sections onto the IEC. The leadership persuaded José Villa to become an LRCI full timer in London and member of the International Secretariat for a full year (1993) before the next congress. In addition several members of the international leadership and militants from other sections visited Peru and Bolivia in the years 1991-94. One British militant spent an extended period with the Bolivian section helping it to regularise its publications and internal education.

The LRCI launched an irregular publication – *Guia* – which carried Theses on Latin America, a Latin American Action programme and a series of articles on the key political issues and events of the period, many of them of special relevance to Latin America. However, the long disputed issue of the character of the period in Bolivia and Peru after 1986 meant that we did not reach agreement with the comrades.

After many delays and much debate the IEC eventually passed positions recognising the strategic character of the setbacks suffered by the working class in Bolivia, even against the votes of the Latin American comrades. Worse, the Bolivian comrades refused, delayed and evaded publishing these documents. Indeed it was only a few months before they walked out of the League in October 1995 that they actually published our assessment of



the seriousness of the miners' defeat of 1986.

Unfinished business

In addition to the differences with our Latin American sections, several of the the documents submitted to the Second Congress aroused much wider oppostion than just the Latin American sections.

A new draft constitution and Theses on the Early Stages of Party Building aroused considerable oppostion in the British and German sections. The drafters –the International Secretariat - had thought that further steps towards international democratic centralism were urgently needed. But it became clear that a substantial section of the membership were scarcely ready for this.

In addition there were substantial differences over the International Perspectives put before the congress. These argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening up of a process of social counterevolution heralded what we called a "reactionary phase"- lastinga few years, perhaps.

But they also asserted that the instability which the downfall of Stalinism would cause meant that in the longer term a new revolutionary period would develop. This dual perspective met opposition from two sides. Those who could see only social counterevolution on the march and those who refused to see it at all .

This debate over perspectives was to continue- on and off- until the next congress. Amongst the "pessimists", passive propgandistic tendencies emerged which were to lead to losses in the Austrian section. No less were there losses from amongst the optimists when the level of class struggle in Europe and Latin America and the mass resistance to restoration failed to materialise.

Clearly a longer period was required during which the leaders of the sections worked collectively on the new areas of analysis and programmatic eleboration which the unfolding restoration process posed. Discussion on the methodology underlying key tactical questions was required. These took place on the on the International Executive Committee over the next three years.

Over the next two years the now six-monthly week-long IEC meetings of the League had to address a whole series of programmatic and tactical questions as well as attempting to integrate the Latin American sections.

The IEC also had to decide on our economic and political perspectives (the character of the new period which resulted from the world historic events of 1989-91), the theoretical analysis of the restoration process clearly underway in Eastern Europe, the USSR and China and of any re-elaboration or development of our programme which these events made necessary.

In the year after the Second Congress we tried to help the weaker sections by an input of members from the two strongest – the British and the Austrian sections. One comrade from each spent extended periods in Dublin helping the IWG. ASt members spent extended periods in Berlin helping the Gam to consolidate new East German recruits there. In early 1992 we renewed contact with a Swedish Trotskyist and within the year had a small nucleus of sympathisers within the Socialist Party – the Swedish section of the USFI.

Overall the years 1992 and 1993 were not ones of growth for the two larger sections. The British section declined, reflecting the slump in the British class struggle after the end of the poll tax mass movement. The full impact of the scale of the defeat inflicted upon the British trade union movement in the 1984-89 period (miners, printers, dockers) was now making itself fully felt. Although there was a brief upsurge of mass street protest after the proposal for the final butchery of the mining industry was announced in late 1992, there was no hiding from the defeat and dispersal of a generation of trade union militants after two decades of militancy.

Understandably, given these problems, a sharp dispute erupted in the British section - and in the IEC - over whether the answer to this was a greater concentration on the workplaces and on young people involved in the anti-fascist movement or a strengthening of theoretical and propaganda circle work. As it turned out the British section became more involved in youth work via the developments in the British Militant and the CWI who initiated two militant demonstrations against the BNP headquarters in south London.

In February 1992 we produced an action programme for the states of the former Soviet Union which were in the earliest stages of transition to capitalism. This programme was in a sense a combined one – including elements of the anti-bureaucratic political revolution and the tasks of opposing and reversing capitalist restoration. Over the next three years we debated and adopted resolutions on the nature of restoration, published in a series of articles in Trotskyist International.

But our work on this was far from purely theoretical. From late 1991 to early 1993 a member of the Austrian section lived in Moscow. Several members of the Austrian, French, British and German sections visited Moscow too. Six issues of a small journal in Russian, Rabochaya Vlast, were produced and sold in large numbers. Discussions with the Russian left-anarchist and "Trotskyists" – took place.

We were able to witness at first hand the terrible effects of the neo-liberal shock therapy on the workers, pensioners and youth of Russia, and also the political paralysis of the working class and the reactionary bloc of the hard-line Stalinist and fascistic elements. We handed out thousands of leaflets on marches to celebrate the anniversary of the October revolution in 1992, and were forced to defend ourselves against physical attacks by Stalinists.

In December 1992 we organised a weekend school in Moscow on the politics and programme of the LRCI.

From late 1991 to early 1993 . . . six issues of a small journal in Russian, *Rabochaya Vlast*, were produced and sold in large numbers . . . We handed out thousands of leaflets on marches to celebrate the anniversary of the October revolution in 1992.

It was attended by forty people including anarchists and members of other Trotskyist tendencies. The debate was lively but unfortunately we did not win over any co-thinkers.

In the years 1992-95, the period of the growing restoration of capitalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, the LRCI made strides in other areas of its programmatic work adopting Theses on the early stages of Party Building (July 1992), Democratic Demands in the Political Revolution (January 1993), Theses on the United Front (July 1994) and Theses on the National Question (April 1995). In this period we brought to a successful conclusion discussions with USFI members in Sweden. During 1992-3 they waged a tendency struggle in the Socialist Party and in October 1994 a Swedish section of the LRCI was founded, Arbetarmakt (AM).

Unfortunately, the conditions in Bolivia, after the defeat of the miners eight years before, were not propitious to building a section with activist appetites and abilities. Still less was this the case in Peru after Fujimori's election in 1990.

But even with the handful of comrades that existed José Villa's weakness as an organiser and an educator of cadres proved an insurmountable barrier to consolidation, collaborative work and growth. Consequently no other leaders of his talent and experience emerged within them.

Both sections suffered serious internal crises between 1992 and 1994, expelling members temporarily or permanently for serious lapses of discipline. Indeed the Peruvian group was

decimated and ceased to be a section. It was only the interventions of the LRCI which gave them what stability they had and saved them in many crises.

Villa responded ever more often with attempts to boost his own standing by bluff and exaggeration. This was perhaps a gamble based on his belief that Bolivia— if not Peru— was always on the verge of a revolutionary upsurge which would make good his claims. When reality failed to come up trumps he increasingly sought to blame "the Europeans."

He was unable to develop loyal collaboration with any of the comrades in Europe (whatever their national origins) who were charged with helping with the work of "his" two sections, nor would he allow them to develop any independence. In this one could see all too much of the caudillismo (leader cult) he himself had accurately described as the bane of Latin American "Trotskyism".[8]

Between the Second and Third Congresses the LRCI suffered a protracted period of internal struggle. While this did not paralyse the organisation completely, it hampered its growth and restricted scope for outward intervention. But even such a problem strewn period is not without its positive aspects.

Internal struggle can strengthen an organisation and it can do so in different ways - comrades can learn how to fight loyally over their differences and they can learn why disloyal factional struggle obstructs, rather than facilitates the resolution of real differences.

Within the British section the dispute over perspectives was heated, but it was conducted by comrades who understood that they shared more than just a coincidental membership of a common organisation.

They were in fundamental agreement over the principal, epoch defining questions – the collapse of Stalinism, the role of imperialism, the character of the programme and the party needed to resolve the crisis of working class leadership.

Unity over these questions had been forged over a period of time in which the triumph of collective leadership over individual domination had been well and truly won.

A collective centralised leadership in the British section emerged out of a truly functioning democracy in which the strengths of individuals were recognised and utilised while their weaknesses were compensated for by the overall balance of the leading body. Common struggle - both theoretical and practical - collective work and discipline all bred a spirit of loyalty. This loyalty did not at all mean agreeing over everything. That would reek of cliquism. But it did mean, above all, conducting debates over differences in an honest and fraternal way, without recourse to threats, abuse, manoeuvres or unprincipled factionalism.

This model of collective leadership was the goal the LRCI set itself. The proof that it was an inclusive model was the expansion of the IEC to represent oppositionists

This model of collective leadership was the goal the LRCI set itself. The proof that it was an inclusive model was the expansion of the IEC to represent oppositionists, the inclusion within the apparatus of the leading oppositionist and the repeated willingness of the sections of the League to allow oppositionists to canvass for their views.

The attempt to achieve this goal is testified to not simply by the number of discussion bulletin pages that flew from the duplicators of the sections in this period but by the investment of thousands of pounds of the LRCI's money to help make it happen.

It was precisely this attempt to build a collective leadership that opened the overwhelming majority comrades' eyes to the difference in character between the disputes that took place within the LRCI.

The arguments in the British section were had out, resolved at a conference, majority decisions were accepted and a leadership including different strands of opinion was elected to implement the agreed perspective.

The end result of this was that the gap between the two positions narrowed considerably over subsequent years. The same process did not take place with the opposition emanating from Latin America and New Zealand. Indeed, the comrades involved revealed themselves to be incapable of taking part in a collective leadership.

As the Third Congress approached one thing became apparent - regardless of the character of their political differences, regardless of what they upon among themselves or indeed with others, they would continue to resist the operation of a collective leadership and democratically agreed upon decisions.

They were united by something else altogether, something that flowed from their fundamental adherence to that debilitating aspect of the degenerate Trotskyist tradition, Stalinophile sectarianism: namely, unprincipled factionalism.

That is, regardless of disagreements among themselves, and regardless of agreements with other members of the LRCI not within their charmed circle, they would unite "against the leadership" no matter what.

In the eyes of many comrades this mode of operation militated against honest and loyal discussion since it turned every difference - major or minor - into a factional issue, yet, as the congress approached, without a faction being openly declared. It was time to openly face this trend within the LRCI and defeat it.

A settling of accounts: the Third Congress

At the Third Congress the LRCI, held near Vienna in July 1994, we faced a battle once again with the Stalinophile positions of its Bolivian and Peruvian sections and the majority of the New Zealand section over the events of 1991. The congress rejected them by an overwhelming majority.

The congress represented a major step forward for the League. Unlike the near-abortive Second Congress, all key documents and proposals were fully debated and decided on. Minority views were fully aired; majority views were to be implemented. A really centralised democratic functioning now existed at an international level, overcoming the vestiges of an earlier federalism based on consensus between national groups.

Inevitably, perhaps, the period following the Third Congress and its decisive outcome, saw the defection of those unwilling and unable to implement its decisions. In Austria the majority of the section's youth organisation, Internationalist Action, left the LRCI.

Its key leaders strongly objected to what they called the "over-optimistic" perspective of the congress – that despite a counterrevolutionary phase of some years following the downfall of Stalinism, in the medium term a new revolutionary period was opening.

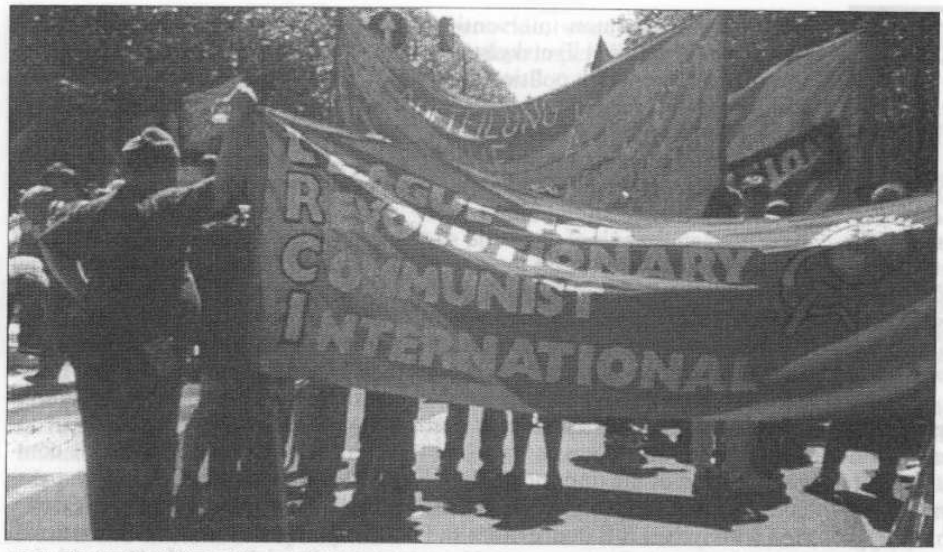
In contrast they believed that a prolonged counterrevolutionary period had opened; one in which only a single-minded focus on theoretical work and the building of propaganda circles was really possible.

In particular they rejected the more active agitational attitude to youth work which was being developed by the LRCI at this time.

The leaders of Internationalist Action opposed every suggestion that their growing discussion groups should launch an active campaign against racism, despite clear signs that the CWI-led Youth against Racism in Europe was making gains in Austria at this time.

A more general trend to passive propagandism manifesting itself within the Austrian section was to lead to the loss of several other members in the coming years. Decades of a largely quiescent class struggle situation had left some comrades unprepared and even unsuited for pro-active tasks now demanded by the LRCI's political perspectives.

This pessimistic approach to the downfall of Stalinism ("historic defeat" "forty years of reaction", "midnight in the century") became a common theme amongst the Trotskyist and non-Trotskyist left and has not disappeared to this day. It represents an over-reaction to the downfall of the Stalinist bureaucracy which it identifies with the near destruction of the



LRCI CONTINGENT ON THE JUNE 1999 COLOGNE MARCH AGAINST THE EU SUMMIT

socialist consciousness of the working class and the labour movement itself.

The historically low levels of the class struggle in several (but not all) European countries, the ideological triumphalism of the market, and bourgeois democracy, the rise of globalisation, convinced many that any serious revival of the class struggle and the building of revolutionary combat organisations was almost indefinitely postponed.

Given the small size and relative isolation of the LRCI, it was no surprise – indeed it was almost inevitable – that such passive and conservative moods should affect some of its members.

The denouement of undeclared factionalism

In 1995 two leaders of the New Zealand section and two other members together with José Villa began to undertake secret factional activity inside the LRCI. This clandestinity was unnecessary, because no restriction on the formation of tendencies and factions exists in the LRCI. But by a curious bungling on the part of Villa, the LRCI leadership became aware that they were discussing splitting from the League.

To our invitation to form a faction but to clarify their intentions over splitting, the New Zealanders, but not José Villa and the Bolivians, rapidly declared a "Proletarian Faction". This pronounced the LRCI centrist, accused it of capitulating to democratic imperialism, failing to "root itself in the working class" and having a revisionist position on the state (curious, because at the Third Congress the position that they characterised as revisionist had been defeated - but the importance they attached to democratic decisions was slender given their split agenda). The IS and the IEC replied to this platform and debated it, with its main proponent present at the IEC meeting in July 1995. At the end of the discussion he confirmed that he had no complaints whatsoever about way this had been discussed. He read and approved the minutes of the discussion. In these minutes he explained (contrary to the myth that the faction was driven out of the LRCI) that he thought "there would be a rapid parting of the ways, within a few months" but that the discussion was a "frank exchange and I'm grateful for that". Even more curiously he made no attempt to debate and discuss this afterwards either with the other half of the New Zealand section or with the new Australian section with whom he had long established links. Then on 4 September they walked out of the New Zealand section and the LRCI.

In early October we learned of a cowardly walkout by the Bolivian section by means of an announcement at a WPB public meeting in London by José Villa. POB announced that "we do not recognise the resolutions of the last IEC nor the International Secretariat elected by it".

Another, entirely separate, pretext was the position taken by the LRCI on the NATO bombing of the Serb artillery emplacements bombarding Sarajevo. The LRCI had unambiguously opposed the bombing, but refused to seek the victory of the Bosnian Serbs armed forces in this specific conflict.

Villa and POB claimed the LRCI had "put themselves on the side of their own (sic) imperialism", despite an IS statement saying "Stop the air strikes! Stop the artillery bombardment! UN/Nato out of the Balkans!" What the comrades wanted us to say was that we supported the Serb bombarders of Sarajevo against the imperialist planes trying to knock them out.

But the three year long siege of Sarajevo, like the near genocide of the Bosnian ethnic Muslims by the Republic Srpska, was not a progressive anti-imperialist struggle. Nor was it a legitimate defence of a non-imperialist state.

The LRCI called for the bombing to stop and Nato to get out, but refused to call for the victory of the Serb besiegers of Sarajevo. In itself this issue was no more serious a political difference with the comrades than previous ones we had on defending the rights of nations to self-determination, from Lithuania in 1990 onwards. Moreover since this statement dates from early September it could be no reason for rejecting as illegitimate an IEC held and an IS elected in mid-July. In reality José Villa was by now totally demoralised. Later he stitched back together an unprincipled bloc with the New Zealanders which has since then made no serious efforts to build a democratic centralist international tendency.

Nevertheless the loss of our Bolivian section and half the New Zealand section was a blow. It left the LRCI with only political lessons to draw from nine years of work in Latin America. However, the New Zealand section survived the desertion of two of its founding members, David and Janet Bedggood.

The remaining comrades were strengthened politically by the fight and newer comrades assumed leadership responsibilities. In addition the section received extended visits by an experienced British cadre to help stabilise and reorient the section at a time when the full force of the neo-liberal attacks on New Zealand workers after 1991 was being felt. In the same period, again largely as a result of the recruitment work of the New Zealand section in 1993-94 we saw the foundation of the Australian section and its rapid growth among students in 1996-98.

These serious, if not unexpected, losses were to be compounded over the next three years by the resignation or retirement of a number of older members in Europe. These losses were in part offset by the growth of the French section, recruiting students and youth. Pouvoir Ouvrier nearly tripled in size between 1994 and 1997. The background was one of intensified class struggle in 1995 – most notably the public sectors workers' strike and street demonstration movement of November-December. The other sections of the LRCI sent comrades to help with the massive increase of activity this demanded.

How do we explain the serious losses we suffered in this period? Certainly, in the case of the Latin American and New Zealand groups there were long term differences of method – broadly summed up in their sectarian-Stalinophilia which we had been unable to overcome. In the young Austrian comrades there was a distinct passive propagandist method

that sought refuge and justification in a pessimistic perspective.

But for many of these comrades and for others who had no political differences, there was undoubtedly the long-term demoralising effects of the defeats suffered by the working class. What the Third Congress characterised as a counterrevolutionary phase (1990-1 onwards) was clear enough both in the former workers' states, in the shift to the right of the entire world labour movement including the centrist "Trotskyists" under the impact of the victories in the Reagan-Thatcher 1980s, and in the relatively low level of the class struggle in many countries where it had been high in the 1970s and 1980s. In an important objective as well as subjective sense these were the LRCI's "dog days", to use James Cannon's expression.

The Fourth Congress

It was these problems that the Fourth Congress, again held near Vienna in summer of 1997, set out to overcome. The Australian section was represented for the first time; we also welcomed to the Congress three delegates of the Marxist Left of Sweden who were to fuse with Arbetarmakt the following year.

It also welcomed three representatives of the Argentine Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS, which with its Mexican and other Latin American co-thinkers formed the Trotskyist Fraction). In the summer and autumn of 1995 we had entered into an organised series of discussions with London representatives of the PTS-FT. These talks were continued in Buenos Aires in early 1996 and led to a joint declaration setting out a plan for further discussions with a view to possible fusion. Between the Third and Fourth Congresses of the LRCI, we produced six semi-public bulletins of discussion documents, political letters and translations of important FT materials. This discussion reached an important impasse however at the Fourth Congress when no agreement was possible either on the form of a common intervention into the international Trotskyist left nor on the content of a political platform with which to do it.[9]

In the new millennium, if these struggles are to attain lasting success – if partial gains are to endure,one victory not to be set against defeat elsewhere – today's vanguard must become the steeled cadre of a new world party of revolution.

The Congress studied the significance of the temporary revival of militant class struggle in Europe in 1995-96 in Italy, France and Germany). It drew from an analysis of the world situation the conclusion that the counterrevolutionary phase was coming to an end, marked by rising class struggles and also by the election of Social Democratic governments across Europe.

Free of the serious differences that had dogged the previous two congresses - and of the unprincipled factionalism that had clouded the discussion of any real differences that did exist - the Fourth Congress was able to significantly develop the League's democratic centralism. This was achieved by formulating guidelines and instructions for key areas of practical intervention for the national sections and having these regularly checked and overseen by the IEC and not merely the leading bodies of the national sections. The uniformity of party-building priorities – where political conditions allowed for it – was already foreseen in the Theses on Party Building, but had never before been so actively pursued. This reflected the growing trust, borne of common experience, that the LRCI membership had in its leading bodies.

After a debate, the Congress also adopted a perspective of turning to youth and building autonomous youth organisations around the three major European sections – all with publications called *Revolution*. Opposition to this perspective continued and played a role in the development of a factional struggle inside the French section.[10]

Our work since the last congress has centred internationally on this youth work – including two successful international youth camps in France in 1998 and 1999, international contingents on the European Marches for Jobs in Amsterdam in 1997 and in Cologne in 1999 and the production of regular youth bulletins by the French, British and Austrian sections.

The Fourth Congress also adopted a resolution on the class character of the state machine in the former degenerate workers' states which corrected some important mistakes in the original joint work of the IWG and Workers Power/Britain on the expansion of Stalinism after the second world war.[11]

The Congress passed a Manifesto setting out the key perspectives and programme of the LRCI for the remaining years of the century. Its conclusion is one that has underpinned the work of the MRCI and LRCI since their foundation and remains as valid today as ever:

"The old bureaucratic leaderships of the working class are directly responsible for the heavy defeats of the last decade or more. Their prestige, which in the boom years rested on solid gains for the working class in all sectors of the world, is now shattered. They could not defend these gains which they did not win but rather acted as parasites upon them.

They have abandoned all pretence of fighting to replace capitalism with an alternative world order – socialism. Yet the need to struggle, to fight back, is more urgent than ever. Spontaneity and improvisation will not be enough in the years ahead. The mounting struggles lack centralisation, lack consciousness of the fact that their common resolution resides in the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism.

Only a new world international party of socialist revolution can bring this centralisation and consciousness. The fear that all centralism must be bureaucratic will have to be set aside if effective co-ordinated combat parties are to be built. In the new millennium if these struggles are to attain lasting success – if partial gains are to endure, one victory not to be set against defeat elsewhere – today's vanguard must become the steeled cadre of a new world party of revolution.

This new international will have to be built on the firm programmatic and organisational foundations laid down by Lenin and Trotsky. None of the events of the past eight years invalidate either the *Transitional Programme* or the Leninist Party. There is no need to confuse reform and revolution in sickly utopian rhetoric and limp pleadings.

Revolutionary communists have no need to conceal their aims nor to seek strategic blocs with reformist or petit bourgeois forces. They still stand for the forcible overthrow of all existing conditions – for the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only road to a classless and stateless world order."[12]

Towards the Fifth Congress

The founding organisations of the LRCI were born in the 1970s, the stormy period of class struggles in Europe and revolutionary upheavals in the semi-colonial and Stalinist world. The experience of political mass strikes, factory occupations, mass movements of students and youth, the recreating of a mass feminist movement, of revolutions in Vietnam, Cambodia, Chile and Portugal, Nicaragua and Iran taught us countless lessons. In this period we made a basic critique of the inadequacy of the major leaders and organisations of the working class. At the same time we discovered the invaluable key to overcoming these inadequacies in the writings and actions of Lenin and Trotsky.

This period of revolutionary ascent gave way to a period of retreat in the 1980s – although this too was a period of massive class battles against neo-

liberalism and the New Cold War of Reagan and Thatcher. In this period we built the MRCI and moved towards democratic centralism.

Then came the historic turning point of the downfall of Stalinism – once more presenting a real, if short-lived, revolutionary opportunity.

As we had feared, the "revolutionary" organisations which had failed the tests of the 1970s and 1980s failed this test too. But the programme and the democratic centralist structure which the LRCI had adopted in 1989, just as the storm was breaking, stood us in good stead to intervene with a militant revolutionary policy.

It prepared us too when the effects of the defeats of workers in China, Russia and Eastern Europe became manifest. The counterrevolutionary tide of the years 1992-5 swept most tendencies and countless individuals off their feet and out of politics.

It inevitably produced internal struggles in our own ranks. But such struggles are the necessary means of political clarification and demarcation. We strengthened and matured our attachment to democratic centralism, to Leninist norms of party membership.

The LRCI set about analysing new problems posed acutely in the 1990s – could planning overcome the apparently all-powerful market, what was the internationalist strategy in a world of erupting national struggles and genocide, what was the nature of modern imperialism and of its crises to come?

We have not solved all these questions but we are setting out to do so, just as we set out to deal with questions of similar importance in the early 1980s.

But just as in the 1980s we realised that such work could never be divorced from the living practice of the class struggle, so today we look to those in active struggle.

That means first and foremost to a new, younger generation not scarred by the scepticism and demoralisation of the defeats of the last decades.

The forthcoming Fifth Congress of the LRCI will have to draw a balance sheet of all this work and develop new tactics for growth. But one thing is certain: international democratic centralism works.

It is the only way to develop an effective international programme and to train a cadre that is internationalist in a practical rather than a Platonic sense.

International "permanent discussion forums", political post-restantes that are going nowhere, will play no role in creating the basis for the new revolutionary communist international the working class must build in the twenty first century. ■

FOOTNOTES

[1] L Trotsky, "Once More on Brandler and Thalheimer" *Writings of Leon Trotsky* ,1929, p159-60

[2] The delegates at its first Congress, in Coventry, England, came from France, Germany, Austria, Ireland, Britain and Peru.

[3] For an exposition of the origins of democratic centralism in the revolutionary movement see D Stockton, "In Defence of Democratic Centralism", *Trotskyist International* 23

[4] "Declaration of Fraternal Relations", *Permanent Revolution* No 2 p 45

[5] ibid

[6] Originally numbering 22 theses they were expanded to 30 and reissued in January 1992.

[7] *Trotskyist International* 7 September 1991

[8] For documents relating to the split with Poder Obrero Peru and Bolivia, see *Trotskyist Bulletin* 7, January 1996

[9] See the separate article in this journal on the PTS/FT.

[10] Eventually in 1999 this led to an unprincipled walk-out by eight comrades, ostensibly over our non-support of the LCR-LO slate in the June 1999 Euro-elections; in fact Pouvoir Ouvrier did support this slate, but not in the uncritical manner they advocated.

[11] See Mark Abram and Helen Watson, "Stalinism and the Marxist Theory of the State", *Trotskyist International* 23

[12] "Manifesto of the Fourth Congress", *Workers Power* 215 October 1997.

International Left Opposition, 1928-33

Forging an internat

Battered but unbroken by his fight inside the USSR with Stalin, Trotsky began his foreign exile in 1929 by creating an international opposition (ILO). **Dave Stockton** reveals the obstacles that had to be overcome by the ILO in building unity around political principle, a trusted international leadership and disciplined practice

The year 1927 was a turning point in the struggle against Stalinism in Russia. The Left Opposition within the Communist Party mounted a defiant attempt to mobilise the working class against bureaucratism and repression. Their action proved too little, too late: as Stalin's police drove the Opposition off the demonstration to mark 10 years since the Russian revolution, their fate – and that of their leader, Leon Trotsky – was sealed.

The fight against Stalinism in Russia turned from an inner party struggle using condemnations and sackings, to a class-wide struggle involving exile, imprisonment and death. The fight against Stalinism in Russia continued – but with Trotsky's exile and the outbreak of opposition within the world communist movement it began to take on a new international scope.

In this article we will examine how Trotsky and his closest co-thinkers in the years 1928-33 organised the International Left Opposition – the small but influential group that was to keep alive revolutionary Marxism through the 1930s as the Stalinist Comintern degenerated and collapsed.

Despite the beleaguered state of the revolutionary minority in the Comintern, the story of the ILO is one of intransigent struggle by Trotsky and his followers against political confusions within the anti-Stalin camp. From the outset, Trotsky insisted on revolutionary unity: unity based on programmatic agreement – not a sentimental unity on based on the lowest common denominator, an agreement to disagree, or a "liaison committee" for endless discussions.

Trotsky faced enormous difficulties, in terms of the individual leaders, in unifying the disparate groups of oppositionists which had emerged in many countries. The middle class individualism, factionalism, even cliquism – all products of national isolation and isolation from the workers' movement – repeatedly played a very disruptive role. So, too, did the Stalinist police agents planted in the Opposition.

Another, inevitably disruptive, influence was the process of political development itself. On the key questions of the nature of the Soviet bureaucracy, the reformability of the Russian CP, tactics towards the Communist and Socialist Parties worldwide, the international left split again and again. The Left Opposition did not have the benefit of hindsight – nor were any of these questions an accomplished fact when the struggle against Stalinism began. So this article will situate the organisational battles firmly within the political evolution – including the mistakes – of the Left Opposition.

Stalin's left turn shatters the United Opposition

On 15 November 1927 – one week after the anti-Stalin demonstrations that marked the anniversary of the 1917 – both Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the party.

Their followers had been organised in the "United Opposition", but within a month Zinoviev and his followers had capitulated and were re-admitted to the party "in disgrace". The United Opposition (UO) had in fact been a bloc between revolutionary Marxists and a left section of the bureaucracy opposed to Stalin's compromises with the party's right wing – led by Bukharin – and the rich peasants' interests it had come to promote.

The political reputation of the Zinovievists was in shreds: indeed, as Trotsky insisted, they were "politically dead". Those who refused to capitulate were deported to Siberia or Central Asia in large numbers.

Trotsky himself was deported to Alma Ata in Kazakhstan on 17 January 1928, followed by hundreds of other left-wing victims of the Stalinist police. The purpose of the repression was to break up the collective leadership of the opposition. Trotsky's only co-workers in Siberia were his partner, Natalia Sedova, and Leon Sedov, his twenty-one year old son.

The spring of 1928 marked the beginning of Stalin's break with Bukharin and his turn to the "left". He proclaimed the need for force against a grain strike organised by the rich peasants ("kulaks", for increased collectivisation of the land, and for a more ambitious – in fact, reckless – version of the five year plan. All these measures were ostensibly drawn from the

ional leadership

programme of the Left Opposition.

In June, Zinoviev and Kamenev were readmitted to the party. The Sixth Comintern Congress, meeting between 17 July-1 September 1928, saw the launch of a left turn – the so-called "Third Period". Although Bukharin was still head of the Comintern – and though he went uncriticised in the formal sessions – in the corridors another congress was taking place: Stalin and his supporters made it clear to the foreign delegates that big changes were coming.

Stalin's move against the party right, and his apparent conversion to socialist planning measures, took a heavy toll on the ranks of the opposition. Numerous leading opponents of Stalin during his appeasement of proto-capitalist forces now returned to the fold.

The first wave of capitulation was led by Yuri Piatakov in February 1928. The second and far more serious came one year later when Karl Radek, Evgeni Preobrazhensky, Ivar Smilga capitulated, with the excuses that Stalin had taken over much of the Opposition's platform and the dangers that the USSR faced, internally and externally, required their "return to the party".

Of course, the bureaucracy had no intention of relaxing its dictatorship over the party: it intended to strangle what remained of proletarian democracy. The capitulators were obliged to grovel before Stalin, admitting they had been wrong and he right, all along. The third wave of capitulations came in November 1929 led by IN Smirnov and MS Boguslavsky.

That left as leaders of the Opposition inside Russia Christian Rakovsky, N I Muralov, BM Eltsin VD Kasparova, LS Sosnovsky and KI Grünstein.

Opposition spreads throughout the Comintern

The ups and downs of the Russian opposition's struggle with Stalin had a profound and immediate effect on the various small opposition groups that surfaced in the other parties of the Comintern, particularly those in France, Germany, and in the United States.

For nearly six years, the Left Opposi-



FROM LEFT: FRANKEL, SEDOV, NATALYA, KOPP, TROTSKY ON PRINKIPO IN 1930

tionists had fought mainly within the sections of the Communist International, though some early supporters of Trotsky were expelled in 1924. Figures such as Alfred Rosmer and Boris Souvarine in France, and Max Eastman in the USA, had sided with Trotsky as early as 1923.

In the Polish CP, veteran leaders like Adolf Warski, Henryk Walecki and Vera Kostrova protested against the campaign against Trotsky. Other distinguished revolutionaries of the older generation, founders of their respective communist parties rallied to the Opposition: Andreu Nin (Spain), Henk Sneevliet (Holland), James P Cannon (USA), Chen Duxiu (China), Pietro Tresso (Italy), Josef Frey (Austria).

Some of the isolated opposition intellectuals succumbed to political pressure and became – like Eastman and Souvarine – sceptical mavericks.

But, unwittingly, the Stalinist bureaucracy performed a service to the opposition. Between 1926 and 1928 many members of the Russian opposition were sent on diplomatic and trade mission postings abroad – to get them out of the way. Rakovsky was Soviet ambassador to France from November 1925 to October 1927. Piatakov and Preobrazhensky were in Paris for periods in 1926 and 1927 respectively.

The first conference of the International United Opposition took place in Berlin in 1928. This was chaired by the major Zinovievist leader G I Safarov and had delegates from the German and several other European oppositions. There were 20 Soviet oppositionists present.

In 1928, just as the Russian opposition fell victim to repression, its members scattered over the vast spaces of the Soviet Union and reduced to clandestinity, the isolation, the fragmentation of the opposition in western Europe began to be overcome.

In part this was because the defeats suffered by the working class in China and Britain in 1926-7 began to shatter the prestige of the Stalin-Bukharin

leadership. In Russia, the bureaucrats had a state machine at their disposal: in the international movement they had only a lie machine. So, in the west, the CP leaders found it more difficult to convince party members that Trotsky – the acknowledged co-leader of the October insurrection and founder of the Red Army – was a "counter-revolutionary".

Opposition groups come together

In France, as early as 1926, various groups and individual oppositionists existed around prominent former leaders of the Communist Party. Some of these were long term sympathisers of Trotsky such as the veteran syndicalist and communist Alfred Rosmer and the lawyer Maurice Paz. Rosmer, collaborated with another syndicalist, Pierre Monatte, on a paper La Revolution Proletarienne. Paz had received funds from Pyatakov of the Russian Opposition in Paris in 1926 to launch a review, Contre le Courant.

"There is nothing worse than the stagnation of small groups close to one another. They can sit and rot for years. The conservatism of the small group is particularly powerful in France."

Other oppositionists were leading members of the communist youth organisation, for example Pierre Naville and Gerard Rosenthal. They visited the Soviet Union as part of a young communist delegation and witnessed the attempt of the United Opposition to make a public demonstration during the celebrations of the anniversary of the October Revolution. With the aid of Left Oppositionist Victor Serge they met Trotsky, Zinoviev and Radek.

There were also long term supporters of Zinoviev such as the former party leader Albert Treint and Suzanne Girault around the Contre le Courant magazine.

The problem was that all these groups remained at best indifferent and often hostile to one another. Trotsky noted that:

"There is nothing worse than the stagnation of small groups close to one another. They can sit and rot for years. The conservatism of the small group is particularly powerful in France."[2]

In North America, the United States and Canadian sections of the Left Opposition owed their origins to the presence at the Sixth Comintern Congress 1928 of James P Cannon and Maurice Spector. Here, all the international delegates were given a copy of Trotsky's critique of Bukharain's draft Comintern programme.[3] Cannon, who at that time found himself at an impasse in the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA), was receptive. He had been a supporter of Zinoviev in the mid-1920s, but on his return to the USA, Cannon, together with Max Shachtman and Martin Abern, formed a Left Opposition faction and were in consequence expelled from the CPUSA in November 1928. They immediately began publication of The Militant.

In Germany, in the later 1920s, the strongest oppositionist forces were those linked to Zinoviev, led by Ruth Fischer, Hugo Urbahns and Arkadi Maslow. At the first conference of the Opposition, in October 1927, 500 delegates voted for the Platform of the Russian Opposition. After the expulsions from the party and Zinoviev's capitulation, Urbahns formed the Leninbund as a "public faction" of the KPD in April 1928. It claimed 6,000 members and up to 100,000 supporters still in the KPD. It published a daily paper Der Volkswille.

Zinoviev's capitulation left his supporters abroad orphaned. But these former Zinovievists remained by and large left-centrists. They had been complicit in most of the Comintern's errors between 1924 and 1926, including the early stages of the Anglo-Russian Committee and the entry into the Guomindang. Most of them flatly rejected the theory of Permanent Revolution (see below). Moreover, Fischer and Maslow withdrew from the Leninbund when it became clear that they might be reinstated in the Comintern if they followed Zinoviev's lead and recanted.[4]

Thus whilst the Leninbund had serious roots in the German working class, it was ideologically amorphous.

The Chinese opposition was the one that sprang most directly out of the struggle of the Russian opposition. In 1926, there were at least 800 Chinese students in Moscow, mainly at the Sun Yat-sen University but also at the University of the Toilers of the East and the Lenin School. The Sun Yat-sen University was headed by Left Oppositionists Karl Radek and Adolf Joffe.

In 1927-28, the Chinese revolution was defeated, after many political concessions towards general Chiang Kai-shek by the Communist Party (CCP) failed to stop him butchering the Shanghai working class. Then the CCP swung left and launched an abortive rising in Canton – also suppressed at the cost of thousands of lives. The Comintern put the blame on the CCP general secretary Chen Duxiu, though in reality strategy had been dictated by the Comintern emissaries Borodin, MN Roy, Lominadze and, hiding behind them, Stalin himself.

In 1927, the Chinese students in Moscow debated why the revolution had failed. At first suspicious of the Opposition, after the demonstrations on the anniversary of the October Revolution, they began to read illicit copies of Opposition documents. By summer 1928, many Chinese students including Wang Fanxi, had read Trotsky's Critique of the Comintern draft programme and the Platform of the Opposition. They translated these documents and prepared to return to China to fight the Stalinist leadership in the CCP.[5]

In December 1929, Chen Duxiu broke the long silence since his disgrace and declared for the Opposition. He revealed the role of Stalin and the Comintern in the strategy which led to the disasters in Shanghai and Canton.

But because the Moscow students returned in two waves and to different centres it soon became clear that there were four Oppositional groups:

- Our Word, whose leading figure was Shi Shuyun. This was founded by the first wave of returning Moscow students. But it was very propagandistic and concentrated on translating Left Opposition texts. Wang Fanxi however considered it, in retrospect, "the healthiest of the four factions"
- October Group, whose leading figures were Liu Renjing, Luo Han and Wang Fanxi. They worked in the official party, holding important positions in it for a while, and had 80 members in Shanghai.
- the Militant Group the smallest
- The Proletarian Faction, led by Chen Duxiu. When he was expelled from the CCP in November 1929, he took 80 or so senior party cadres with him, like Peng Shuzi.

At this point, though divided, the Chinese opposition was probably the largest outside Russia. The task was, as in France and Germany, to unite around a principled anti-Stalinist revolutionary programme. This they finally did in May 1931- despite resistance to the inclusion of Chen Duxiu. In fact, it took Trotsky's own intervention to bring it about. But, three weeks later, the Chinese Opposition suffered the arrest of most of its leaders. However, it survived in illegality, led by younger cadres.[6]

However, debate now raged within the anti-Stalinist left over the attitude to the USSR as a state, the class nature of the Soviet bureaucracy and the orientation to the Communist Party, within and outside Russia. It was overlaid by another debate over Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, thrown into sharp relief by the events in China.

The programmatic challenge facing the ILO

The opposition to date had been unified around the platforms of the 1923 and the 1926 oppositions and Trotsky's critique of the draft programme

of the Comintern.

Trotsky realised that more in-depth works were needed to attack the theoretical foundations of Stalinism – starting with the theory of "socialism in one country". This was created in 1924, lasted throughout Stalin's bloc with Bukharin and survived the left turn of the Comintern in 1928. It proved as adaptable to justifying the forced collectivisation and breakneck tempo of industrialisation as it was the laissez faire attitude to the "kulak"– those peasants who owned farms large enough to employ permanent hired labour.

Trotsky decided to publicly revive the question of "permanent revolution" – a theory which Trotsky considered vindicated by the Russian revolution of 1917, but which he had refrained from returning to in order to maintain the bloc with Zinoviev.

In 1930, Trotsky's *Permanent Revolution* appeared in German and Russian and an English edition in the following year. It represented a generalisation of the theory as originally expounded in *Results and Prospects* (1906). It centred on three major questions:

(a) the relationship between the unfulfilled tasks of the bourgeois revolution and the proletarian revolution in the imperialist epoch.

(b) the purpose and limits of socialist economic measures in an isolated and backward country;

(c) the relations between an existing workers' state and the revolutionary struggle in the capitalist world, as expressed in the programme of the Comintern.

The theory of permanent revolution started from a recognition that the capitalist world economy brought together countries at different stages of development, making isolated "national roads to socialism" an impossibility. It underlined the inability of the national bourgeoisie in "backward" countries to uproot feudalism on the land, to destroy national oppression and to install democracy. It showed the incapacity of the peasantry to take the leading role in the fight: for this it would be dependent on either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.

The workers' task throughout the colonial and semi-colonial countries –but also in developed countries where the main class question was the struggle for democracy – was to put themselves at the head of the "bourgeois democratic" revolution, leading the peasantry and allied with it, but never standing back from a struggle for proletarian power and never reserving a place for the "national" or "democratic" bourgeoisie in the revolution against imperialism. Only by spreading the revolution to the more developed countries could a revolution in a backward country complete the economic tasks of building socialism.

For Trotsky this meant that:



TROTSKY PRAISED THE "FIGHTNG SPIRIT" OF *THE MILITANT*, LAUNCHED IN MARCH 1929

• the era of entirely separate national programmes was over along with national parties. An international party of socialist revolution had to have an international programme.

• the existence of a world economy – and one gripped by acute crisis – meant that, whatever the backwardness or incomplete tasks, it was necessary to combine demands which addressed these with others that opened the transition to socialism: planning, state ownership etc.

• whatever the unevenness of the situation of the working class in each country all had a common goal: the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat based on soviets.

The era of entirely separate national programmes was over along with national parties. An international party of socialist revolution had to have an international programme.

Permanent revolution, both as a theory and a strategy, struck at the heart of the Stalinist programme, which advocated "socialism in one country" – the subordination of the world revolution to the defence of the USSR – and a "two-class" democratic revolution (and even two-class "worker-peasant" parties).

In the 1920s, in the name of the "democratic dictatorship", Stalinism went further than Menshevism had ever done: it ordered the Chinese CP to dissolve into the Guomindang and blocked even the formation of soviets. Trotsky wrote:

"The official subordination of the Communist Party to the bourgeois leadership and the official prohibition of forming soviets (Stalin and Bukharin taught that the Guomindang "took the place of Soviets") was a grosser and more glaring betrayal of Marxism than all the deeds of the Mensheviks in the years 1905-1917."[7]

The Sixth Comintern Congress not only approved Stalin's policy in China but generalised it. It proclaimed the correctness of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" for the entire colonial and semi-colonial world.

Trotsky's conclusion was that Stalin's strategy constituted the "unconsciously organised sabotage of the Chinese Revolution". The judgement was harsh but not exaggerated. He neither claimed that Stalin deliberately aborted the Chinese revolution – a charge he did make with regard to the Spanish Revolution after 1936. But neither did he conceal the fact that the Chinese Communist Party (like the British Communist Party in the General Strike of 1926) would have found its way to revolutionary tactics better without the influence of the Comintern.

But what did all this mean for the Comintern? In the late 1920s, Trotsky's strategy was to fight within the Comintern – in the hope that the class struggle in Russia and the political struggle within the Comintern might combine to bring an opportunity to put revolutionaries again at the helm. The perspective of the ILO was to work as an "expelled faction", and with a primary orientation to the CPs.

However, as expulsion served to isolate the Trotskyists from the CP militants, and as "Third Period" adventurism in turn isolated the shrinking CPs from the rest of the working class, the pressure inevitably grew for a turn away from the sole emphasis on the CPs and towards workers in struggle. This in turn posed questions of organisation: for it is one thing to be organised within a mass party as an opposition – another to have to make your way by agitation to the masses themselves, with only the resources of a discussion circle.

While Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution brought into the fight a coherent ideological weapon, that cannot be said, initially, of his characterisation of the process of degeneration in the USSR, which was developed considerably during the 1930s.

The debate on the nature of Stalinism

In November 1929, an all-out drive for collectivisation was launched. It soon became a forced collectivisation. To have any hope of collectivisation working, agricultural machinery had to be provided and thus industrialisation had to be stepped up. Because of the severity of the crisis, this had to be accomplished at breakneck speed – not by harnessing the creativity of the working class but by dragooning it. The first five year plan, drafted in 1928, had its targets arbitrarily doubled in the spring of 1929. It called for a 250% increase in industry by 1933. All of this required a massive, indeed a qualitative, increase in compulsory measures taken against the working class.

Between the summer of 1930 and the summer of 1932, according to historian R. W. Davies, "the strain placed on industry by the overambitious plans led to much disorder".[8]

The results were an increase in the violent zigzags at the top. As early as the spring of 1930, Stalin had to call a halt to collectivisation. After his Pravda article "Dizzy with success", six million peasants flooded out of the new kolhozy. Stalin blamed all the mistakes on the local party officials who were carrying it out. In fact, it was his policy which was breaking up. In 1931-2, the tempo of industrialisation was dramatically lowered in practice and the planners tried to pick up the pieces.

Trotsky devoted a pamphlet to this crisis when it became manifest – *The Soviet Economy in Danger*, completed in October 1932. He pointed out the basic problem with bureaucratic planning: that it could not deploy the one basic resource for correcting the mistakes of the plan – the working class itself, through democracy within its basic organisations. *The Draft Platform of the International Left Opposition* proclaimed: "The living standards for the workers and their role in the state are the highest criteria of socialist successes".

Only an educated working class with time to read, to discuss with other workers, to voluntarily attend political meetings and speak their mind there without fear: only such a working class could take control of its own state and economy. But in Stalin's plan, in reality, improving the living standards of workers came bottom of the list.

In the introduction to *Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky outlined succinctly the alternative the Left Opposition posed to Stalin's "left turn" in economic policy:

"The optimum tempos, i.e. the best and most advantageous ones, are those which not only promote the most rapid growth of industry and collectivisation at a given moment but which also secure the necessary stability of the social regime, that is first of all, that strengthen the alliance of the workers and the peasants, therefore preparing the possibility for future successes."[9]



PEASANTS WERE FORCED TO BUILD FACTORIES AT BREAK-NECK SPEED

Trotsky compared the two approaches thus:

"The course outlined above towards the economic strengthening of the proletarian dictatorship in one country till further victories of the world proletarian revolution (the viewpoint of the Russian Left Opposition) and (b) the course towards the construction of an isolated national socialist society and this in "the shortest possible time" (the current official position). These are two completely different, and in the last analysis directly opposed, conceptions of socialism. From these are derived basically different lines, strategy and tactics."

The key question now for the entire international opposition, including those attracted to the right or the ultra-left was: what was the political character of this unforeseen and horrendous historical development – what was the Soviet Union under the near-personal dictatorial rule of the General Secretary?

The size of the repressive apparatus grew enormously. In 1928, there were six labour camps with a population of 30,000. By 1931 the number in the camps had soared to 2 million. The reason was straightforward. Before 1928 – despite bureaucratic injustices and excesses – the dictatorship was aimed primarily against the class enemies of the workers and the poor and middle peasants. After this it was reoriented against the great majority of the peasantry and all critical elements within the working class.

Police repression now struck the members of the party. Up to 1927-8, de facto factions had continued to exist in the party despite the formal 1921 ban on them. They were subject to harsh and vexatious administrative measures, such as drafting to posts in far corners of the USSR or abroad. But now any Oppostionist who refused to recant was expelled and handed over to the OGPU (the secret police). Trotsky characterised this as situation where the party had ceased to exist as a party.

Nevertheless, outside the Stalinist apparatus, there were underground groups of workers, tens of thousands of exiles, debating and discussing the Left Opposition's politics in the camps, and many thousands more "old Bolsheviks" who listened furtively to Trotsky's criticisms. In addition, there were even elements within the bureaucracy who would rally to a revolutionary strategy if the alternative was the restoration of capitalism.

For Trotsky this meant that there was a possibility that the Communist Party could be literally re-formed –that is, formed again out of these elements and from those who would recover their critical spirit once the repression disintegrated. Because – in his view – the first political stage of a social counterrevolution had not yet occurred.

then it remained possible to remove the bureaucracy from power by a political fight that stopped short of armed struggle and insurrection. The state machinery was not yet in the hands of dedicated capitalist restorationists.

The summation of Trotsky' entire analysis of the USSR was contained in *Problems of the Development of the USSR*, dated 4 April, 1931. Trotsky rejected the theory that Russia under Stalin represented a variety of State Capitalism – and the theories of Hugo Urbahns and Karl Korsch that it was no longer a workers' state even though it was not yet capitalist. Because the gains of the October 1917 revolution were still intact, for Trotsky the starting point was that Russia was still a workers' state. Its bureaucratic degeneration must be reversed but that could still be done by a process of reform.

But Trotsky made an important shift of perspective in 1931, one which was based on his recognition that the forced collectivisation and industrialisation had greatly reduced the danger of a revolt from the old possessing classes and the kulaks-Nepman axis. Now it was the bureaucratic apparatus that was the prime danger:

"The Bonapartist system of administering the party [is] a precondition for a Bonapartist regime." He wenton to say that, despite the Five Year Plan and collectivisation, indeed because of the way they were carried out , i.e. by brutal , massive force:

"The elements of dual power contained in the bureaucratic apparatus have not disappeared – they have even become stronger as the plebiscitary degeneration of the apparatus has progressed."[10]

But, despite the suitability of this machine for a social counterrevolution:

" – the passage of power into the hands of the bourgeoisie could in no case be confined simply to a process of degeneration alone but would inevitably have to assume the form of an open, violent overthrow."[11]

"By Thermidorean overthrow the Opposition has always understood a decisive shift of power from the proletariat to the bourgeoisie, but accomplished formally within the framework of the Soviet system under the banner of one faction of the official party against the other. In contrast to this, Bonapartist overthrow appears as a more open, "riper" form of the bourgeois counterrevolution, carried out against the Soviet system and the Bolshevik party as a whole in the form of the naked sword raised in the name of bourgeois property. The crushing of the right wing of the party and its renunciation of its platform diminish the chances of the first, step by step, veiled, that is Thermidorian, form of the overthrow. The plebiscitary degeneration of the party apparatus undoubtedly increases the chances of the Bonapartist form. However, Thermidor and Bonapartism represent no irreconcilable class types, but are only stages in the development of the same type - the living historical process is inexhaustible in the creations of transitional and combined forms. One thing is sure: were the bourgeoisie to dare to pose the question of power openly, the final answer would be given in the mutual testing of class forces in mortal combat."[12]

Trotsky thus came to the conclusion that the Stalinist bureaucracy was:

"the source of the most acute and direct danger for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The systematic struggle against ruling centrism is the most essential part of the struggle for the rehabilitation, the strengthening and the development of the world's first of workers' state."

Of course, this analysis contained within it a problem. Whilst Trotsky drew out an analogy from the French revolution – the growth of Bonapartist tendencies – he was still obliged to insist that Thermidor lay ahead and not behind.

In the years 1929-33 Trotsky moved beyond the analysis that the Russian Opposition had developed. He no longer identified the right and the kulaks as the main danger but rather saw it in the Stalinist regime's Bonapartist character and the destruction of workers' democracy

He corrected this error in 1934. In that year he admitted that "the analogy of Thermidor served to becloud rather than to clarify the question". Thermidor was political counterrevolution against the most radical wing of the bourgeoisie and the Jacobins and their plebeian supporters the sans culottes. In fact the striking analogy is that Stalin – making allowance for the fact that we now speak of a proletarian rather than a bourgeois revolution – also represented a political counterrevolution. Trotsky concluded that the period 1924-27 represented Thermidor, while the personal dictatorship of Stalin its Bonapartist phase.

"Thus, the present-day domination of Stalin in no way resembles the Soviet rule during the initial years of the revolution. The substitution of one regime for the other occurred not at a single stroke but through a series of measures, by means of a number of minor civil wars waged by the bureaucracy against the proletarian vanguard. In the last historical analysis, Soviet democracy was blown up by the pressure of social contradictions."[13]

Both Thermidor and Bonapartism created an instrument for the social counterrevolution but one which required a revolutionary overthrow of the planned property relations to accomplish – one which would fracture the bureaucracy. Likewise – though Trotsky did not at once draw this conclusion clearly – it would take a political revolution to restore the power of the soviets as they existed in the early years of the revolution.

In the years 1929-33, Trotsky moved beyond the analysis that the Russian Opposition had developed. He no longer identified the right and the kulaks as the main danger but, rather, saw the Stalinist regime's Bonapartist character and the destruction of workers' democracy in party, soviets and trade unions as the main threat. For this reason Trotsky now used the words "bureaucratic degeneration" and even "complete bureaucratic degeneration". Not until the period 1934-6 was he to conclude that Stalinism had abandoned its centrist character and that a political revolution was necessary to smash it.

Trotsky in exile: the struggle for an international opposition

These developments and analysis formed the background to the organisational struggles within the proto-ILO groups. When Trotsky was expelled from the USSR in the first days of 1929, he settled in Prinkipo, Turkey, able at last to set about rallying together oppositionists around the world into an international tendency. Formally, the ILO was to be a faction of the Comintern, albeit an expelled one.

It was possible now to clarify the political physiognomy of the Left Opposition, distinguishing it from both the ultra-left oppositionists of the early 1920s, and from the Zinovievists who, even if they resisted capitulation, either defended their leader's former errors or made new ultra-left ones. Trotsky's hope was to win as many worker cadres and party intellectuals as possible out of these confused opposition groups.

In addition, it was necessary to distinguish the Left's positions from those of the Bukharinist "Right Opposition" who were, by 1929, also in the process of being expelled from the Comintern sections.

From Prinkipo, Trotsky tried to keep in touch with the Russian Opposition which, both in Siberian exile and driven underground, was still the largest section of the Left Opposition. In July, Trotsky and his son, Leon Sedov, issued the first number of the Russian language Bulletin of the Left Opposition which was smuggled into Russia, circulated widely and received considerable correspondence in return. This contact with the Russian Opposition, now headed by Rakovsky and Sosnovsky, continued more or less unbroken until 1934.

Then the repression of the GPU became so intense that all regular reciprocal contact was broken. In 1934, Rakovsky – in ill health and living in dreadful conditions – finally capitulated, as did Sosnovsky. Their excuse was the great danger to the USSR posed by Nazi Germany. This was a heavy blow to Trotsky. But as Victor Serge and Ante Ciliga testify, groups of Oppositionists continued to hold out in the "isolators" – the camps scattered over Arctic Russia, Siberia and Central Asia.

The first successful unified section of the ILO was the Communist League of

America, founded in Chicago on 17-19 May 1929 by Cannon, Shachtman and Abern. At its foundation, it had around a hundred members. Unlike most of the European sections it had from the outset a good number of worker cadres. A group of Canadians around Maurice Spector worked in close collaboration with the CLA. A fortnightly paper, *The Militant*, had been launched in March 1929.

The CPUSA was itself not a mass party (it had some 6,000 members) and the Left Oppositionists hoped at first to be able to make a direct approach to non-party workers and youth as a supplement to the orientation to the Communist Party of which they considered themselves "an expelled faction seeking readmittance". Trotsky agreed and advised the Americans to "win over the proletarian youth, to clear a road to the most oppressed and neglected strata – beginning with the Negroes".[14]

Trotsky, soon proclaimed himself delighted with *The Militant*'s "fighting spirit" and considered the publication a great step forward for the International Opposition.

But, important as the USA was, it was even more vital to begin the process of creating an international leadership and a functioning international organisation.

Trotsky looked to the French opposition to lead this process. It rapidly became clear that the French opposition leader Paz had no will to go beyond producing Contre le Courant. The young Russian Oppositionist, Soltnsev had already noted this in his report on the West European Opposition groups, sent to Trotsky just before his return to the USSR. He describes Paz's activity as having something of a "salon opposition" character. Trotsky later summed up Paz's objectives as hopelessly propagandist.

Trotsky was delighted when the weekly paper *La Verité* finally appeared, believing it would speed up the ideological clarification of a French left which was riven with political and personal prejudices

Trotsky turned from Souvarine and Paz to an old comrade from his days in Paris during the First World War, the former revolutionary syndicalist and founder of the French CP, Alfred Rosmer. Rosmer, after his expulsion from the party, had returned to working with his old comrade Pierre Monatte, who, after five years in the CP, was succumbing once again to syndicalism. Monatte produced a paper – *Revolution prolétarienne* – which Rosmer also wrote for, but which Trotsky thought was politically confused. Nevertheless, he looked to Rosmer to play a crucial role in rallying and unifying the forces of the opposition.

Rosmer and his wife Marguerite (also an opposition activist) visited Trotsky in June where they planned the unification of the French opposition.

Trotsky held out great hopes that the young oppositionists who visited him in Turkey would be able to build a powerful French section and indeed the core of an international leadership for the ILO.

The first group to arrive – at the end of March – was a party consisting of Raymond and Henri Molinier and Pierre Gourget. A little later Jeanne Martin, arrived and stayed after the departure of the main group to perform secretarial duties for Trotsky. Trotsky was impressed with the 25 year old Raymond Molinier – not least for his organising abilities. Then in August came three other young militants: Pierre and Denise Naville and Gerard Rosenthal.

In August 1929, Trotsky was delighted when the weekly paper *La Verité* , finally appeared, believing it would speed up the ideological clarification of a French left, riven with political and personal prejudices. Even so, it still took nine months of the appearance of the paper to produce an organisation

Finally, in April 1930, the Ligue Communiste (Opposition de Gauche) was founded with a leadership of seven members: Rosmer, Naville, Pierre Gourget, M. Mill, D. Levine, Rosenthal and Pierre Frank.

Mill – a codename for the Lithuanian Pavel Okun – was the representative of the Russian group in Paris and indeed was to be entrusted with representing the Russian Opposition on the International Secretariat. He was, however, an agent of Stalin's GPU and played a role in fomenting the disputes which were to nearly destroy the French section over the next two years.

The dispute over the international conference

Trotsky received a whole series of Oppositionists over the spring and summer of 1929. During the Rosmers' visit, there was something of a mini-conference which established a "provisional committee of the Communist Left Opposition".

Trotsky hoped at this time to draw the Leninbund and the Austrian opposition, led by Josef Frey, into co-producing an organ in German for the International Opposition. To investigate if it was possible to achieve a basic political clarification with Urbahns and Frey, he persuaded Rosmer to visit Vienna and Berlin.

Whilst Rosmer reported political solidarity with Frey, and an ostensible willingness to collaborate with the publications, the response of the Leninbund was a great deal more distant.

Trotsky hoped to draw the Leninbund into co-producing the journal if it was possible to achieve a basic political clarification with Urbahns. Already, it was ominous that, despite the stream of French and Czech visitors to Prinkipo, there had not yet been even a proposal for any representatives of the Leninbund to come. Then political life threw two apples of discord into the path of unification: the day of mass street actions proclaimed by the Comintern for 1 August 1929 and the dispute over the Russia-China far eastern railway.

Trotsky called on the Comintern to cancel the day of mass street actions proclaimed for 1 August - he said it was part of an adventurist "conquest of the streets" strategy that would cut the vanguard off from the working class. The Leninbund disagreed. The Leninbund also took a different line to the defence by Trotsky of the USSR in the dispute with Chiang Kai-shek over the far eastern railway – calling the USSR's actions "imperialist". Urbahns was already evolving away from characterising Russia as a workers' state, albeit one ruled by a bureaucracy.

Despite these disagreements, Trotsky was eager to convene an international conference of Oppositionists as soon as possible. In three letters to Rosmer in October-December 1929, he expressed alarm at what he described as the "stagnation of the international bureau". From Paris he received only excuses. This eventually led to an explosion:

"Things have dragged on since the summer in spite of the decisions made and even signed on Prinkipo – I sent a proposal for a circular at least two months ago. It was proposed to remit this task to La Verité. I agreed at once. Everyone awaited the promised initiative and now you propose that I wait a few days for an answer on the international bureau. I do not know the reasons for this inadmissible delay. We are losing time and in politics to lose time is to lose the battle"[15]

The first international conference of the Opposition finally took place in Paris on 6 April 1930. The German, Belgian, Spanish, French and American oppositions were represented. Observers from the Italian Bordigist exiles were present but did not participate.

To Trotsky's dismay, the conference held only two sessions (morning and afternoon). It issued no statement whatsoever, beyond a short one on the shooting in the USSR of the Left Oppositionist Blumkin. In the morn-

ing session an International Secretariat was elected and an international Internal Bulletin set up. In the afternoon session the delegates gave reports on the situation of the oppositional forces in each of their countries.

In this, sharp differences broke out between the delegates, especially between the Belgians: the Brussels group around Adhémar Hennaut and Eduard Van Overstraeten. The latter argued for a "broad regroupment" to include the Bordigists and the Leninbund. On the other hand, the Charleroi group, made up largely of miners, around Leon Lesoil, held with Trotsky that it was necessary "to group together those who are ready to go forward, not those who came here only for a discussion".[16]

Finally, the conference elected an International Secretariat consisting of Rosmer, Nin, Mill and Sedov.

Trotsky was furious at this "mute conference" because of its failure to issue any sort of political declaration or manifesto, "not even a succinct, clear statement of principle". He savagely observed that there was no need to have a conference for such work as it had performed. To create a secretariat one would need "four or five postcards, nothing more".[17]

Trotsky observed: "I sense that there are tendencies on this important question that are not in agreement with the active revolutionary internationalism of the Opposition".[18]

In fact, the French section was performing important work among the émigré communities in Paris which was to enormously aid the spread of the ILO. In late 1929 it attracted a group of Jewish workers from the Communist Party and then a group of Hungarian émigrés. Rosmer also won to co-operating with the League three distinguished exiled Italian Oppositionists Pietro Tresso, Alfonso Leonetti and Andrea Ravazzoli. They soon constituted the New Italian Opposition – new in contradistinction to the Bordigists. The French section also entered into collaboration with a group of Vietnamese Oppositionists around Ta Tu Thau.

Problems in the trade unions

Among trade unionists too, the Ligue Communiste seemed to have made a good start. Rosmer's record as a militant worker gave them a hearing among layers of militants. However, problems soon arose with the manner in which this work was conducted. Rosmer proved unable to break in practice with an approach he shared with his syndicalist ally and friend Pierre Monatte.

In the Ligue, Rosmer and Naville left the trade union work entirely to Pierre Gourget. He received no guidance, no political counterweight to the syndicalists with whom he was working. Clearly, too, he did not trust the Ligue to do this. For Naville, this attitude was in part due to lack of knowledge of trade union matters and partly because Gourget was in his camp in the personal friction with Raymond Molinier. Gourget thus threw himself into work in the Opposition Unitaire, entirely without political supervision. Without consulting anyone he co-authored a set of theses with a non-member of the Ligue for a conference of the Unitary Opposition on 20 November 1930.

Raymond Molinier got wind of this and correctly demanded that the Ligue's executive take a position on the document. When the leadership saw the draft they all agreed that it would not do. It consisted, in Trotsky's view, of "bits and pieces culled from syndicalism, communism and reformism. One can clearly see where the good Gourget, in diplomatic deference to his partner, threw one communist principle after another overboard, on the one hand, and on the other incorporated one prejudice after another into the document."[19]

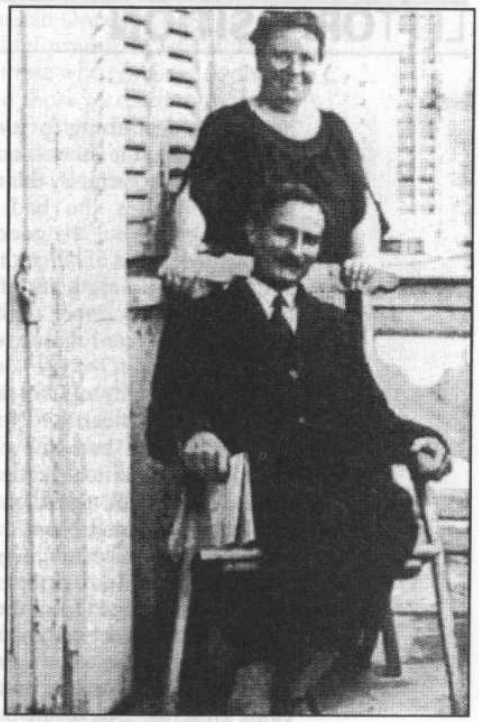
The attempt to exert control over Gourget at the last moment had the predictable consequence that he stormed out of the Ligue denouncing it for political interference in the unions. Trotsky summed up the lessons:

"Beginning in April 1930, the League in effect gave up independent work in the trade unions in order to build the Unitary Opposition, which for its part strives to have its own platform, its leadership, its policy. Within these limits we have a striking analogy with the experience of the Minority Movement in Britain. It must be said, however, that in the French circumstances there are certain features that, from the very beginning, render this experiment more dangerous. In Britain the Minority Movement as a whole was more to the left than the official leadership of the trade unions. Can this be said of the Unitary Opposition? No, in the ranks of the latter there are elements who are obviously tending towards the Right Opposition, that is towards reformism."[20]

He called into question the entire orientation within the Opposition Unitaire, which he saw as a propaganda grouping for semi-syndicalist, semi-communist ideas. Even its central obsession with "trade union unity".

". . . the Unitary Opposition is not a trade union organisation, it is a political faction having as its task to influence the trade union movement. Let us leave it to Monatte and his friends, the POPists, to act under a mask. Revolutionists act openly before the workers. In the Unitary Opposition we can work only with those who go side by side with us, in the same direction, even though not to the end of our road."[21]

These disputes were only a foretaste of the political struggle Trotsky had to carry out in order to turn the sections of the ILO into a disciplined and politically unified current. The political struggle in three key sections illustrates the problems that were being thrown up by the counter-revolution in Russia and the rising threat of fascism in the West.



THE ROSMERS

The French section was performing important work among the émigré communities in Paris which was to enormously aid the spread of the ILO.

The sharp disagreements in the French section crystallised into a clash of political method and personalities between Pierre Naville and Raymond Molinier. At the same time, Trotsky had developed major political criticisms with Rosmer and Naville – the slowness and compromising over the conference of the ILO and the conciliation to syndicalism involved in the Gourget crisis

Many accounts of the clashes between the Molinier-Frank grouping and the Naville-Rosenthal grouping, supported by Rosmer, mention the primarily personal character of the affair. This is not correct or, rather, it puts the cart before the horse. Of course, there were strong personal animosities involved. But the differences were not first and foremost ones of temperament but arose from genuine differences over:

- the priority and resources to be accorded to building the international opposition;
- the attitude to trade union work;
- the balance between literary propaganda and active building of the organisation in the working class.

On all these issues, Rosmer and Naville took a different position to Trotsky – not openly and clearly – but often by delay and even subterfuge.

This is not to say that Molinier and Frank had no faults. Trotsky was well aware of them. In September 1931 he wrote:

"Molinier's big fault lies in the extreme explosiveness of the man. At a moment's notice he throws himself

into doing everything for everybody, without asking the others and without coming back to them. By this means he not only incites the bad workers against himself but the good ones as well, who demand of him more normal and democratic methods of work. I have had some clashes with him on this field and I fear I will have more in the future."[22]

In his biography of Trotsky, Pierre Broué makes it clear that Naville had already made a bad impression on Trotsky as a political leader, just as Molinier had made a good one.

"[Trotsky] judged Naville as being too much the intellectual, regarded his surrealist past in a bad light, judged that he was divorced from the mentality of workers, criticised him for having a haughty attitude to other militants, said his conceptions of organisation came close to 'Souvarinism': and he created for all these weaknesses the neologism "Navillism". [Leon Sedov] and [Jan] Frankel, who were both hostile to Naville and in touch with Molinier, carefully encouraged him in this attitude."[23]

"The League is on its way to transforming itself from a small propaganda group, which was like a family, to a public organisation where relations are less warm, ties and duties more formal, and conflicts at times brutal."

At the April 1930 foundation conference of the League, Rosmer, backed up by Naville, succeed in excluding Raymond Molinier, though not Frank, from the seven-person executive of the French Ligue. Trotsky criticised the "stacking" of the leadership in favour of the Naville grouping, arguing for a more inclusive leadership so that the dissension might be overcome by discussions on it rather than by warfare between the Molinierists and the leadership on each and every issue.

The explosion soon came, over a demonstration organised by the Vietnamese group outside the Elysée Palace after a massacre in Vietnam by French colonial troops. Arrested at the demonstration, Ta Tu Thau, the leading figure of the group, and eighteen others were deported to Indochina. They had only notified Gerard Rosenthal at the last minute and he too was arrested on the demonstration. This was a savage blow and led to an eruption of criticism of the leadership in the Paris organisation, led by Molinier and Frank. The leadership outraged by what it regarded as disloyal criticism, censured Molinier and removed him from the leadership of the Paris organisation.

A heated correspondence between the Rosmers and Trotsky took place, in which Trotsky refused to support their actions and viewpoint. Trotsky urged the main combatants Molinier and Naville to come to visit him. After a long discussion, what became known as "the Peace of Prinkipo" was signed.

But on their return to Paris war broke out almost at once. Rosmer became totally demoralised by the "infernal atmosphere". From the end of 1930, Rosmer withdrew completely from the Ligue and the International Opposition. Given Rosmer's international reputation and his role in attracting an number of cadres from various countries to the ILO, this was clearly a heavy blow to Trotsky.

Typically, Trotsky refused to be swayed by what he called sentimental considerations. He insisted that, at the root of the disputes in the French section, there lay important political differences. These included the League's direction of its members' work, policy toward the trade unions, the need for a proactive international leadership and, last but not least, the more formal, disciplined and inclusive type of leadership necessary for building a organisation which wanted to actively intervene in workers' struggles, recruit large numbers of them to its ranks, rather than rest content with publishing propaganda.

Rosmer was used to the atmosphere of a syndicalist pressure group, of a journal whose task was propaganda: he hated the idea that the political differences generated by world events would drive wedges between himself and former comrades and friends. To assuage these differences he was willing to soften polemics, blur organisational questions and to procrastinate when time was of the essence.

In fact Trotsky came to realise that there was a degree of inevitability that some who could play a positive role in one phase of building an organisation would be unable to make the transition to another phase.

"The League is on its way to transforming itself from a small propaganda group, which was like a family, to a public organisation where relations are less warm, ties and duties more formal, and conflicts at times brutal. Politically speaking, this is a great step forward which can also be seen in the development of *La Verité*. But the ineluctable negative aspects of this step forward Rosmer finds unbearable – and this is the personal explanation for the Rosmer case. But it would be highly frivolous to fall into despair or even to become pessimistic because of them. For in the course of the last year we've come a long way and these crises no longer arise from the old unhealthy stagnation of the foreign Opposition groups but rather out of their development, metamorphosis and growth."[24]

This first "crisis in the French section" showed the enormous problems there were in welding together a leadership team which had a firm grasp of principles and the flair and the will to carry them into the workers' movement. The personal character of the disputes only served to highlight how what is secondary in a mass organisation can sometimes cripple a small one.

Germany was to be vitally important for the Left Opposition. In the years 1929-33 it was the most crisis-wracked major capitalist power, with the largest and most historically Marxist-influenced workers' movement. It was the key to the international situation. If a revolution were to break out, let alone succeed, in Germany, then western Europe would be plunged into a revolutionary situation and the Russian workers would experience an upsurge of hope and confidence in the international revolution. That, in turn, could rouse the Russian party from its demoralisation and enable the reversal of the bureaucratisation process in the state, the party and the Comintern.

The central issue in Germany was how to defeat the influence of Social Democracy on the workers' movement. The German Communist Party showed its manifest incapacity to do this; the SPD showed its absolute craven subordination to the bourgeoisie. So fascism – utilising "revolutionary" and "socialist" demagogy – began its terrifyingly rapid ascent.

The key question from 1930 onwards was how to defeat rising fascism and open the door to the seizure of power by the working class. The Comintern's answer was adventurist leftism, formally launched at the Sixth Congress in 1928 but intensified with suicidal consequences after the rise of fascism in 1930. The SPD offered class collaboration with the imperialist bourgeoisie's "solution" to the 1929 crisis: to punish the working class and ruin the middle class in the name of "saving democracy".

Centrist currents emerged from within the two mass workers' parties and in the political space between them, in response to these criminal errors. But they did not in general go beyond calling for a defensive "unity at any price", a long-term bloc with reformism, that is, one made at the price of capitulating to reformism in deeds while posing the need for revolution in very abstract terms.

The key task was to address the problems of defending workers' jobs and organisations: against mass unemployment, against the fascist gangs. The working class needed a strategy for a united response to these attacks which could, as it succeeded, pass over into a struggle for power.

Such a strategy – and only such as strategy – would unite the employed



ABRAM SENIN (RIGHT) WAS AN ILO LEADER AND ALSO A GPU AGENT

and unemployed workers and neutralise the mass plebeian base of fascism. Only if the workers showed that they had a solution to Germany's economic agony could fascism be defeated.

By 1929, Urbahns and the Leninbund were moving rapidly away from the positions of the Left Opposition. Urbahns came under the influence of the ultra-left ideas of the Russian Democratic Centralist faction led by Timofei Sapronov. This group had been a part of the United Opposition of 1926 but had developed the view that social counterrevolution had taken place and that the Comintern was incapable of leading a revolution. A further influence on Urbahns was the philosopher Karl Korsch, recently expelled from the KPD. Urbahns increasingly took up positions hostile to the idea of a Leninist vanguard party which he blamed for giving rise to Stalinism. He also insisted that "independent" soviets (that is, outside of party leadership) were sufficient for the emancipation of the working class.

Urbahns' position involved turning its back both on the Russian workers' state and the hard-pressed Russian opposition, but also, critically, on the millions of revolutionary workers still in the Comintern. Ultra-left in form, it had a strong right-opportunist logic; namely, no longer calling for the defence of the Soviet Union from attack. This manifested itself in Urbahns attitude to the Sino-Russian conflict over the Manchurian railway where he supported Chiang Kai - shek's China against the USSR. Urbahns developed (or rather borrowed from the Mensheviks) the theory that Russia represented a form of "state capitalism".

In Germany, the explicit Trotskyists – official supporters of the Russian Left Opposition – were few in number. A veteran KPD leader, Anton Grylewicz, had already opened a struggle against Urbahns within the Leninbund. In addition, there was a KPD oppositional grouping of some size in the famous working class district of Wedding in Berlin. Neither were very clear on the principle issues which the Left Opposition had fought for over the past six years though they were clear enough on the suicidal course of the KPD, and respected Trotsky's views and his record of struggle.

The Leninbund was not in a good state largely as a result of Urbahns' turn away from the central task of addressing the vanguard workers assembled in the KPD. Grylewicz reported to Trotsky at the end of 1929 that whilst it claimed some 2,000 members, most of them were completely passive.

Urbahns gradually became more and more publicly hostile to the Russian Opposition at a time when the Russian Bolshevik-Leninists were being subjected to ever more violent repression – to mass exile to Siberia – and to blows from within.

July 1929 saw the so-called "fourth wave" of capitulation by key old leaders of the LO such as Karl Radek, Evgenii Preobrazhensky and Ivan Smilga as Stalin broke with the Right and embarked on rapid industrialisation and collectivisation. Christian Rakovsky, the most prominent remaining leader of the Opposition, did not capitulate but he did issue a statement in August 1929 emphasising the Opposition's willingness to work with the centre against the Right and pointing out that they were forcibly, not voluntarily, excluded from the party at a time when the future of the workers' state was in jeopardy.

Urbahns condemned both the capitulators for "surrendering to Stalin". He drafted a resolution which said: "The leadership of the Leninbund condemns this declaration as the passing of the Russian Opposition over to centrism and reformism."[35] This amalgam between those who remained in deportation and those restored to the party was an outright declaration of war on the ILO and made a split of its supporters in the Leninbund urgently necessary.

In August 1929, Kurt Landau, an Austrian Oppositionist, moved to Berlin with the project of unifying the German Opposition. Landau had been expelled from Josef Frey's Austrian Communist Party-Opposition (KPO-O) in mid-1928 and, with a group in Graz, brought out a journal, *Die Neue Mahnruf* (The New Warning Call). Once he arrived in Berlin he worked primarily with the "Wedding Opposition". However, his relations with the Leninbund minority led by Grylewicz, rapidly deteriorated, with them accusing Landau of sectarianism and authoritarianism.

Nevertheless, the project of unifying the various groups continued. Trotsky sent Max Shachtman and Pierre Naville as representatives to a fusion conference held in Berlin in April 1930. In fact they had to chair the meetings. So divided were the followers of Landau and Grylewicz that it was only the threat of a refusal to recognise either group if they did not unite that finally "forced" the unification. This did not augur well for the future of the German section, the United Left Opposition (VLO).

The membership of the new organisation was overwhelmingly working class. This was so in Berlin, especially "Red Wedding", the proletarian heart of the capital. It also had a strong base in Saxony. Prominent among the leaders from Saxony, and soon to be Landau's main opponent, was Roman Well and his brother Abram Senin.

Both were GPU agents whose task was to split and demoralise the German section of the ILO. With the (unconscious) aid of Landau's leadership methods – or absence of them – the next year was spent in furious internal disputes. Unlike the French disputes – which had at their core important political differences – the ferocious polemics in the German section appeared not to do so. Thus Landau denounced the Saxon members as "centrist" because they expressed doubt about Trotsky's contention that there existed "elements" of dual power in the USSR. Trotsky replied to these perfectly loyal political differences at length but fiercely defended their right to express them and not be treated to a diatribe involving questioning their right to be in the Opposition. Landau's opponents, particularly Well, replied in a similar manner.

Because the disputes disclosed only a minor political content Trotsky urged conciliation – in vain. Well demanded the expulsion of Landau and then Landau set about organising to do the same to Well and Grylewicz. Clearly,

Well's purpose as a GPU agent, was to cause the maximum disruption without being uncovered. But Landau could not have acted more disruptively if he had been a Stalinist agent. Well did it by art, but Landau by nature.

In the middle of this mayhem, Landau's former comrades in Austria accused one of their members of being a police provocateur. They could present no evidence for this when challenged to do so, nor would they withdraw. Trotsky condemned Mahnruf, calling their behaviour a "criminal toying with serious accusations" and observed that the group was showing "a combination of light-headedness and cynicism". He commented that people who throw such unsubstantiated allegations around should be expelled for "poisoning the well of the revolution. A revolutionary organisation selects and educates people not for intrigues among cliques but for great struggles".

"We must say straight out that in various countries the most heterogeneous elements are united under the name of the Left Opposition . . . Far, far, too many have masked their ambitions for their groups, their petty bourgeois conservatism, their narrow national mindedness . . . "

On Trotsky's initiative, the International Secretariat declared both Mahnruf and Frey's group "unfit to belong to the ILO".

However, Landau rushed to defend his Austrian disciples, out of personal loyalty and because their unscrupulous polemic methods were, after all, his. This led to a final breach with Trotsky. "Landau is in all respects a disciple of Frey, and at the same time a caricature of him, a malicious caricature". Trotsky pointed to his extreme querulousness, rude and disloyal behaviour to opponents, cliquish defence of his friends no matter what they did. All this meant that, on the national terrain he was working on, he was factional to the point of sectarianism. But internationally he adopted a live-and-let live approach, ignoring major differences of principle.

Landau sought the support of the Naville leadership in the French section – with whose positions on the trade unions he had no common ground. He began to make overtures to the Bordigists and to argue for an all-inclusive Opposition Conference.

But on 31 May, 1931 the VLO finally split. Landau took one-third of the organisation with him, proclaiming that they had no programmatic differences with the ILO but disagreed with its "bad organisational methods", "bureaucratism" the cult of Trotsky. In April 1932, Landau went on to gather all the opponents of Trotsky and the ILO over the past few years into "International working group of Left Opposition groups in the Comintern".

Trotsky drew the lessons of the struggles in both the French and the German sections, plus the failure to win either Frey or Mahnruf to the ILO:

"We must say straight out that in various countries the most heterogeneous elements are united under the name of the Left Opposition, and unfortunately elements that are not always of a high quality. Far, far, too many have masked their ambitions for their groups, their petty bourgeois conservatism, their narrow national mindedness, with generalities expressing solidarity with the Russian Opposition. It is only in the last two years that the testing of this solidarity has begun with respect to questions of programme, strategy, and the living facts of the struggle."[26]

Otto Schüssler, one of Trotsky's secretaries on Prinkipo, returned to Germany and together with Erwin Ackerknecht (E. Bauer) strengthened the leadership of the section. In addition, Leon Sedov moved to Berlin, and the Bulletin of the Opposition was now produced there, and the International Secretariat moved there from Paris.

The revolutionary crisis in Germany intensified. By 1931, there were over four million unemployed in Germany. The KPD's Third Period policy entered its most adventurist phase, toying with slogans of the "national revolution", that is, trying to match the Nazis in nationalist demagogy. In July, the KPD presented the SPD in Prussia with an ultimatum: make a united front with us or we will back the Nazis' referendum to remove the SPD-led Prussian coalition government. The SPD leaders rejected this proposal and the KPD duly backed a Nazi referendum, rebaptising it the "Red referendum".

But events in the SPD clearly showed how effective a serious offer of the united front could have been against the economic effects of the crisis, against the governments which were implementing austerity measures on the workers and the unemployed, and against the terrible fascist danger. The SPD leadership's policy of refusing to collaborate with the KPD and supporting the bourgeois Reich government led to convulsions in the SPD.

In September the SPD expelled Reichstag deputies Max Seydewitz and Kurt Rosenfeld. In October there was a further wave of expulsions and splits from the SPD these left Social Democrats then fused with SPD youth, pacifists, and some of the Brandlerite Communist Party Opposition (KPO) to form the Socialist Workers Party (SAP).

Six SAP leaders were deputies in the Reichstag. Trotsky was initially hopeful that the SAP could overcome its right-centrism. But it concentrated on elections, standing against the KPD and suffered a major defeat in the July 1932 elections, winning only 72,630 votes and losing all six of its Reichstag seats.

Trotsky wrote a series of major articles and pamphlets in this period. In November 1931, *Germany, the Key to the International Situation*, in December *For a Workers United Front Against Fascism*, in January 1932, *What Next?; Vital Questions for the German proletariat*. By 1932, the economic crisis was still deepening and the number of unemployed stood at five million. On the streets of Germany's cities and towns, the fascist SA was engaging in bloody armed clashes with workers' organisations and murdering Jews.

Against this background, the VLO was able to recover after its split with Landau. In the period from April to June 1931 they sold over fifty thousand copies of Trotsky's pamphlets on Germany, which had a major impact on individual militants in both the mass workers' parties and in the SAP.

The VLO's journal Permanente Revolution, though only monthly in 1931, went fortnightly in January 1932 and weekly in June. In newspaper format, by this time selling about 5,000 per issue. Despite facing violence from the state, the fascists and the KPD, the German Opposition spread Trotsky's warnings and working class solution as widely as they could.

Wherever it could, the VLO took practical initiatives in setting up united front committees and proletarian defence groups – in Erkenscweik, Halberstadt, Kaiserslautern and Lauenberg – though these were sabotaged at a later stage by the national SPD and KPD leaderships.

However, VLO in Bruchsal (Baden) had such local dominance that the KPD was unable to set up a branch there. This enabled them to take the lead in the creation of an action committee involving themselves, the SPD and the trade unions. The VLO became very influential in Oranienburg. A section of the KPD leadership there together with some party members and fighters from the proletarian self-defence organisations were expelled for arguing the line of the Trotskyists and joined the VLO.

They were then able to put into practice the anti-fascist united front. In Oranienburg, they drew in not only the SPD and the unions but also the local KPD, its workers' defence squads. With a solid proletarian base they were able to focus on work in the

factories and organise the unemployed.

By the end of 1932, the VLO once more had about 600 members organised in 44 branches across Germany. Nevertheless, it is clear that such small forces were unable to turn the tide of history, only to swim courageously against it.

In Spain, Andreu Nin, a leading figure from the revolutionary period of the Comintern and the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), sided with the Left Opposition. He was expelled from the Comintern, and physically from the USSR, in 1927.

After Trotsky's arrival in Turkey, he rapidly made contact with Nin and sought his collaboration in building a Spanish section of the Opposition. Yet Nin and his closest collaborators Juan Andrade and Julian Gorkin, repeatedly delayed the formation of an organisation of the Left Opposition in Spain, or the publication of an open paper, despite Trotsky's pleadings.

Their conciliationist attitude to existing centrist forces drew constant advice – and then criticism – from Trotsky who repeatedly emphasised the importance of ideological intransigence and involvement in the international organisation of the LO.

Trotsky wrote to Nin on 21 November, 1930:

"In order that small national groups, without adequate theoretical basis, without tradition, without experience, may not lose themselves on the road in the process of patient clarification, there must be a firm link between them, there must be a continuous reciprocal verification; there must be organised ideological control, there must be double and triple ideological implacability."[27]

Nin did not heed Trotsky's advice. This was doubly disastrous since in spring 1931 the Spanish monarchy finally collapsed and a revolutionary situation exploded, one which lasted nearly a year. The opportunity to build a large Spanish section of the ILO was never better. Yet Nin and his comrades obviously had no appetite for starting this task guided by the programme of the ILO.

He looked for a ready-made instrument to hand. Trotsky was to observe three years later that his correspondence with Nin "was nothing else than a constant polemic, in spite of its most friendly form". In Trotsky's words he "held back for a long time the formation of the Spanish Opposition. He did everything to isolate it and oppose it to the International Opposition."[28]

Instead of forming an independent group on the principles of the ILO, he worked in 1930-31 as a de facto adviser to Joaquin Maurin's Catalan Communist Federation – a tendency much closer to the positions of the Right Opposition than to the Left, but with the temptation of having a substantial membership, albeit one entirely



TROTSKY WAS INVITED TO SPEAK IN COPENHAGEN IN 1932. THE ILO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THIS TO HOLD A MEETING OF 17 DELEGATES FROM SEVERAL EUROPEAN SECTIONS

restricted to Catalonia. Nin placed this work above the ILO's international orientation to the Comintern. His excuse was that the Spanish CP was small and insignificant.

His inclination was clearly to fuse with Maurin's group rather than to keep to the ILO's position of "faction not party".

Trotsky recognised (as he did for the group in the USA) that where the LO sections might be able to grow as nearly as fast as the small Comintern sections in these countries, crippled as they were with the Third Period idiocy, then its was necessary to have a higher party-like profile, undertaking more mass work than was the norm for the other sections of the ILO. But this did not mean abandoning the call for readmission into the CI.

It did, however, mean not privileging fusions with other centrist groupings – especially those to the right of the Comintern sections. Trotsky insisted on absolute intransigent demarcation from the Bukharinist right, that is, Brandler and Lovestone. Maurin was also a close personal friend of Nin and the latter allowed this to influence him greatly when it came to any public criticism of Maurin's politics.

Trotsky insisted that "We must submit Maurin to pitiless and incessant criticism". This involved the rejection of the idea of the "workers and peasants' bloc" a version of the two class party –"a reactionary idea": of the constant prattle about "the democratic revolution, the popular revolution". Only Trotsky and the ILO's pressure led to Nin's creation of an ILO section which, of course, led to a rupture with Maurin. It began to make progress and by the end of 1932 had some 1,500 members making – alongside the Russian Opposition and the Archeiomarxists of Greece – one of the largest sections of the ILO.

Unfortunately, it was far from being one of the strongest politically; rather, it was one of the weakest. This was symbolised by a struggle over its very name. The Spanish section insisted on calling themselves "Left Communists", a name Trotsky considered imprecise and evasive compared to the internationally recognised Left Opposition or Bolshevik-Leninists, both of which would have clearly identified the Spanish section with the Russian and International LO, against all other expelled Comintern factions and tendencies (Right, ultra-left, Zinovievist etc.).

Nin's fundamental weakness was a tendency to make unprincipled political concessions and organisational conciliation to centrist groupings. His aim was always to secure short term tactical advantages or to make rapid numerical gains.

At the same time, Nin tended to ignore the need for principled communist work within the mass workers' organisations, to reject a central orientation towards the CPs before 1933, and to reject entryism in the leftward moving Socialist parties after that date.

Moreover, Nin's role in the internal life of the ILO was a bad one. He refused to become a real part of the international leadership which Trotsky repeatedly tried to encourage and persuade him to do. He maintained distant and evasive relations with the International leadership and with Trotsky. Rather he sided with every "critical" or "oppositional" tendency or individual, no matter what their grievances (Rosmer, Landau etc.).

In essence, Nin sought a short cut to a powerful Spanish section and resisted any "interference" by the international leadership in these adventurist projects. Thus his ultimate desertion to Maurin with the foundation of the openly centrist POUM in September 1935 was prepared by this long history of opportunistic waverings.

The foundation of the ILO

Trotsky summed up the stage that the sections of the ILO were at:

"Our strength at the given stage lies in our appreciation, in a Marxian conception, in a correct revolutionary prognosis. These qualities we must present first of all to the proletarian vanguard. We act in the first place as propagandists. We are too weak to attempt to give answers to all ques-

tions, to intervene in all the specific conflicts, to formulate everywhere and in all places the slogans and replies of the Left Opposition.

"The chase after such a universality with our weakness and the inexperience of many comrades, will often lead to too hasty conclusions, to imprudent slogans, to wrong solutions. By false steps in particulars we will be the ones to compromise ourselves by preventing the workers from appreciating the fundamental qualities of the Left Opposition. I do not want in any way to say by this that we must stand aside from the real struggle of the working class. Nothing of the sort.

"The advanced workers can test the revolutionary advantages of the Left Opposition only by living experiences, but one must learn to select the most vital, the most burning and the most principled questions and on these questions engage in combat without dispersing oneself in trifles and details. It is in this, it appears to me, that the fundamental role of the Left Opposition now lies."[29]

The long-awaited international conference of the opposition was delayed time and again due to the factional struggles in the French and German groups and the resistance of the Spanish section. Then, in 1932-33, a faction fight in the CLA pitted Cannon against Shachtman and Abern. Meanwhile, the crisis in Germany demanded much of Trotsky's attention.

Yet Trotsky's invitation in 1932 to speak to a meeting in Copenhagen provided an opportunity to arrange an informal conference with 17 delegates from various European sections in attendance. This led to an agreement to call the ILO international conference for early 1933. At the end of December, Trotsky published a set of theses for this conference. As always they emphasised the foundation of programme.

But they also laid out with great clarity what democratic centralism meant in an international organisation. This contrasted sharply with both the high-handedness of the bureaucrat and the intellectuals' hatred of discipline.

"The task of the coming conference of the Left Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninists) is to adopt a clear and precisely formulated platform and organisational statutes, and select its leading bodies. The preceding theoretical, political and organisational work of the Left Opposition in various countries, especially in the last four years, has created sufficient premises for the solution of this task.

The fundamental programmatic and political documents of the Left Opposition are issued in no less than fifteen languages. The Left Opposition publishes thirty-two periodicals in sixteen countries. It has reorganised and strengthened its sections in nine countries and has created new sections in seven countries in the past three years. But its most important and most valuable achievement is the undeniable raising of the theoretical level of the International Left Opposition, the growth of its ideological solidity, and the expansion of its revolutionary initiative . . .

"The sections of the Left Opposition, originating out of small propaganda groups, gradually are being transformed into workers' organisations. This transition puts the tasks of party democracy in first place.

"Regular organisational relations must finally replace the kind of regime in which a few comrades, who are closely connected and understand each other even by the most informal indications, make all their decisions in a casual manner.

"The foundation of party democracy is timely and complete information, available to all members of the organisation and covering all the important questions of their life and struggle. Discipline can be built up only on a conscious assimilation of the policies of the organisation by all its members and on confidence in its leadership. Such confidence can be won only gradually, in the course of common struggle and reciprocal influence.

"The iron discipline which is needed cannot be achieved by naked command. The revolutionary organisation cannot do without the punishment of undisciplined and disruptive elements; but such disciplinary measures can be applied only as a last resort and, moreover, on the condition of solid support from the public opinion of the majority of the organisation."[30]

Conclusion

It was during the years 1928-33 that "Trotskyism" was born as an international movement. In its genesis it was the continuation of the entire tradition of Bolshevism whose programmatic and organisational achievements it defended against Stalinism as well as fighting the latter's replacement of democratic with bureaucratic centralism. The Russian Left Opposition – almost from the moment of Lenin's final departure from the leadership – defended the twenty year heritage of the party of the October Revolution. Most of the key figures of the Left Opposition had played a major role in this history. But during the 1920s a new generation joined its ranks despite the enormous adversity and sacrifice this meant. The well-chosen name Bolshevik-Leninists, embodied the struggle against the bureaucratic destroyers and falsifiers of these two terms.

This meant not only a fight against bureaucratic hyper-centralism, which crushed all democratic debate and the holding of leaderships to account for their mistakes. It also required the defence of the project of a centralised international party against those who thought that the Comintern's fundamental error was its centralism and that the answer lay in a de facto national autonomy. The ILO defended the concept and practice of building disciplined Leninist combat parties against those who confused Bolshevism with Stalinism.

They also made a new series of programmatic and tactical conquests; permanent revolution as an international perspective, the analysis of the fascist movement and united front necessary to combat it, the class character of a bureaucratic degenerated workers' state, the economic programme and the political measures needed to restore the working class to the capacity to direct its own state.

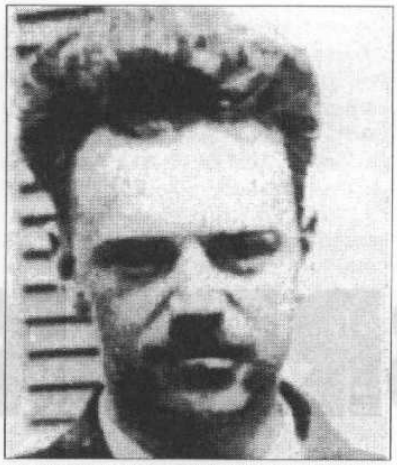
The task of spreading the influence of the Opposition around the globe was a success. Between the conference which founded the ILO and gave it central bodies in 1930 and the next international conference in early 1933, the number of sections expanded.

Trotsky's role was central. As the last of the great generation of classic Marxists of the Second and Third International, his predominance was inevitable. Trotsky's lonely eminence was caused in part by the isolation and repression visited upon his co-thinkers such as Christian Rakovsky. The younger generation of Oppositionists – like his son Leon Sedov – were still learning. Thus Trotsky was the theoretical powerhouse as well as the principal tactician of the ILO.

Step by step, his powerful analytical work added a whole new dimension to Marxism. Gradually integrated into a developing body of practical politics they emerged– in 1938 – as the new programme of a new international.

But this process of building the ILO as an international organisation was one which faced by truly terrible problems. It was a period in which Trotsky and all the cadres of the Left Opposition were swimming against ferociously strong countercurrents. Stalin and Hitler, though not unstoppable if the working class vanguard had rallied to the right tactics in time, were not stopped. In China and Latin America, military dictatorships drove many of the small Opposition groups into illegality. A larger number of oppositionist communist militants were swept away from the ILO and drowned in these deadly currents.

The early 1930s were also a period for weeding out – by sharp political struggle rather than bureaucratic measures – the accidental collection of maverick and eccentric elements which had gravitated towards the opposition in the 1920s. Many of them were inveterate petty bourgeois haters of all discipline and of centralisation, even that founded on workers' democracy.



SEDOV: KEY ORGANISER OF THE ILO

The non-proletarian class composition of many of first nuclei of Oppositionists was the basis for many of the internal struggles and crises of these years; many students, young intellectuals brought into the opposition habits, of clique conflicts, of passive propagandism, and aloofness from the working class and its struggles.

In short, they mistook revolutionary intransigence for sectarian narrowness and a propaganda circle mentality. To overcome this, Trotsky fought hard to get the sections to involve themselves as much as possible in the mass struggles of these turbulent year.

The disproportion between the magnitude of the opposition's tasks and the tiny forces it had to carry them out, the pressure of the great mass workers' organisations on tiny circles in a period of mounting mass struggles with historic dimensions all meant that the progress the ILO actually made in this period was remarkable.

Those militants who joined and stayed in the sections necessarily had more than average firmness of character, willingness to sacrifice and commitment to fighting for extremely unpopular ideas.

An additional cause of disruption in the ranks of the Trotskyists was the activity of the Stalinist agents who disrupted the international leadership. They always had at least one agent on it. This all magnified the failure to construct a stable central organisational and political leadership, despite the work of Leon Sedov. But Trotsky never stopped trying to build a collective leadership, to organise regular international gatherings of the Opposition, to ensure the publishing not only of the journals of the major sections (to which he gave considerable sums from his book and journalism royalties) but to maintain an international internal bulletin to stimulate the common life of the ILO.

As well its historically vital role in saving the legacy of Bolshevism from the stranglehold of Stalin, the ILO is a model today for all those seeking to recover and renew the legacy of Trotsky and the Fourth International. Like the ILO, we start – not by choice – from the basis of small propaganda societies, from the need to re-elaborate our programme.

At the close of the twentieth century, this means analysing the collapse of Stalinism and learning the lessons from it. If we do not have the living Trotsky to guide us this must never be a pretext for abandoning the central goal of his work. Today, the political obstacles are less daunting – and the organisational and technical resources available to us far greater – than those faced by the courageous founders of Trotskyism.

Like the ILO, we cannot avoid the internal and external battles in the "small world" of propaganda groups and individuals. So it was and so it will be. During these, however, we must never lose sight of the working class vanguard for whose mass struggles alone our tactics and our programme are designed.

The four year history of the ILO is thus rich in lessons – both positive and negative. But the central one is the absolute priority of the task of rebuilding a democratically centralised single international organisation, armed with a programme which has been renewed to meet the tasks of the period of revolutionary struggles ahead. ■

Footnotes

[1] The definitive work on this period is *Opposants á Staline* by Damien Durand. Published first in *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* Nos 32 and 33 (December 1987 and March 1988) and later as a book. This excellent work deals mainly with the years 1929-30. It has not been translated into English though it certainly should be. Other invaluable sources are many other issues of the *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* and *Revolutionary History*. These two journals have performed an invaluable service for those wishing to study this period by collecting the accounts of many of the participants as well as by publishing accounts of the national sections of the Left Opposition. Last but not least we owe an incalculable debt to George Breitman and Pierre Broué, the editors and inspirers respectively of the *Writings of Leon Trotsky* and the *Léon Trotsky OEUVRES*, the notes and introductions of which are an important guide to this period.

[2] Cited in D Durand, "Opposants á Staline", volume 1 *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* no 32 p79.

[3] L Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, New York 1972 pp 1-73

[4] P Broué, "The German Left and the Russian Opposition (1926-28)" in *Revolutionary History* vol. 2 No. 3 Autumn 1989

[5] See Wang Fan-Hsi, *Chinese Revolutionary*, Oxford 1980 pp 54-104.

[6] see "The Birth of the Chinese Left Opposition" by D Durand in *Revolutionary History* Vol. 2, No. 4 Spring 1990

[7] L Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution*, New York 1965 p14.

[8] *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union* 1913-1945, R W Davies (ed), p16

[9] *ibid.* Preface to the German edition p32

[10] "Problems of the Development of the USSR Draft Theses of the ILO on the Russian Question" *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1930-31 p218

[11] *ibid*, p221

[12] *ibid*, p221-2

[13] "The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1934-5)* p134, p172-3, New York 1971

[14] *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1929) p134, New York 1975

[15] D Durand, op cit, *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* no 33 p187.

[16] ibid. p234

[17] "The Mute Conference", *Writings of Leon Trotsky; Supplement (1929-33)* New York 1979 p33

[18] *ibid.* p34

[19] "Personal Elements in the French Struggle' *Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement 1929-33* p53

[20] "The Mistakes of rightist elements of the Communist League on the trade union question", 4 January 1931, in *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay* New York, 1990 p135

[21] *ibid.*

[22] *Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement 1929-33* New York 1979, p91

[23] P Broué, *Léon Trotsky*, Paris n.d. pp 677-8

[24] "Personal Elements in the French Struggle", Writings of Leon Trotsky Supplement 1929-33 pp 51-55. In the mid-1930s Rosmer once again collaborated with Trotsky, this time in the campaign against the Moscow trials. Trotsky was to split definitively, when Molinier's political adventurism got completely out of hand.

[25] D Durand, *op cit*, Vol. 2 *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* no. 33 p138

[26] *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1930-31* p257

[27] L Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution(1931-39)* New York 1973 pp 382/3

[28] *ibid.* p 369

[29] "Some Ideas on the Period" *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1930-31*, p297 New York 1973

[30] "The International Left Opposition, Its Tasks and Methods", L Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, 1932-33, New York 1972 1 p48

Fracción Trotskista
FAILING TO BREAK

Four years of discussions between the LRCI and the Latin American based Fracción Trotskista have failed to produce revolutionary unity. **Keith Harvey** sums up the lessons and explains the principled basis for international left regroupment.

In London in autumn 1995 the LRCI began discussions with representatives of the Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS) of Argentina. These discussions, plus a reading of the PTS' latest publications alerted the LRCI to considerable areas of common ground in the two organisations assessment of the world in the wake of the collapse of Stalinism. For this reason the LRCI sent a representative to Buenos Aires in December for further discussions involving other members of the international tendency of which the PTS is a part (now called the Fracción Trotskista – FT). This led to the signing of a joint declaration at the conclusion of the visit.

In this agreement we recognised that "there has been a convergence of programme and perspective during the last years between the two organisations".[1] Many areas of agreement were noted, as were significant differences. In a situation where, in the 1990s, the main international currents calling themselves Trotskyist had drawn right-centrist conclusions from the collapse of Stalinism and the apparent omnipotence of US imperialism, we recognised that we had a heavy responsibility to devote resources to overcoming the differences. Both agreed that a successful outcome would have a powerful effect on forces on the international left fighting this rightward drift within the official labour movements and the centrist groups of a Trotskyist origin.

Unfortunately, four years on, we have to conclude that the desired outcome did not happen. Was it a question of what Trotsky called the "conservatism" of small groups, content with the status quo, or was there a real opportunity for revolutionary unity? The LRCI believes there was such an opportunity – and that the leadership of the FT/PTS squandered it.

There was a tension at the heart of the 1995 declaration. It noted:

"There seems to be a difference on the degree of centralism and democracy that there would have to be in an international regroupment in the actual conditions of the stage of development of our tendencies".[2]

In reality this phrase inadequately expressed the PTS-FT's the view that democratic centralism is not possible or desirable for a an international tendency consisting of propaganda groups. The LRCI, on the other hand, believes that, once a common programmatic basis exists, an organisational expression of it, through an international party, is essential. Regular international conferences and the construction of an international leadership are obligatory for all genuine international revolutionary organisations. Only by this means is it possible to put a programme to the test, in a disciplined manner, in the class struggle. For this reason the LRCI pressed the FT from the outset to concentrate on the areas of programmatic disagreement, to see if we could overcome these.

In contrast to this the PTS preferred to approach the question of fusion by the method of constructing partial political "blocs" around "common declarations" on important international political events. The LRCI saw this as useful up to a point, but mainly as a way of testing the extent of existing agreement on principles and on the progress made in resolving programmatic differences. But we did not see it either as the desired way to conduct a regroupment discussion, or as a prior stage before discussions on programme could begin. To concentrate on declarations on conjunctural events in the class struggle – however important – ran the danger of agreeing on what could be agreed upon and leaving aside what was contentious to either side. It could in short lead to them representing a "lowest common denominator" .This could even mean that such declarations were scarcely distinct from many other international tendencies outside the framework of the agreed regroupment process.

Over the subsequent three years a number of declarations were hammered out in this way – each principled in itself. But they did not draw the support of other leftward moving

WITH CENTRISM

groups as the FT had hoped; nor did they play a major role in getting to the heart of the known or anticipated differences over strategy and tactics that the declaration of 1995 outlined. In short they did not act as the basis of a fusion discussions – an objective clearly stated in the 1995 declaration, on the LRCI's initiative.

The 1995 agreement did envisage two stages of such a fusion process – though these were not common declarations first and then programmatic discussions. Rather, the first stage was to involve an intensive study and exchange of material; later in 1996 the two organisations would decide whether the political basis existed for a Liaison Committee whose task would be to decide "whether the basis exists to move to the fusion of both currents into a common international tendency".[3]

In the event, in 1996 and on into 1997 the fusion process stalled at the first stage. Major political letters from the LRCI went unanswered; long silences were punctuated only by the occasional urgent request from the FT for another draft declaration. Relations between the LRCI and the FT fell into crisis during mid-to late 1997 – during and immediately after the LRCI's Fourth Congress (July 1997), which three members of the FT attended. At the Fourth Congress, the LRCI attempted to move the discussions forward by proposing a Liaison Committee comprised of the FT and the LRCI. This would effectively act as a programme commission to intensify discussions on key areas and try urgently to resolve differences. If successful, it would draft a new common programmatic manifesto and suggest steps towards fusion between the two tendencies.

The FT by contrast revealed at the Congress an alternative method. They proposed an Open Liaison Committee, aimed attracting and possibly regrouping, a supposed "left wing" of the Trotskyist movement. The LRCI stated clearly that we believed this represented a downgrading of the original project in favour of a more nebulous attempt to rally those who wish to "refound the Fourth International" – forces the FT felt sure would emerge as the crisis of centrism deepened.

For the FT the stress was to remain on common declarations and open public initiatives aimed at leftward moving tendencies trapped within right centrist internationals – for example in the USFI and the UCI. By contrast we emphasised working for principled left splits from the rightward moving centrist currents and fusions with them to build a programmatically united democratic centralist international tendency. A clear programmatic manifesto and demonstration in practice of coherent action in the class struggle would we believe attract the best elements to our banner.

The FT proposed an Open Liaison Committee around a platform that neither codified what the LRCI and FT stood for in common up to that point, nor addressed itself to all the key issues and positions that marked revolutionaries off from centrism in the 1990s. In our view it was abstract, designed to appeal to broader forces. Yet at the same time it introduced sectarian and ultra-left positions regarding tactics towards reformism in Europe that would doom the far left to phrasemongering and guarantee their continued marginalisation within the labour movement.

In the aftermath of the 1997 LRCI Congress both sides agreed to differ; though neither side suggested breaking off discussions they effectively stopped.

But in early 1998 the FT showed its ability to respond positively to frank and honest criticism. The appearance of their own programmatic manifesto in early 1998 was an important break with the method of the "common declaration" and offered an opportunity to escape from the impasse in our relations.

That Manifesto (January 1998) represented a political advance in the FT's break with degenerate Trotskyism, particularly the Morenoite LIT, from which the PTS split in 1988. Indeed, the very fact that they recognised the need for such a programmatic document was itself a major development on the international left. Its merit was as a codification of the programmatic lessons drawn by the FT in the years of its existence and reflections upon the decades long crisis of centrism, together with a brief action programme and set of perspectives.

What were these merits which set it above the rest of the "Trotskyist" movement?

- the recognition of the break in revolutionary continuity after the war and the collapse of all fragments of the FI into centrism ("Yalta Trotskyism");
- the need for an action programme based on a re-elaborated Transitional Programme that values agreement over broad principles less than of detailed exposition of strategy and tactics towards the key events of the international class struggle;
- a common appreciation of the contemporary capitalist crisis – a view of the post-1989 years as opening a new revolutionary period;
- the urgency of an international initiative to bring to about a principled fusion of revolutionary forces;
- agreement on the use of central tactics inside the workers' movement (united front, demands on and denunciation of reformist workers' parties in government;
- appreciation of the right of nations to self-determination and especially a principled position in the Balkan Wars up to 1999;
- the deployment of a combined programme of political and social revolution in the remaining workers' states in decomposition (moribund workers' states).

In the opinion of the LRCI these positions brought us closer to the FT than any other tendency that we are aware of on the international left.

Unfortunately, it soon became clear that this advance promised more than the FT was prepared to deliver.

To our knowledge, only the LRCI responded seriously and in detail to the stated aim of the document, name-

ly, to find "a way of exploring possible convergence with other tendencies or individuals that make a claim to principled Trotskyism." But our responses were once again shelved and ignored. In fact they were taken by the FT leadership as a statement of differences that ended any hope of success in the fusion process.

At discussions in Buenos Aires in December 1998 the FT admitted as much. The FT concluded that disagreement "on the method to reconstruct the FI, or found a Leninist-Trotskyist International" meant that, even if we were able to remove the tactical differences over reformism and centrism, they would still not be willing to set up a joint programme commission or even a Liaison Committee with the LRCI.

In effect the search for the programmatic basis for fusion agreed to in December 1995 – of finding a principled political basis to overcome our organisational separateness – had failed. During the first half of 1999 we tried once more to resurrect the process, by seeking to convince the FT comrades that their outlook on international party-building represented an unsurmounted element of centrism in their politics. Our arguments fell on deaf ears.

Four years on from the joint declaration the LRCI has come to the conclusion that its aims have not been realised. Without a major change the attitude of the PTS-FT to building a Trotskyist international tendency, they will not be realised.

Thus we have to recognise that there is no "process of revolutionary regroupment" operative between our tendencies. The method of the FT's leadership has proved an insuperable obstacle to that process.

How to fight reformism?

The history of the discussion between the FT and the LRCI over social democratic governments in the European Union – and more generally how to break workers from their illusions in reformist parties – illustrates some of the most positive aspects of the discussion process. In the 1995 statement the first disagreement with the PTS materialised on the subject of social democratic governments.

At first they counterposed denouncing these governments to the tactic of placing demands on them. This was because – at that time – the FT seriously underestimated the effect of on working class consciousness of the defeats of the 1980s and 1990s. The LRCI took account of these effects: that was the reality which we summed up as a counter-revolutionary phase whose deepest period was late 1991 to late 1995. A partial recovery began in France and Italy in 1995-6 and we consider this period to have definitively ended in 1998. We claim no great credit for observing this since we obviously have deeper roots in Europe than the FT. We felt very sharply the fall in workers' hopes and aspirations as a result of the collapse of Stalinism.

In the course of the argument the FT came to a more realistic assessment, as could be seen in the 1998 Manifesto. It recognised that workers will overcome their leaders only as a result of a clash between their own hopes and expectations in what they still see as "their" parties and "their" trade unions (even if these hopes are very modest) and the reality of their betrayal.

A resolution adopted by the PTS Conference in December 1998 noted:

"Only a blinded sectarian can refuse to see that the putting by the European proletariat of its reformist leaderships into power opens the possibility of eventual confrontations between the workers' movement and its leadership, indispensable for a truly revolutionary process of political radicalisation to arise."

This is a clear recognition that it is insufficient to simply denounce these governments, that it is permissible and indeed necessary to utilise the tactics of "exposure demands" on them. Savage revolutionary denunciation on its own is all the more inadequate where, as the PTS acknowledged, the recomposition of the workers' resistance in Europe has been on a reformist basis. Hence the social democratic governments' deviation from class principles, let alone revolutionary principles, will not, in itself shock workers. In Lenin's words, when the workers' consciousness is not revolutionary our duty is to patiently explain – over and over again if necessary. We cannot force the workers to break with the reformists by strong language. All we will do in such circumstances is to convince them that we are irresponsible hotheads with little or no experience of the reality of the defeats and problems workers have recently experienced.

In such conditions it is necessary to utilise the tactics of demands on them. The fact is that the workers of Europe, primarily by their votes it is true, have put "their" parties into government. At the same time there is a recovery of trade union activity – beginning slowly at least even in Britain. We have to recognise in this a limited recovery from the defeats of the late 1980s and early 1990s and at the same time the product of the absence of a militant revolutionary alternative capable of challenging the still very right-wing social democratic and trade union leaders.

Such pedagogic adaptation is not at all a retreat on fundamentals – we must still clearly condemn every betrayal and every imperialist action of these governments.

In a passage in *Estrategia Interna-*



JOSPIN WINS IN FRANCE, 1997. THE PTS INITIALLY REFUSED TO RAISE DEMANDS ON REFORMIST GOVERNMENTS

cional No. 10, the earlier difference between the FT and LRCI is largely overcome in the following passage:

"These governments support themselves, in the carrying out of their political perfidy, on the illusions which, despite the revival of broad layers of the workers' movement, preserves certain organic links with them, despite the rightist turn of recent years and the conversion of them into mere electoral machines. The implacable policy of denouncing daily these governments, hostile to the mobilisation of the masses, should be complemented with a policy of demands faced with their demagogy or reformist concessions which these governments may be forced to make, with the objective of mobilising and so that the masses complete their experience of them."[4]

In these conditions we believe that it is far better for the reformists to be in power than in opposition. We agree with the FT that to tell the workers the full truth about the nature of these governments is a strategic question to which all tactics must be subordinated. But denunciation without tactics – in particular without united front tactics – would be only passive propagandism and sectarianism, not revolutionary agitation. Revolutionary agitation always seeks to grasp the positive class elements in the contradictory consciousness of the masses, turning them against the bourgeois elements in this same consciousness. The essence of Trotsky's method is to be able to utilise the reformist workers' hopes and aspirations to bring about action which will expose the capitalist agents in the workers' movement.

For the capitalist class in Europe, the bourgeois workers' parties and trade union bureaucracies have become central – both as a means to contain working class action as well as to ensure the implementation of the single currency. As long as the expansionary phase of the cycle persists, the room for manoeuvre of these governments will generally still be sufficient to allow both the mass of workers and the majority of the bourgeoisie to think that they are serving their interests.

Certainly, so far they have been able to integrate the trade union bureaucracy, contain the left-right conflicts within the reformist parties and even to allow for the integration of some left reformist parties into government – even if they are not formally part of coalitions (e.g. Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, the German PDS, the Left Party in Sweden).

However, internal conflicts continue in the unions and in workplace organisations between the base and the bureaucracy. Those sections of workers directly betrayed by these governments (e.g. by privatisations, on citizenship rights) will be more sharply disillusioned and may turn to more leftist solutions ("Trotskyist" candidates, Rifondazione Comunista). But we are convinced that when the full force of recession hits Europe the conflicts, both within the unions and between them and reformist parties, will erupt, opening up excellent opportunities for revolutionary intervention.

It will also increase the leverage of the left-reformist (and ex-Stalinist) parties and the larger centrist groups too. Indeed in such conditions we expect these to grow substantially – which they have not yet done. Their growth to date has been restricted by the focus of workers' attention on the reformist governments. Revolutionaries have to be firm and clear about their own programme whilst intervening vigorously in the clashes between the rank and file and the union bureaucracy in the trade unions, in the mass reformist parties, in the left reformist parties and the larger centrist organisations.

The FT is an international tendency rooted in Latin America, above all Argentina, where there has been no history of significant reformist workers' parties in which the working class has illusions. There have been no social democratic governments. It was understandable therefore that the PTS should gravitate towards a one-sided position of denunciations alone as a tactic towards reformism. Nevertheless, the discussion proved too that the PTS was capable of changing its mind.

The crisis of Stalinism and the restoration of capitalism

In 1995 the FT agreed to "reject the position that the process of restoration has finished and that capitalist states have been constructed" in the ex-USSR and eastern Europe. But it soon became clear that the FT position was untheorised and dogmatic. The LRCI's view, by contrast, was provisional: framed within a considerable body of theoretical analysis and under constant review.

There was significant agreement on the origin of the crisis of Stalinism in the 1980s, as well as on the programme for the political revolutionary crises in 1989-90. The two tendencies also agreed on the way the anti-Stalinist revolutions were derailed, and in their critique of centrism, which moved right in the face of these events.[5]

Nevertheless, the FT tended to exaggerate the homogeneity of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the 1980s in becoming the direct agent of restoration. In reality the bureaucracies were riven with factions, some closer to the IMF, some closer to the nationally-minded intelligentsia, some committed to bureaucratic planning. Cutting across all of these factions were ideas about the limits of political reform.

The FT Manifesto of 1998 suggested that Gorbachev represented the open and committed restorationists, which he certainly did not – he represented the last attempt at "market socialist" reforms, short of capitalism, while objectively preparing the way for it. Ligachev headed the Stalinist bureaucratic planners and Yeltsin the open pro-imperialist restorationists. Elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe decades of market socialism had reduced the hard-line Stalinist central planners to an insignificant political force by 1989.

However, the main differences revolved around the question: how far has capitalist restoration gone since 1989 and what methodology should we use to study the process?

The LRCI and FT from the start rejected a purely political set of criteria for judging this process. Our opponents asserted that the process of political revolution and counter-revolution between 1989-91 was sufficient to restore capitalism to the countries of eastern Europe and Russia. For the LRCI the form of the state machine in the Stalinist ruled states was always bourgeois – ever since they became degenerate or degenerated workers' states – even though the property and production relations were not bourgeois but proletarian. Hence the process of regime change (government, personnel etc.) in the years after 1989 produced no qualitative rupture in the form of the state machine. The open restorationists (both from within and outside the old Stalinist bureaucracy) "took hold of the state machine" and began the process of restoring capitalism consciously.

The LRCI, therefore felt it was critical to analysis the changes in the nature of finance and production inside these states. We recognised that the destruction of the instruments of central co-ordinated planning and the monopoly of foreign trade, while an important precondition for the advance of capitalism in these countries, was not self-sufficient.

The transformation of use values into exchange values, of labour into labour-power, of means of production into capital, of money as a means of accounting and exchange into the embodiment of surplus value – all required a social counter-revolution. This could only be carried through by means of classes and parties struggling against each other. The content of the measures required in each country have been the same, although the timing, sequence and even form of some of these measures (e.g. privatisation of state assets) have differed.

The essential objectives of the restorationists has been to transform the labour process itself. This is far more important than changes in legal title to ownership of assets, although in some countries this was more important than others in allowing for new relationships of exploitation to be

imposed upon production. We have examined in detail in different countries how industrial and banking capital have imposed the logic of profit-making upon their own operations, which has included mass unemployment, closures, wage cuts on the one hand, and on the other forcible bankruptcies and mergers within the capitalist class. The negative proof of this process can be seen all too clearly in Russia today where the radical restructuring of labour and the shake-out of failed capital has not taken place; instead in its place we have witnessed the seemingly endless extended reproduction of losses and the demonetisation of whole sectors of the economy and of the country.

But we have also seen where the restorationists have succeeded, as in Hungary.[6] Here we have the clearest and most pure form of the integration of a former moribund workers' state into global capitalism, via the direct absorption of much of its manufacturing and banking by imperialist finance capital.

In all of the 1990s the FT has chosen to ignore a concrete analysis of Central Europe and its progress towards capitalism, focusing on Russia and China alone, where the difficulties of the transition are evident. This is hardly credible as a method of approach, leading the FT to be silent on the very real differences between the contemporary political economy of East Europe and the former USSR.

Capitalist central Europe's production, trade and investment is directed in the first instance to the European Union and its fate is bound up with the further development of the crisis there. It will be a crisis of over-investment, of lower profits and productivity. It will be in short a capitalist crisis; it will not be a crisis of non-payment of wages, of mounting unpaid debts between loss-making enterprises, of a failure to construct a state machine that can organise taxation.

The merit of the LRCI's approach has been to understand what unifies the different moribund workers' states in this process as well as what distinguishes them from each other. The relationship of imperialism to the different post-1989 regimes, the backwardness or otherwise of the economy of the moribund workers' state in question at the start of the process of restoration, the balance of class forces within each country – all have to be studied concretely (as we have done in many cases).

In the FT's 1998 Manifesto all the states in question are treated as though their internal dynamic could seriously be analysed as if they were essentially similar to Russia. The FT suggest that the main obstacles in the path of capitalism in central Europe was or is (i) the weakened nature of the state as a result of the battles of 1989-91; (ii) the failure of the bureaucratic faction to rise above plunder of state assets and act as guarantor of business interests; and (iii) the old relations of production living on in the consciousness of the masses. Even if this is partially correct account of Russian capitalists difficulties is totally false for Central Europe.

The FT contented itself with the abstract view (to be found in its Manifesto) that capitalist restoration is "impossible without decisive defeats of the mass movement". To insist upon anything else suggested to the FT that it is possible to pass from a "superior system" to an inferior one peacefully, hence winding the film of reformism backwards.

We answered these charges several times. First, just what constitutes a "decisive defeat" is left conveniently vague and open. The FT's analysis of the 1997 Albanian uprising suggested that they thought the restorationists would have to defeat an armed resistance in each country. There was a tendency to generalise falsely from the Albanian case rather than see in those events what was specific and limited. The utter impoverishment and bandit form of capitalism which was unsuccessfully being implanted into Albania, on top of the wretched social conditions of the people as inherited from Stalinism, led to this explosion. Such drastic social conditions were absent elsewhere in central Europe. [7]

Secondly, we explained that we have not seen, nor can we expect, generalised civil wars in the process of restoration. The explanation lies in the defeats inflicted upon the working class in those countries during Stalinist domination, which eroded the subjective attachment of the workers to their own property relations and their organisational ability to collectively resist the plans of the bureaucracy.

Further, to rest content with the statement that post-capitalism is superior to capitalism and hence cannot give way peacefully to it leaves out of account the fact that this "superior" system went into free fall economically in the 1980s, first relatively and then absolutely in comparison with imperialist capitalism. We have to distinguish between the historic pre-requisites of the transition to socialism (planned property, monopoly of foreign trade etc.), which are advances, and the worsening living conditions of the masses as a result of the ineptitude and corruption of the bureaucracy.

The most extensive exposition of the FT's methodology appeared in 1998 for the first time.[8] It seemed in essence an attempt to give more substance to the idea that capitalism is a socially inferior system, which in an era of crisis has no inner strength to restore itself where it has been abolished. There is no empirical evidence for this assertion, still less any concrete study of imperialism's actual relations with any of the central or eastern European countries involved in the restoration process.

The FT leans back upon the barest of abstractions and quotes torn from Trotsky to "prove" that it is "vulgar" to try to analyse the moribund workers' states within their own national terrain since "every Marxist knows" that one has to start from an understanding of the world economy. Since world capitalism has been in crisis since the early 1970s, and it is getting worse, then it is unlikely to be able to restore capitalism where once it had been uprooted, so the reasoning goes. This is little more than a syllogism.

It is indeed valuable to start with the nature of the world economy. World imperialist pressure and capitalist penetration of the eastern bloc was one major cause of the downfall of Stalinism. We also recognised in 1991 that the transition process would be protracted due to the fact that imperialism was in recession: it was destroying factories in Europe, Japan and the USA with far higher productivity levels than could be found in the former Stalinist states, despite the lower operating costs in the latter.

But we also recognised that capitalism could see an opportunity once the recovery was underway after 1992. The capitalists were able to relocate production more cheaply in central Europe with a highly skilled workforce. The MNCs also needed to get access to a substantial market for white goods, autos and food in the bigger central European markets. This was more easily done by taking over native companies and launching new start-ups to get around protective barriers to trade.

The real reason the FT refuses even now to recognise the completion of capitalist restoration – even in the handful of central European states where it is obvious – is fear. The comrades fear that to recognise restoration would mean abandoning the idea that the 1990s are essentially a revolutionary period. In contrast, the LRCI believes that the weak, semi-colonial and often crisis-ridden nature of the newly restored capitalism in the region guarantees further social explosions in Central and Eastern Europe.

The test of war in Balkans

Ever since the break-up of former Yugoslavia after 1989 the FT and LRCI have found themselves in agreement many times. We agreed on the nature of the Stalinist crisis that led to the rise of Serbian nationalism; we agreed on the programme to be adopted in the face of the Bosnian war (1991-95); we shared the same view of the role played by imperialism in its diplomatic and military intervention

into the region. Yet the differences with the PTS over Kosovar in the course of 1999 were symptomatic.

The PTS criticised the LRCI for its position of demanding arms for the KLA in the war against Serbian occupation in April/May 1999. They objected to this demand claiming, correctly, that the KLA is pro-imperialist.

They maintained that the LRCI came "dangerously close" to the NATO "war camp" because we supported the demand of arms for the KLA. They implied that our support for the arming of the KLA was enough to render worthless our fight to stop the bombing of Serbia.

The PTS held an untenable position: On the one hand, it supported the demand for self-determination for Kosova and, on the other, opposed the arming of the only organised mass Kosovar force then fighting to achieve it. This rendered their support for self-determination abstract in the extreme. Using the same polemical method one could argue this brought the PTS "dangerously close" to the Serbian regime.

The issue is not whether either the LRCI or PTS were "dangerously close" to those to whom we were opposed. In fact, the PTS was principled in its opposition to Milosevic just as they acknowledged that the LRCI in Europe fought the pro-war position of Blair, Shröder and Jospin.

Tactics by their nature bring revolutionaries alongside those who you seek to defeat ultimately. The united front by its very nature does this in all spheres of political life.

Our criticism of the PTS position is that it leaves their tactics in war abstract and therefore sectarian. They argued that "The PTS defends the right of the Kosovar people to arms themselves in order to struggle for independence, yet we say that this not the same as 'arms to the KLA'."

This sophistry brought them no nearer to reality on the ground. The Kosova working class was dispersed – by and large – from its places of employment. The vast majority of the population inside and outside Kosova backed the KLA; many thousands joined it. If a working class community remained intact in Kosova that was not part of the KLA and had it been possible to get arms to it, it would almost certainly still have been nationalist and sympathetic to, or supportive of, imperialism.

What would the PTS then have proposed? To only give arms to those Kosovars that agreed with the programme of permanent revolution? Presumably not, for it would have been a long wait. Perhaps only to those that agreed not to take arms from the west? Then from whom should they have got arms? Or perhaps they would have agreed to arm only those that in principle renounced the bombing of Serbia? In which case it would have be more honest if the LVO and PTS had made this much clear to its readers.

Unfortunately, the LRCI was not aware of such organised forces inside the Kosovar population and this meant that we were obliged to recognise that if revolutionaries will the end (self-determination against armed Serbian resistance) then we must will the means (arms) for those carrying out the fight.

No one has yet proven to us that support for the fight against Serbs inside Kosova (at least before Nato troops were inside Kosova) was incompatible with opposition to KLA support for the bombing.

When the war ended NATO sought to disarm the KLA. Did the PTS argue against this? Did they demand that the KLA keep their arms and refuse to allow the west to become the sole legitimate armed force inside Kosova?

The LRCI argued that the demand for self-organisation in the refugee camps and elected committees in the towns and villages was best combined with demands for the KLA to keep its arms and put them under the control of the returning Kosovars.

Progress was derailed eventually by the inability of the FT to break with centrism n respect to the kind of tactics and slogans needed to combat the influence of groups originating from Trotskyism.

Do we think that the KLA is "independent"? It is far more "independent" of Trotskyism than it is of imperialism. Politically, it is a vacillating and ultimately treacherous force that will lead the Kosovars to ruin.

But throughout the war the KLA has been in collaboration and conflict with imperialism for the simple fact that NATO refused to arm it, restricted its field of military operations as far as possible and resolutely opposed the KLA goal of state independence for Kosova.

If the war had have escalated and NATO had have sent in a ground invasion force then the contradiction between the KLA and imperialism would have been obliterated. However, this did not come to pass. Trotskyists should have done two things in the aftermath of Nato's entry.

First, it should have resisted tooth and nail the killings and expulsion of Serbs from Kosova, while demanding justice against those proven complicit in crimes of ethnic cleansing or burning or looting of Kosovar Albanian property.

The PTS by contrast only had one operative tactic for bringing about a split within the Kosovar liberation movement; namely, opposition to NATO bombing of Serbia, combined with abstract propaganda for arming the working class.

The fight for an Trotskyist international tendency

The tactics towards reformism and the analysis of restoration of capitalism were just two of the issues under discussion over the past four years. The former saw a narrowing of the political differences, illustrating the principled nature of the whole discussion process. The latter highlighted the tendency for the FT to lean back on dogma and doctrine when theoretical innovation was needed.

But progress on these and other areas of difference and agreement were stalled – indeed derailed eventually – by the inability of the FT to break with centrism in one key area: the analysis of centrist groups originating from Trotskyism and the kind of tactics and slogans needed to combat their influence.

It was the difference over this that eventually drove the fusion process into the sand. In a 1997 letter to the LRCI, in reference to various amendments to a draft Open Liaison Committee (OLC) platform proposed by the FT to the LRCI's 1997 Congress the FT bluntly insisted:

"there was no point in discussing the amendments that the LRCI presented to our draft since we did not have agreement over the objective for which it had been proposed, whether or not we agreed with the content of them."

What did this reveal? What was the aim of the OLC as far as the FT were concerned? Despite agreement on programme the FT believe that the slogan of the "reconstruction of the Fourth International" was so overwhelmingly important that the FT felt little progress could be made with the LRCI towards a common tendency. Why?

The FT acknowledged in the 1995 joint statement that essential revolutionary continuity within Trotskyism was broken "during the years 1951-53". But in fact it became clear in subsequent exchanges that the FT did not understand or accept that this break was rooted in a collapse into a centrism with its own distinct methodology and set of positions in the period 1948-51.

The Fourth International's failure to come to grips with the emergence of the degenerate workers' states after 1945 cut across the partial self-criticism of wrong positions adopted by some sections during the war that was underway between 1944-48.[9]

The FI took a principled position of opposition to the actions of the Soviet Armed Forces into eastern Europe, but were confused by the dynamics of the process. Under Mandel's leadership the FI refused to consider the possibility of a social overturn by purely bureaucratic means. In 1948 the leadership flipped over into the opposite stance and made unforgivable opportunist accommodation towards Tito in 1948/4.

The FI was on certain ground when it was a matter of denouncing the reactionary actions of the Soviet Armed Forces in 1944-5 in derailing the revolutionary struggles. But they were disarmed ideologically when the



ERNEST MANDEL, LEADER OF THE USFI: IN THE LATE 1940s UNDER HIM AND PABLO THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL WENT DOWN THE PATH OF CENTRIST DEGENERATION

Communist Parties later overthrew the national bourgeoisie and believed that had thereby ceased to be Stalinist and must have become a variety of centrism.

So by 1948-9 what had been isolated centrist deviations on the war became a fully blown centrist methodology which asserted that Stalinism had been transformed into a form of centrism. This was only fully summed up and codified in an international programme with the 1951 Congress, but by then three years of consistent centrist policies and purges made it certain that the Third Congress documents would be adopted virtually unanimously.

The FT's 1998 Manifesto says contradictory things on the question of continuity. On the one hand, the FT correctly states that by the time of the 1953 split revolutionary continuity had been broken.

The International Committee offered no revolutionary alternative to the Mandel-Pablo ISFI; indeed the IC's leaders had fashioned many "Pabloite" policies themselves.

All they offered was phrasemongering about the need for a revolutionary party which served to hide a criminal opportunism towards petit-bourgeois nationalism and social democracy. It is no surprise to us, or the FT, that centrism of Trotskyist origin failed the test of the crises of 1968-76.

Nevertheless, the FT accused the LRCI of pedantry for suggesting that "in the adaptations of 1953 one can find already present those mistakes of later years." Connected to this, the FT rejected the LRCI's concept of "petrified centrism" to describe the positions of the FI after 1951.

Instead, the FT says that "the possibility existed that a combination of the influence of the thousands of radicalised workers and the youth who joined their ranks together with the force of the prevailing programme could have led to important steps in the revolutionary regeneration of the vanguard."

This is a sort of processism and objectivism and hits directly against the observation made earlier that revolutionary continuity was broken.

If we take ourselves seriously in insisting on the rupture of continuity, then for the possibility of regeneration to have existed in the 1960s one thing above all else was needed: a revolutionary pole of attraction, a party, or at least a significant fighting propaganda group that could have been a point of reference to such radicalised workers.

But tragically none existed. Only a variety of critical left centrist forces emerged in the cauldron of these events of the late 1960s and early 1970s – including the faction inside the International Socialists that was to give rise to Workers Power.

Worryingly, the FT's formulation suggests that the pressure of the radicalised workers alone would have seen the scales drop from the eyes of the established centrist leaders of the USFI and other tendencies as they reached out for the *Transitional Programme*, forcing them to abandon the centrist programme with which they have operated for the previous two decades. These centrist leaders on the contrary blocked, intimated and expelled any critical voices.

Our use of the term "petrified centrism" which draws the FT's fire, to describe the centrism of Trotskyist origin in the post-war period, is intended to draw a parallel with Trotsky's use of a similar term to label the Independent Labour Party in the 1930s, a member of the London Bureau. He meant by this term to indicate a form of centrism that avoids for a certain time the harsh fate that awaits all centrism – to choose decisively between reform and revolution. Essentially this is because these centrist formations are marginalised sufficiently from the workers' vanguard not to have to choose either option under the hammer blows of the class struggle.

The FT's rejection of this term is linked to its refusal to identify a coherent centrist method within the FI post-1951-53. Once the FI's centrism was defined as uniquely remediable by the experience of the masses and their pressure on the International, the way is open to classifying it as a special kind of centrism.

This flawed analysis of the FI's complete programmatic collapse has led the FT to adopt an objectivist and one-sided view of the possibility of regeneration and to the superiority of this form of centrism over others; hence the fetishisation of the slogan of reconstruction of the Fourth International and the privileged position it is given in the process of revolutionary regroupment.

For relations with the LRCI it became an absolute hurdle. Conversely, for those that could agree on this slogan like the POR of Argentina, it was a passport for prioritised discussions. This led swiftly to the adoption of a political agreement signed between the FT and the POR which represented a real step back in the FT's approach to revolutionary regroupment.[10]

The document is so general and abstract as to be of little use; the level of agreement would not withstand the first serious test of the class struggle. It could have been signed by any one of dozens of groups internationally. But the FT's willingness to put agreement on the Fourth International slogan above all else bore bitter fruits when a clash over tactics inside Argentina saw the process derailed amid acrimony.

In the analysis of the post-war FI, the FT's nerve fails at the last moment. The FT correctly note it collapsed into centrism, that revolutionary continuity was broken and that its organisational fragmentation has lasted until this day. In short, it has ceased to exist.

The FT rejected the idea, along with the LRCI, of putting back the broken pieces of the FI or bringing the "world family of Trotskyism" back under the same roof because of a some supposed common affinity to principles of the *Transitional Programme*.

The FI failed the test of history in the 1940s and collapsed. To assert despite this and over and against this that the Transitional Programme "remains valid" and that it was simply the Trotskyists that failed, not Trotskyism, is not good enough. The centrist errors were committed in the name of the *Transitional Programme* just as they were carried out under the banner of the Fourth International. Just as a new programme is needed so to a new International is needed.

Of course, the many "Fourth Internationals" have not embraced counter-revolution: they remain centrist. But this does not justify the perspective of reforming them. Trotsky

broke with the Third International when it was centrist; centrist parties and Internationals can become useless for making a revolution – irreformable. It is exactly the nature of centrist forces that they do not actively implement a counter-revolution: their political vacillation often facilitates it however.

The German USPD, the Chinese or the British CPs in the 1920s, the ILP or the POUM in the 1930s etc. did not themselves implement the bourgeois counter-revolution – indeed many of them were among its first victims. What they did was to obstruct the decisive independent action of the vanguard, stopping it from breaking in time with reformism.

Revolutionaries are obliged to break politically not only with parties which openly side with the counter-revolution but also with all forces which do not consciously and with the correct program fight for the proletarian revolution. That is why Lenin and Trotsky called for a decisive break from centrist forces.

A wrong perspective

In the resolution adopted at the December FT/PTS 1998 conference "On the balance and orientation of the international policy of the PTS and the FT(AEI)" there is a self-criticism:

". . . we think that we made an error in seeking to transform the major theoretico-political strength and the strategic policy of the 'Liaison Committee' into a policy for immediate action, thus separating the objective and subjective conditions for its correct application. The central feature of the conjuncture which prevents this policy being of immediately applicable is the non-existence of "left wings" in the Trotskyist movement."

This passage refers to the FT's hopes of influencing what the they refer to as unstable national-Trotskyist currents (the POR-A, with whom the FT formed an exploratory committee) or "transitory phenomena" (the Voix des Travailleurs split from Lutte Ouvriere in France).

The FT says that it "overestimated the possibility of influencing [them] into taking a progressive course". To us this is only an empirical recognition of a concrete failure rather than a serious self-criticism of an erroneous perspective. Worse, it threatens to turn the Liaison Committee into a general principle – in fact into an obstacle to concrete and real steps to building a real international democratic centralist tendency. The negative sides of this can be seen in the criticism of what the FT takes to be the LRCI'S position.

"Strengthening ones' own tendency, gaining groups or individuals (or fusing with them) around an accord, with its theoretical and historic bases, and a general programme."

Such a method, the FT say, was that of the LIT under Moreno and "today the comrades of the LRCI have a similar method. For us this is a self-proclamatory method and one which is powerless to make strategic steps forward on the road to the reconstruction of the FI."

The FT says there is a contradiction in our view that continuity was broken in the late 1940s or early 1950s and claiming it can be restored by currents moving to the left from centrism. How should such forces recognise one another unless they have been able to "effectively incarnate the revolutionary programme in the class struggle. Not only is it self-proclamatory but it runs the danger, of transforming itself, through its impotence, into the search for short-cuts, whereby the revolutionary programme will be degraded".

Against these two false methods the FT puts forward the Liaison Committee, built on the basis of programmatic and strategic lessons and the sharp facts of the class struggle, claiming this is "the same method as Trotsky followed after the definitive break with the Third International in 1933".

Nevertheless, the FT affirms at the same time that this policy of Liaison Committees, nationally and internationally, is not counterposed to fusions with other tendencies on an international or national level.

So why then do the FT rule out even a serious organised discussion to see whether the basis exists for a fusion into a common tendency with us? Who else other than the LRCI responded positively to the FT's draft Manifesto of February last year?

No one. Yet the FT have refused to even acknowledge, let alone reply, to what we suspect is the only fraternal, positive and detailed critique of the FT's major international document of the last years. This leads us to question the FT leaders' seriousness as real internationalists: to be a real proletarian internationalist you have to do more than denounce imperialism and solidarise with the actions of the world's oppressed – you need actively to build an international Trotskyist tendency.

We think the FT are very confused on this question. This confusion is in part a product of Morenoism and the FT's break from it. We have nothing in common with the Moreno-Lambert notions of fusion that dominated the 1978-80 period. We reject absolutely the idea of a statement of "orthodox" Trotskyist principles, that is, a programme which has drawn no revolutionary lessons from events since 1940 and confines itself to platitudes.

It was no surprise to us at the time that the Moreno-Lambert "Fourth International" scarcely lasted 12 months or that it was unable to stand up to the election of Mitterrand in France. Indeed, we publicly predicted it at the time.

But that is exactly why we want to re-elaborate our programme on the questions and major tactical methods which Trotsky only outlined, such as electoral tactics (which were little discussed and debated in the 1930s, because other issues stood in the foreground). The last thing we suggest is an abstract programme of ancient truths.

Hitherto, this issue has been mixed up with the entirely separate issue of what strategy is needed to reconstruct the revolutionary international. We know well that to found a new (or refound the Fourth) International we need serious forces drawn from centrism and from the major countries on all the continents. We are not likely to proclaim this task accomplished when it has not been. We are talking today not of founding an International but of building an international tendency. We are building an international revolutionary tendency that can be an instrument for this indispensable and urgent task.

We recognise that this tendency will itself need go through a series of fusions (and splits too) which will enrich and transform our programme as well as strengthening our active intervention in the class struggle in as many countries as possible. The same transformation will take place in our organisational structure and the personnel of our leading bodies. We are not a capitalist business trying to increase its market share or take over its rivals.

We seek to fuse with other revolutionary forces, to transform and be transformed by them. The deeper such forces have already sunk roots in the working class, the more seasoned in class battles is their leadership, the more such a new organisation will represent a qualitative as well as a quantitative transformation of the Trotskyist forces on the planet.

Why is it any more "self-proclamatory" to form such a tendency, on the best programmatic basis possible, than it is to form a national organisation?

There is nothing wrong with "proclaiming" what the LRCI are – revolutionaries – and what we have achieved – the foundation of a small international tendency. Who else will "proclaim" this to the workers' vanguard if we don't do it ourselves? What do the FT counterpose to this – a modest silence? Waiting for the masses to spontaneously hail the FT or the LRCI? Or do they stand by Trotsky's method?

It seems to us wrong to elevate the Bloc of Four as Trotsky's "method of building an international organisation".[11] It was a short-lived bloc between an international revolutionary organisation (the ICL) and three supposedly leftwards-moving centrist organisations whose avowed aim was to draft a common programme and achieve fusion. The International Left

Opposition, the International Communist League and the Movement for the Fourth International – Trotsky's actual international organisations – achieved the maximum programmatic homogeneity and sought the best democratic centralist structure that human and material circumstances permitted.

"The opposition is now taking shape on the basis of principled ideological demarcation and not on the basis of mass actions. This corresponds to the character of our era, similar processes occurred within the Russian Social Democracy and during the years of the counter-revolution and within the international Social Democracy during the war years ideological groupings in a period of stagnation or ebb tide disclose great tendency toward differentiation, splits, and internal struggles. We cannot leap out of the period in which we live. A clear, precise ideological differentiation is unconditionally necessary, it prepares future successes."[12]

Trotsky explicitly rejected the idea that small size, or the obstacle this constitutes to "effectively incarnate the revolutionary programme in the class struggle". Lack of deep roots in the working class is no alibi for inaction in building an international organisation:

"If the Communist Left throughout the world consisted of only five individuals, they would have nevertheless have been obliged to build an international organisation simultaneously with the building of one or more international organisations."

"It is wrong to view a national organisation as the foundation and the International as the roof. The interrelation here is of an entirely different type. Marx and Engels started the communist movement in 1847 with an international document and with the creation of an international organisation. The same thing was repeated in the creation of the First International. The very same path was followed by the Zimmerwald Left in preparation for the Third International. Today this road is dictated far more imperiously than in the days of Marx. It is of course possible in the epoch of imperialism for a revolutionary proletarian tendency to arise in one or another country, but it cannot thrive and develop in one isolated country; on the very next day after its formation it must seek or create international ties, an international platform, an international organisation, because a guarantee of the correctness of the national policy can be found only along this road. A tendency which remains shut-in nationally over a stretch of years condemns itself irrevocably to degeneration."[13]

The above quotations were aimed at the Bordigists but Trotsky experienced similar hesitation from within the French Left Opposition:

"The main reason for this loss of months, almost a year, in the formation of the international organisations, is in my opinion, the lack of understanding that can be observed among a number of comrades about the reciprocal relations between national and international organisations of the proletariat. Among certain elements of the opposition the struggle against bureaucratic centralism has revived a non-Marxist conception of the reciprocal relationship between the national sections and the international organisation, according to which the national sections are the foundation and walls and the international organisation is the roof to be added at the end. Among some of the Belgian and French comrades there was a strong opposition to "premature" international organisation."[15]

And again:

"Some wise men who understand nothing of the character of our epoch, and learned nothing from the victories and defeats of the proletariat, try to reason as follows: first we will build a national party and then, on a solid and safe foundation, we shall erect the International. This argument sounds very serious, circumspect, solid, but in reality it demonstrates philistine short-sightedness. Can they, in this case, refuse the establishment of international connections, elaboration of programmatic and strategic questions, exchange of political experience and, finally, mutual practical support, already at the first steps of their work"[14]

We cite these passages not out of dogmatism but because we have never heard a good argument against them. The FT has occasionally quipped that "neither you nor we are Trotsky" – that is, we are not seasoned leaders of workers in mass struggles. But this false argument would hold well on a national terrain too. Indeed its falsity is shown if one does just that.

If anyone suggested to the PTS that it should not offer itself as a leader in the class struggles of the Argentine proletariat because it had not yet got deep enough roots in the working class or because its leaders had insufficient experience they would reject such ideas with indignation.

The refusal to lead signifies an ossified centrist organisation, content to vegetate on the fringes of the bureaucratically-led mass labour movement, making savage criticism of the leaders perhaps, but so fearful of "self-proclamation" that it never offers workers a revolutionary alternative.

The PTS rightly rejects this attitude on the national scale. But its fatally flawed understanding of post-1953 Trotskyism prevents it from applying the correct method on an international scale.

From the moment that a leftward-moving centrist throws off centrism they have an imperative duty to seek and fuse with co-thinkers on an international level. On what basis ? On the basis of a revolutionary programme. Their mutual support and co-operation must aim towards that of single organisation whether that is a faction or a party.

We think that the FT should reconsider this position on building the International very seriously. The spirit of internationalism cannot live without an earthly body, no matter how weak the latter is.

National and international rooting in the class struggle should, as Trotsky says, be pursued simultaneously and equally seriously. An organisation as numerically strong as the PTS, with a strong basis of theoretical analysis over the last eight years, with clear



PTS CONTINGENT ON A BUENOS AIRES DEMO, DECEMBER 1995

positions on many of the major events of the class struggle, should be much more pro-active in the formation of an international tendency. The FT are not idle, we are aware of that.

The FT started its work with fraternal co-thinkers in Mexico and Chile. The FT have sent comrades to Brazil and have contacts in Bolivia; the FT have an emissary in London and two more in France. On this road there are setbacks we no only too well. The FT lost a major part of its Chilean group and is having to rebuild it. Results in Brazil and Mexico we understand have been slow. Yet the objective situation in Latin America in the last five years has been more favourable than before.

We know the value of inherited fraternal groups from a faction fight (the Irish Workers Group played that part in the case of Workers Power); we know the value of sending comrades from one section to another country (the LRCI's French section was founded by them).

But in Latin America, Austria, Germany, the Czech Republic, Sweden our modest successes have been due to the equal priority we have accorded to searching out and intersecting with critically-minded groups and devoting time and resources to a dialogue aimed at overcoming our separateness.

We think the PTS/FT could have and should have achieved as much if not more than the LRCI along these lines in the last ten years. Together we believe that we could achieve far more.

In previous discussions the FT rejected democratic centralism at an international level while claiming to have adopted it at a national level.

We replied that such distinction is arbitrary and dangerous: the idea that the adoption of it nationally flows from greater "national rootedness" when we are talking of hundreds of militants in the case of Argentina and substantially less elsewhere makes no sense.

It seems to us a recipe for potential relapse into the "mother section" syndrome, with one largish section "earning" its right to be dominant due to its size, its roots etc.

Conclusion

The PTS has many fine qualities. Its members are youthful, energetic, determined to find a road to the working class. We know from personal experience the revolutionary mettle of the cadres of the PTS in Argentina, and the FT in Mexico. They have small but effective cells of working class militants in several industries. They run impressive electoral campaigns at a national level. They have in the past years produced considerable amount of propaganda and theory. They orient outwards towards world events and to the international left which they appraise with appropriate revolutionary sharpness.

Of course, we are now only too aware of grave weakenesses in the politics and method of the FT. We consider the PTS to have a tendency towards theoretical dogmatism when what is required is theoretical re-elaboration and innovation; that they have tended to abstract and sectarian tactics in the European labour movement; that they pivot their support for petit-bourgeois nationalists simply and one-sidedly around whether they are in a clash with imperialism, rather than deriving it from the concrete content of that clash (e.g. Haiti 1994, Republika Srpska 1995, Kosova 1999).

Some of this may have obstructed a fusion or they may have been overcome by further discussion and debate. We were prepared to invest the time and effort into finding out since we consider the PTS and the FT to be still the only international current with whom we have a wide spectrum of programmatic and methodological agreement. But the PTS/FT seem unwilling to prioritise a serious search for agreement or the uncovering of the roots of our differences.

The PTS leaders have not broken with a left-centrist view of building an international tendency, its relationship with national parties and necessity of democratic centralism eve at the earliest stage.

To a false view of the role of programme in building the International must be added a tendency to cling to Trotsky's perspectival prognoses rather than to boldly use his method to analyse those predictions which were falsified as he did himself. Lastly the comrades by showing a fear of "self-proclamation" run the danger of failing to break with Moreno's Argentine exceptionalism.

Therefore we say to the PTS members what we have proposed many times to the PTS leadership: either join with us in drafting a common programmatic manifesto or indicate to us what are the principled obstacles to this. We set out above the differences which still exist or which have emerged since the agreement of 1995.

After having reconsidered this balance sheet we appeal to the militants of the PTS-FT to take once more the road of revolutionary regroupment and to clear out of the way those who obstruct revolutionary unity. ■

FOOTNOTES

1 *Workers Power*, January 1996

2 ibid.

3 See Dave Stockton, "The PTS and Argentine Trotskyism". *Trotskyist International* 21, January 1997, for an evaluation of the differences that existed.

4 *Estrategia Internacional 10,*

5 Even so differences existed over the weight of certain factors pushing towards restoration in the 1980s, see "The PTS and Argentine Trotskyism", ibid.

6 For a recent worked example of the LRCI's analysis of a completed restoration process, see Keith Harvey, "Hungary; the end of goulash communism". *Trotskyist International* 23

7 Furthermore even the Albanian 1997 example does not prove the case of the FT methodology. Even here the rulers did not have to crush the armed resistance of the workers but could "peacefully" pacify them – by the election of a social democratic government and the welcoming of an imperialist peace keeping force. This again demonstrates the dominance of the democratic form of counter-revolution in the ex-Stalinist states.)

8 See Estrategia Internacional 7

9 See *The Death Agony of the Fourth International and the Tasks of Trotskyists Today*, Workers Power/IWG, 1983

10. Published in La Verdad Obrera #39

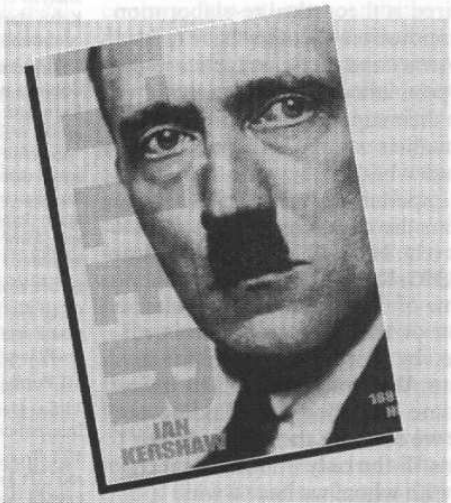
11 See Dave Stockton, "The Fight for the Fourth International". *Trotskyist International* 20

12 L Trotsky, "To the editorial board of Prometeo", 21 June 1930, *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, [1930], New York.

13 L Trotsky, "Circular letter No 1" 21 June 1930, ibid.

14 L Trotsky, "A Real Achievement", *Writings Leon Trotsky [1933--34]*, New York p228

Hitler
FROM OBSCURITY TO POWER



Mark Abram reviews
Hitler 1889-36: Hubris
by Ian Kershaw
Penguin 1998 £20

It is a fair bet that Hitler would be on most people's top ten list of twentieth century figures who were "mad, bad and dangerous to know". Kershaw's excellent first volume of Hitler's life tells us why they'd be right.

Biographers do not have to sympathise with the ambitions or achievements of their subjects. It would be difficult indeed to find a serious scholar today who would do this for Adolf Hitler, whose name has become a byword for evil.

Ian Kershaw makes it plain from the start that he holds no brief for the life's work of the Austrian born German Chancellor of the Third Reich as he charts his rise from provincial obscurity to national demi-god.

But lack of sympathy has not prevented him writing a book that is both a readable, if not innovative, account of Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, and a fascinating insight into the personality of Hitler himself.

Hitler was a thoroughly unpleasant individual. No surprises there then, except that, monstrous as his crimes against European Jews, Slavs and the working class were, there have been plenty of other reactionary figures this century who could in private be witty, charming and cultured.

Not so Hitler. He was pathologically incapable of forming personal relationships on anything approaching an equal or compassionate basis. Even the few friends from before 1914 that have been interviewed or written memoirs could not testify to anything other than that Hitler was boorish and domineering.

He was a monumental egotist He never held a conversation, merely lectured or hectored. His loss of temper when challenged cowed all but the steely. He never read for enlightenment but only to confirm a prejudice. His one genuine cultural pastime, opera, was barely more than an obsession with one German composer – Wagner. His heroic and mythical pastiches of Teutonic history set to stirring scores inflamed Hitler's pan-German from his youth onward.

He was a misogynist; generally avoiding female company. Nor could he contemplate them in his political circle. The few he was in any way intimate with (it is a fair bet that he died celibate) were allowed to be near him on condition they purred at the right moments and acted with childlike naiveté. He loved his mother and his dogs and that was about it.

The man was sad and he was also certainly bad. But how did this individual, as opposed to many others, get to such prominence? How did a man who never killed anyone personally come to be directly responsible for the murder of millions in backstreets, battlefronts and deathcamps?

A massive ego helped but what personal skills prepared him for his life as Germany's national führer? It was certainly not his talent for organisation. All the evidence proves that he was the opposite of bureaucratic. Indeed, he was feckless and unreliable, generally indolent outside of frenetic bouts of electoral work. As Chancellor he rarely appeared before noon. He lacked the decisiveness usually associated in the mind with a dictator. He would often prevaricate for a long time over urgent decisions before acting.

However, although these traits were to become increasingly dysfunctional as Germany prepared for and engaged in war with its European rivals, they worked to Hitler's advantage on many occasions. Indeed, although Kershaw attaches no great significance to it, Hitler's frequent refusal to intervene in the internal party strife while the Nazis were still growing into a mass party, played an important part in preparing him for dictatorial power. All dictators derive their pre-eminent position from balancing over social forces that have fought each other to a standstill. Within the Nazi party, rivalry between various would-be leaders frequently threatened to paralyse activity. Unable to defeat each other, rivals appealed to Hitler for support, only to find that he did nothing. This both prolonged the crisis and emphasised that only a decision from Hitler would settle a dispute. In fact, Hitler often waited simply to see which faction was stronger and then backed it.

Kershaw provides interesting evidence of the stages by which Hitler came to believe that he was himself the saviour of the German volk that he had called for at hundreds of beery meetings in the early twenties. As his conviction grew, so his characteristic vacillation allowed him not only to emphasise his special status but also to see which course of action would work to his own advantage, organisationally or politically. Later, as Chancellor and then Fuhrer, Hitler consciously created overlapping responsibilities throughout the party and state in order to continue this Bonapartist technique.

For Kershaw, Hitler's only real and relevant talent, but an absolutely decisive one, was his ability as a propagandist and orator. To those of us who do not speak German, and were brought up to "World at War" images on TV with mad Adolf waving his arms around, this may come as a surprise. But Kershaw provides many testimonies of the electrifying effect of being present at a Hitler speech. Of course, the audience had to be predisposed to agreeing to the message; his brand of rhetoric was not designed to persuade the totally unconvinced.

While he was pathologically incapable of social chit chat, he was transformed in front of large crowds. He had that rare, awesome talent – also seen in revolutionary leaders like Trotsky or the French reformist Jaures among the great orators of the pre-electronic age – of fusing with the consciousness of the audience, of articulating, magnifying and then throwing back at the audience the passions, the yearnings of the masses. Of course, in content it was the vilest racist filth, the most unimaginable demagogy. But it was potent.

Kershaw cites many housewives, politicians, soldiers, unemployed workers, shopkeepers, who were mesmerised by a Hitler speech, roused to action and commitment.

This talent was first unearthed after the First World War. Hitler avoided being demobbed until March 1920, as his four years as an army dispatch messenger at the front was the one thing in his life that had given it meaning. Germany's loss was a bitter pill to swallow.

He was on the verge of returning to obscurity when, in May 1919, he was selected to join a course in the Reichswehr (army) after the short-lived Munich workers' republic was savagely put down. The purpose of the course was to train propagandists to counter "Bolshevik" sympathies in the army. It was here in Munich that Hitler received his first serious systematic political education that fused all his nationalist and anti-semitic prejudices (common enough in the Austria of the 1890s and early 1900s) into some kind of doctrine.

His talent as a speaker was immediately noticed and marshalled. In the summer of 1919, at a public meeting, he came across the tiny anti-semitic German Workers Party (DAP), one of 73 nationalist organisations at the time, all insignificant and most founded since the war's end. In September, he became member number 555, but the fact that the "party" began numbering at 500 says a great deal about the world in which Hitler moved. Nonetheless, his talents were recognised and he was soon employed as the "recruitment officer". Within three years, his success at this was such that serious figures were comparing him to Italy's fascist ruler, Mussolini.

That Hitler did not get driven to the margins of society again after 1918 was due not to these narrow gifts but rather to the fact that Germany had changed. As Kershaw notes:

"Without the changed conditions, the product of a lost war, revolution and a pervasive sense of national humiliation, Hitler would have remained a nobody."

Kershaw is professor of modern history at Sheffield University. He is not a Marxist but he has produced an account of Weimar Germany (1918-33) that completely confirms the analysis of the rise and success of German fascism provided by Leon Trotsky at the time.

Trotsky from the first grasped that fascism was, above all, a mass movement of the desolate and dispossessed middle classes and unemployed. Its purpose was to destroy the organised workers' movement – its unions and social democratic and communist parties – and on that basis to "nationalise" the masses so that Germany could fight against its imperialist rivals in a war of conquest that would revive the fortunes of German capitalism and the German nation.

Having lost the war in 1918, and then been subject to rapacious reparations, loss of colonial possessions, demilitarisation and even annexation of some of its border territories, Germany was thrown into civil war and revolution in 1918/19. Primarily through the conscious betrayal of the reformist social democrats (SPD) and the fatally delayed formation of a Communist Party, this revolution was crushed.

Hitler, too, felt betrayed after the war. He welcomed the downfall of the decrepit Hapsburg monarchy but hated the workers' revolution. He opportunistically, if passively, backed the SPD as a lesser evil than the Communists for a while. But the far right sought other explanations for Germany's ruin than just the weaknesses of the old regime. The DAP and Hitler relentlessly targeted Jews, democracy and Bolshevism as the main culprits for the nation's plight.

In these early years, Hitler trumpeted his anti-semitism much more than his anti-Marxism to drum up recruits for the DAP. It was not this ideology or his reactionary nostrums that distinguished Hitler in these days from a myriad of similar völkische parties. It was, as Kershaw shows, his commitment to building a movement of the masses on the streets through which to energise the reactionary hordes, smash their opponents in the workers' movement and destroy bourgeois democracy.

Hitler had watched – terrified and full of loathing – the big disciplined marches of the SPD and Communist Party both before 1914 and during the revolutionary days of 1919.

Hitler had watched – terrified and full of loathing – the big disciplined marches of the SPD and Communist Party both before 1914 and during the revolutionary days of 1919. While he abhorred their internationalism and their defence of class interests, he admired their resoluteness and mass character and determined to ape this in his own search for power.

From his youth in Austria, Hitler had inherited a hatred of democracy. He viewed with contempt the impotent proceedings of the powerless parliaments under the Habsburg monarchy. He saw bourgeois democracy as useless and indecisive and fashioned a world view that dispensed with such a facade and concentrated absolute power within a state-party. Within that party, real power would be placed in the hands of one authoritative and unquestioned leader who would be intolerant of factional feuding and forcibly impose his will upon the competing classes.

The failed 1923 beer hall putsch in Munich, when Hitler's forces launched a futile and adventurist assault on regional government in November, also taught Hitler another lesson. From that moment on, he would seek a constitutional, if not peaceful, path to power and not seek to challenge the army head on for state power. Rather, he determined to build a powerful mass movement that combined electoral work with brutality towards its opponents and, once in office, sought to take over the army from within the state apparatus using his own mass paramilitary formation (SA) as the tool for the job.

The attempted putsch was doomed in advance, so small and without influence was the DAP. But by his action and by his self-promotion inside prison during 1924 (writing Mein Kampf made him a millionaire eventually) he sealed his reputation. On release from prison in 1925, he proceeded to refound the NSDAP (as the DAP had become in 1920) using his influence to reorganise and purge it of all opponents. By 1929, the NSDAP was a national, if small, party, well-organised and hegemonic on the nationalist right and Hitler was in unchallenged control of the movement. Factional infighting – once endemic – was largely a thing of the past.

Yet, for all this, in the mid-1920s the "Nazi Movement was no more than a fringe irritant in German politics. Hitler. . . was confined to the political wilderness." In 1927, the Interior Ministry reported that the NSDAP was a "splinter group incapable of exerting any noticeable influence on the great mass of the population." All this was true, but about to change.

Between the failed 1923 putsch and the Interior Ministry report, Germany's economy had stabilised to a degree. Industrial production and real wages surpassed the pre-war level for the first time in 1927. Hitler's fortunes waned. In the 1928 national Reichstag elections, the Nazis got a mere 2.6 per cent of the vote.

But the great crash on Wall Street in October 1929 irrevocably switched the points of history. Economic slump engulfed the capitalist world over the next four years. In January 1930, German unemployment reached over 4.5 million; wages, output and prices began a steep fall uninterrupted until mid-1932. Workers were thrown onto the scrap heap; the middle classes were ruined.

The Nazis benefited from the crisis immediately. The masses' disaffection was aimed at the parties of "democracy" in the Weimar Republic who ruled from 1918 when the monarchy's power was dissolved. Social democracy and the traditional right were blamed for the calamity. The Nazis were untouched by any governmental responsibility; and they campaigned against the increasingly vicious reparations' plan of the Americans and British. They took their mass propaganda machine onto the streets. As early as December 1929 they gained 11 per cent of the vote in regional state elections in Thuringia.

When the government was unexpectedly dissolved in March 1930, Hitler was handed an unexpected gift. Elections would not have been due until mid-1932. Kershaw undoubtedly places too much emphasis upon "this act of irresponsibility" by the traditional parties for giving Hitler a leg up to power. In fact, Germany's social crisis was too great to be contained by parliamentary solutions and at one point or another it was destined to overwhelm the institutions of bourgeois democracy. Until 1933, Germany was ruled increasingly by decree as the paralysed parliament was sidelined again and again. The Nazis undoubtedly gained from this, but so also did the Communists.

The September 1930 Reichstag elections saw the Nazi's win 18.3 per cent of the

vote, gaining over 100 deputies and becoming the second largest party. Again, Hitler turned down all suggestions that he accept a governmental post, demanding instead total power so as to avoid being held responsible for the deepening crisis. But the mass terror on the streets intensified dramatically in the next two years as the SA's mass electoral propaganda was everywhere accompanied by open brutality towards Jews, social democrats and, especially, communists.

Kershaw's book deals with the question of the nature and degree of support Hitler got from the German ruling class. Was the Nazi party a capitalist creation from the start? The answer is clearly no. The NSDAP was a creature of the pan-German middle classes, initially with regional support in the early 1920s in Catholic Baveria but later after 1929 striking deep roots in the rural Protestant areas of northern and eastern Germany.

But without wealthy backers Hitler could not have built the party. From 1919 until the failed coup of 1923, Hitler was able to come to the fore because he attracted support from rich and influential figures within German ruling circles; publishers, the odd industrialist and several landowners. This support was critical in providing a national structure, organisation and financial backing for the Nazis; but it was often short of funds for campaigning.

However, the majority of the German ruling class did not want to see Hitler come to power, certainly not alone, as late as 1932. The industrial bourgeoisie generally favoured the conservative parties, or at best a government with some Nazi ministers. Not a few thought Hitler a dangerous crank and preferred social order to be maintained by stronger authoritarian measures from the succession of Chancellors relying on the army, not Hitler's hundreds of thousands of political paramilitaries. The backers of the cabinets of von Papen and von Schleicher in 1930-32 sought desperately to avoid the pressure of the masses on government, even the reactionary hordes of Hitler. This was especially so since the ideological profile of the Nazis was often confusing to the bourgeoisie.

As late as the summer of 1930, the ideological stance of the NSDAP was confused by the existence of a powerful current within it around Otto Strasser who preached the need for a "social revolution" and consciously aimed to draw upon the support of the working class and mass of unemployed who were attracted to the Communist Party. While this was a chimera, nevertheless, the demands of the Strasserites, if implemented, would have involved significant erosions of the freedom of the capitalist class. Such strivings were naturally anathema to them. The only consistent Nazi backers, therefore, well into the 1930s, were the German landowners.

Now so close to real power, between mid-1930 and mid-1932 Hitler resolved any lingering ideological vagaries. First, Otto Strasser and his supporters were kicked out; secondly the Ruhr industrialists were assiduously courted; up until then only the steel magnate Thyssen was a Hitler fan.

In mid-1932, Hitler suffered a major crisis. In the July elections, the Nazis received 37 per cent of the vote and were the largest party. Hitler refused to accept anything but the Chancellorship. Gregor Strasser, the second most important figure inside the Nazis, however, wanted Hitler to join a coalition government under von Schleicher, thereby lending it mass support. In the event, the Reich President, von Hindenburg, refused to even consider giving the Chancellorship to, "this Bohemian corporal" and Hitler's strategy of mass mobilisation and electoral support appeared to have collapsed. Strasser began to move away from Hitler, manoeuvring with von Schleicher and adding to the sense of demoralisation within the Nazi leadership when he finally broke from Hitler in December.

The fight against the Nazis could not be limited to a "defence of democracy" even if that were its starting point. As in Russia in 1917, even democratic demands could only be achieved by the creation of a workers' council republic.

For Hitler, the whole point of his strategy was not just to "get into government" but to get the only office that would allow him to destroy all the main parties, including the conservative bourgeois ones, which were part of the "Weimar system". Trotsky completely understood this aspect of German fascism when he said that Hitler aimed to "politically expropriate" the German bourgeoisie (even against its will or better judgement) in order to defend its economic class interests.

Hitler's strategy paid off in January 1933, when he was finally offered the Chancellorship by President Hindenburg. A further election in November 1932, although it saw a decline in the Nazi vote, nonetheless confirmed that the conservative parties could not rule as a minority government. Hitler's bourgeois opponents had run out of ideas; they could no longer rule effectively as a minority without Hitler's support.

Kershaw's book deals in detail with the parliamentary balancing acts and political manoeuvring between the main traditional bourgeois conservative parties in the years 1930-33 as they sought first to marginalise, then to incorporate and, finally, to surrender to Hitler. He is at great pains to establish his case that untimely or foolish decisions by irresponsible politicians were mainly responsible for Hitler's success.

In that Kershaw insists that Hitler's victory was not inevitable and could have been prevented, he is, of course, correct. But he pays scant attention to the real social and political forces that could have stopped Hitler and the Nazis – the working class and their parties the SPD and KPD. He briefly bemoans their short-sighted dismissal of the threat posed by the Nazis in the 1920s and the sectarian posturing of the Communist Party. But he fails to see that mistaken strategy and tactics by the leaders of the German workers' movement were the main reasons why Hitler was not stopped.

Trotsky condemned the ultra-left madness of the "Third Period" Stalinist Communist Party which insisted that the social democrats - still the main party of the German workers and largest party in the Reichstag up to 1932 , were worse than the Nazis. As a result, all effective practical political co-operation to defeat the Nazi attacks on them was forbidden and the social democratic leaders were able to maintain their hold over their base as a result. This was crucial because the SPD leaders were commited to maintaining and working within the shambles of the Weimar republic, even tolerating the authoritarian rule of von Papen. By propping up a system that could be seen to be not working, the reformists played into the hands of the Nazis whilst not preparing their own mass support for the violent confrontation with the stormtroopers that alone could have halted their momentum.

What Trotsky argued for was a policy that tactically stressed the need for a united front of the workers against fascism and an anti-capitalist programme that would rally the working class masses to a root and branch destruction of the economic power of German capitalism. At the heart of his programme was the recognition that the fight against the Nazis could not be limited to a "defence of democracy" even if that were its starting point. As in Russia in 1917, even democratic demands could only be achieved by the creation of a workers' council republic.

But Kershaw implicitly feels that defence of the "Weimar system" was a realistic possibility against the menace of fascism. He cannot even envisage its replacement by a revolutionary yet democratic socialist alternative. Weimar Germany was a bastard child of the failed German revolution. It was in terminal crisis after 1929. The only issue was what political system would replace it? The choice was: either Hitler's fascist defence of German capitalism and the quasi-constitutional uprooting of Weimar democracy; or socialist revolution.

The final parts of Kershaw's first volume deal with the destruction visited upon the workers' movement in the aftermath of Hitler's success as a result of the failure of the workers' leaders to unite in opposition to Hitler. The trade unions, the social democrats and communists were the first targets, their leaders arrested, their premis-

es ransacked and closed, their activists murdered and exiled, their publications banned.

By 1934, the plebeian rage of the millions of people who carried out these deeds in the SA had to be checked by Hitler. Prominent bourgeois were being picked off, even ex-Chancellor von Schleicher was murdered.

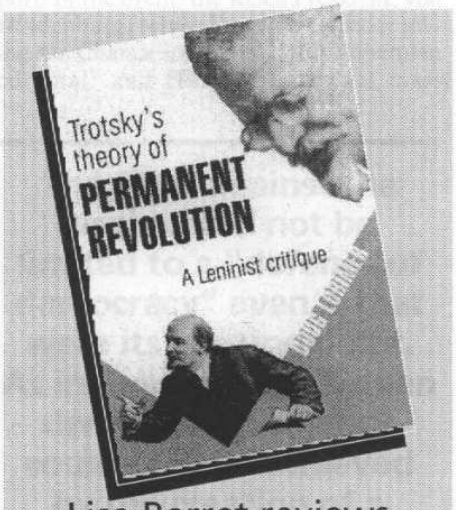
Meanwhile, many in their ranks had expected some immediate reward for the years of service in "the fight against Bolshevism" but little was forthcoming. Restlessness and discontent were rising. The army high command, too, was increasingly ranged against Hitler, disturbed by the presence of an armed paramilitary force loyal not to the state but to the Nazi party. Hitler decided finally to act against the SA and its leader Ernst Rohm in 1934. By a small, but murderous, purge, the SA was demobilised and eventually incorporated and subordinated to the army and the bourgeois state machine, its purpose as shock troops against the workers' movement having been fulfilled. At the same time the army became "nazified".

Kershaw's first volume finishes with Hitler's annexation of the demilitarised Rhineland in March 1936, a fact that announced to the imperialist rivals in Europe that war was inevitable. Hitler would not stop at crushing German imperialism's internal enemies. While we await the second volume, everyone should read Kershaw's lively and richly detailed account of these years.

Don't wait for the paperback; it is widely available in hardback at half price, not because it has been remaindered but because, rightly, it has been heavily discounted as a best seller. ■

TROTSKY'S CRITICS

Recycled rubbish



Lisa Barret reviews
Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution – a Leninist critique
by Doug Lorimer
Sydney, Aus$6.95

It is worthwhile beginning, as the Australian Democratic Socialist Party's (DSP) pamphlet does, by reconsidering the history of Trotsky's and the Left Opposition's (LO's) critique of Stalinist policies in the 1920s.

The fight by Trotsky and the LO against the bureaucratisation of the Bolshevik Party, and the rightward shift in the Communist International, was centred upon Stalin's reactionary theory of socialism in one country, and his related resurrection of the Menshevik "twostage theory" of revolution.

Trotsky argued that in the epoch of imperialism the two stage theory of revolution – whereby revolution in colonial and semicolonial countries is limited to a lengthy bourgeois democratic stage – was a trap for the working class.

It was a trap because it subordinated the interests of the working class in semicolonial countries to the interests of the local bourgeoisie, by insisting that they limit their struggle to bourgeois democratic demands which did not threaten capitalist private property.

This twostage theory, Trotsky and the LO asserted, was not only repudiated by the events of the Russian revolution itself, but was responsible for the military and political disarmament, and eventually the massacre, of thousands of communists in the revolutionary events in China from 1925 to 1928.

Because the Chinese Communist Party, on the advise of the Stalinised Comintern, limited itself to a bourgeois democratic stage, it entered into an alliance with, and subordinated itself to, the bourgeois nationalist Koumintang. The CCP's alliance with the nationalists was the rationale for disarming its own cadre, who were subsequently slaughtered by Koumintang forces.

Against Stalin's reactionary two stage theory Trotsky counterposed his own theory of permanent revolution. At its most fundamental this was the view that revolution in the colonies and semicolonies would have to be led by the working class supported by the peasantry.

Yet any working class government that came to power could not limit itself to bourgeois democratic tasks. As the working class came into conflict with the domestic bourgeoisie, as it inevitably would, a working class government would have to side with the workers and hence make encroachments on capitalist private property, if it was not to be a government of counterrevolution. Hence unfulfilled tasks of the bourgeois revolution would have to grow over into tasks associated with socialist revolution. The revolution would have to become permanent.

The gains of such a revolutionary movement, however, could only be consolidated and built upon by revolutions occurring in other countries. Hence the revolution, far from being the beginnings of "socialism in one country", would also have to become permanent on the international front.

Stalin and his apologists presented Trotsky's criticisms and his theory of permanent revolution as heresies against Marxist Leninism. From 1924 onwards they conducted a campaign of vilification against Trotskyism and Trotsky, which culminated in his assassination in 1940, and the expulsion and murder of thousands of revolutionary communists from commu nists parties around the world.

The principle arguments that the Stalinists levelled against Trotskyism was that it was an "ultraleft" theory which led to ultraleft practices, and that it underestimated the role of the peasantry in revolutions in colonial and semicolonial countries as the Mensheviks had done.

These long dead Stalinist arguments have been raised from the grave, almost word for word, by Lorimer in his pamphlet: "Trotsky shared the Mensheviks' assessment of the peasantry, i.e. that is was too backward, dispersed and passive to play the role of a strategic ally (and be the major social force) in the bourgeoisiedemocratic revolution." 1 This is because "the ultra left theory of permanent revolution that Trotsky counterposed to the Bolsheviks' policy of a two stage, uninterrupted revolution was based on a mechanicalfatalistic conception of the class struggle." And again, Trotsky "rejected, as unrealisable, the Bolshevik policy of a transitional alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry as a whole. Instead, he believed that not only would the working class play the role of political vanguard in the antiTsarist struggle, it would be the main social force in overthrowing and destroying the old order". Just in case the reader hasn't got the point: "by dismissing the possibility and necessity of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry as a whole, Trotsky tended toward the view that the democratic revolution in Russia would be carried out by the proletariat alone..." And finally, to nail the thesis home:

"Trotsky's approach to the land question reflected his repudiation of the decisive role of the peasantry in the bourgeois revolution and of a revolutionarydemocratic alliance between the working class and the entire peasantry as the necessary bridge to the anticapitalist alliance of the workers and poor peasants".

Through applying the device of repetition Lorimer seems to think that his argument will have more weight. He is wrong. Trotsky refuted this Stalinist caricature of his views more that 70 years ago.

Trotsky always insisted that the peasantry, in alliance with the revolutionary proletariat, would play a key role in any revolution in the colonial and semicolonial world. As far back as 1905 he could conclude that:

The oppressed workers and [and!] peasant masses ... must take it upon themselves to create ... the necessary political and organisational preconditions for their triumph".

Similarly, Trotsky's 1928 book *The Permanent Revolution* can be read as an extended response to the charge that his theory ignores the peasantry. He cites a wealth of textual evidence to show that he does not ignore the peasantry, but merely shows their class limitations as a revolutionary force.

In keeping with all previous Marxist scholarship on the subject, he argues that while the peasantry is a necessary ally of the proletariat in revolutionary struggle in the semicolonies, it is the latter who must lead the struggle.

This was because the material conditions

of the peasantry engendered a vacillating petitbourgeois world view and practice, preventing them from independently completing the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution, let alone a socialist revolution.

Trotsky was not alone in this view. It was one that Marx and Engels themselves had advanced on numerous occasions.

As Engels showed in *The Peasant War in Germany*, the agrarian struggle in the 16th century was always led by some urban faction rather than by the peasantry themselves.

This was even more the case in the 1789 French revolution, the most thorough going bourgeois revolution ever, where there is no question that the peasantry was led by the urban bourgeoisie.

By 1848, however, revolutionary events proved that the bourgeoisie was no longer fit to play a progressive role in revolutionary struggle. But did this mean that the peasantry, still the most numerous class in most of Europe, would now play the leading role? Not according to Marx and Engels. The task of leading progressive revolutionary struggle, and with it the peasantry, would fall to the newly emerging proletariat.

As Marx wrote in 1856, commenting about the possibility of further revolutionary situations in Germany:

"The whole thing in Germany will depend on backing the proletarian revolution with some second edition of the peasant war."

The correctness of this position of Marx and Engels that the democratic revolution would have to be led by the proletariat, supported by the peasantry, was thrown into even sharper relief by the experience of the 1905 Russian revolution.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks rightly argued that:

"In the view of the Bolsheviks the proletariat has had laid upon it the active task of pursuing the bourgeoisiedemocratic revolution to its consummation and of being its leader. This is only possible if the proletariat is able to carry with it the masses of the democratic petitbourgeoisie, especially the peasantry, in the struggle against the autocracy and the treacherous liberal bourgeoisie."

This more or less reflects Trotsky's own position. Even Lorimer agrees that:

"Trotsky was in basic agreement with the Bolsheviks on the question of what approach the working class should take toward the liberal bourgeoisie." and "that the working class, through its own party, had to play the role of political leader in the Russian revolution."

But Lorimer then goes on to argue that: "Trotsky shared the Menshevik's assessment of the peasantry, i.e. that it was too backward, dispersed and passive to play the role of a strategic ally (and be the major force) in the bourgeois democratic revolution"

Lorimer here infers that the Trotskyist position ruled out an alliance between the working class and the peasantry.

The evidence presented by Lorimer relies on one quote:

"Today based on the experience of the [1905] Russian revolution and of the reaction, we can expect the peasantry to play a less independent, not to mention a decisive, role in the development of revolutionary events than it did in 1905. To the extent that the peasantry has remained in the grip of "estate" and feudal slavery, it continues to suffer from economic and ideological disunity, political immaturity, cultural backwardness and helplessness.

Despite its elemental opposition to the old regime, in every movement the peasantry's social energy is always paralysed by these weakness. They force it to halt where really revolutionary action begins ... "

Lorimer slyly and falsely infers from the phrase "less independent, not to mention decisive" that Trotsky "rejected, as unrealisable, the Bolshevik policy of a transitional alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry as a whole".

What Trotsky is saying is that when the class struggle erupts in the countryside the petit-bourgeois peasantry "as a whole" will fragment.

This is a gross misrepresentation of Trotsky's position. Trotsky was not arguing that the proletariat could not enter into an alliance with the peasantry, but that the latter would be unable to 'independently' achieve the overthrow of Tsarism, and that they would not and could not lead the revolutionary struggle in Russia.

When "revolutionary action begins", Trotsky insisted, the peasantry would either have to follow the bourgeoisie or the work ers. In the epoch of imperialism a 'third way' was impossible.

Hence Trotsky is not "dismissing the possibility and necessity of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry".

What he is saying is that when the class struggle erupts in the countryside the petitbourgeois peasantry "as a whole" will fragment. The richer land owning peasants will customarily follow the bourgeoisie and the poorer peasants the proletariat.

Therefore while it is possible to envisage "tactical" alliances with the "whole peasantry", longer term "strategic" alliances on that basis are utopian.

Lorimer himself inadvertently admits this point later in his essay. He concedes that at a certain stage of development in the Russian revolution, the class differentiation of the peasantry was expressed when the rich peasants broke from the working class and joined the camp of counterrevolution.

Why did they break? Because the peasantry is not a homogenous social entity but is itself divided by class. This makes a nonsense of any long term strategic working class alliance with the peasantry "as a whole", as is advocated by Stalin contra Trotsky, and the DSP contra Trotskyism.

Lorimer goes on to accuse Trotsky and the theory of Permanent Revolution "of lacking any conception of the possibility and necessity of measures transitional to the socialist revolution". In the context of the Russian revolution the consequences would be that: "the bourgeoisie would be able to rally the Russian peasantry against the workers government, and easily overthrow it."

The primary transitional measure that Lorimer is alluding to is at the heart of the peasants struggle, land reform.

Trotsky's views on the land question in 1905 were explicit:

"The first thing the proletarian regime must deal with on coming to power is the solution of the agrarian question, with which the fate of vast masses of the population of Russia is bound up. In the solution of this question, as in all others, the proletariat will be guided by the fundamental aim of its economic policy, i.e., to command as large a possible a field in which to carry out the organisation of socialist economy. The form and tempo of the execution of this agrarian policy, however, must be determined by the material resources at the disposal of the proletariat, as well as by care to act so as not to throw possible allies into the ranks of the counterrevolution."

Not only is Trotsky aware, some 12 years before the Russian revolution of 1917, of the importance of the agrarian question for the majority of the Russian people, he even pointed out the dangers for the proletariat if this question was not resolved; namely the possibility of "throwing allies into the ranks of the counterrevolution".

This is precisely why Trotsky never advocated the immediate collectivisation of all peasant lands and a "leap" into socialist agriculture as is sometimes attributed to him. Rather, he was for the immediate expropriation of the big landed estates and the introduction of economic incentives that could progressively shift the balance between private and collectivised agriculture in favour of the latter; hardly measures that would throw the entire peasantry into the hands of the bourgeoisie, as Lorimer suggests.

At this point Lorimer's argument gets even more fanciful. He says:

"Trotsky's mechanical-fatalistic conception of the development of the class struggle led him to draw erroneous conclusions from the experience of the 1905 revolution, that is, to mechanically project them on to the future course of the development of a new revolution n Russia".

This claim is based exclusively on some mistaken predictions that Trotsky made after 1905: namely that he expected a future revolutionary upsurge would drive the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks closer together, and that the introduction by a revolutionary government of an 8 hour day would lead to a general capitalist lockout.

The failure of either to eventuate is allegedly a symptom of Trotsky's "mechanical fatalism". Poor Trotsky! On this issue we can only point out the obvious to Lorimer: numerous perspectival formulations down through the history of the Marxist movement have been falsified by actual events. Marx and Engels themselves predicted that the 1848 revolutions in Europe would turn out very differently than they did.

Did this make them "mechanical fatalists"? No. It only showed that historical contingency and subjective intervention, or lack

of it, can falsify plausible predictions, and that Marxists are not witch doctors or crystal ball gazers.

We shouldn't be surprised then, that Lorimer does not even bother to show how Trotsky tried to project his perspectives in 1905 onto the October Revolution of 1917.

There is hardly any need to when you can show that he is a mechanical fatalist because he made wrong predictions.

The two stages of the Russian Revolution
A central feature of Lorimer's critique of Trotsky revolves around a different appreciation of the 1905 revolution, and the alleged applicability of Lenin's position in 1905 to the 1917 revolution. Hence it is useful to reconsider what is at stake.

Before 1905 Russian Marxists believed that the coming revolution would be a bourgeois democratic revolution. However, when events required that this theoretical position be given a practical character, longlasting disputes arose.

Lenin, the Bolshevik Party and Trotsky all agreed that the Russian bourgeoisie would be incapable of leading the revolution.

Only the Mensheviks believed that because the immediate tasks of the revolution were bourgeois, then the bourgeoisie would have to lead the revolution, with the working class and peasantry in support.

This Menshevik stagist theory held that after the bourgeois revolution there would be a period of capitalist development (stage 1). Once capitalism had developed then and only then could the working class fight for socialism (stage 2). Lenin and Trotsky viewed things differently.

Lenin believed that the revolution would see the coming to power, forcibly, of a government embodying the slogan "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". The tasks facing such a government were to complete the bourgeois democratic minimum programme. While this was a revolutionary advance over the ideas of the Mensheviks, Trotsky could see a flaw.

Trotsky argued that the slogan "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" left open which class would be hegemonic in the new government. Trotsky believed, for reasons already explained, that the working class would have to lead.

However, if the proletariat was to lead such a government it would be compelled to go beyond fulfilling the demands of bourgeois democracy. Why? Because such a government would be immediately confronted with problems that demanded solutions which went beyond capitalist private property.

For example, when faced with strikes, lockouts and sackings, the workers' government would have two options: either yield to the capitalists, repress workers' struggles and thus act as a government of counterrevolution; or defend the rights of workers.

This would mean expropriating the capitalists' factories and organising production on a socialised basis. From this Trotsky drew the bold conclusion:

"The very fact of the proletariat's representatives entering the government, not as powerless hostages, but as the leading force, destroys the line between maximum and minimum programme: that is to say, it places collectivism on the order of the day".

Hence for Trotsky, in a semicolonial country like Russia it is not so much that there are no stages in the revolutionary process, as that there is continuity between the different stages. Both the bourgeois and the socialist tasks would be intertwined and there could be no hard and fast separation between them.

Lorimer wants us to believe that Trotsky abandoned this position after he came over to the side of the Bolsheviks in 1917, and that he "abandoned his criticisms of the existing Bolshevik two stage theory".

The opposite is in fact the case. The period of political instability and dual power between February and October 1917 confirmed Trotsky's view. A bourgeois democratic stage and a socialist stage of revolution could not be rigidly separated, but were organically connected by a period of sharpening social conflicts which could only be resolved progressively if the working class took political power and began eroding the economic basis of the old order.

The Bolsheviks for their part, after a fierce struggle between Lenin and conservatives in the party, were won to the Trotskyist view that the impending revolution would be proletarian in character. This change was most famously embodied in Lenin's "April Theses".

After the February revolution in 1917, and in the absence of Lenin, the Bolshevik leaders trailed events and clung to the two stage theory and the old slogan of "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry".

Stalin and Kamenev wrote in Pravda "what matters now is not the overthrow of capitalism, but the overthrow of autocracy and feudalism".

In April 1917 Lenin returned from exile.

He came out strongly against his old slogan and all those who used it as a cover for compromise and inaction. He argued that the Soviets should offer no support to the Provisional Government. The revolution was not over and that if the dual power situation that existed was to be resolved favourably in the interests of the working class and peasantry, all power should pass to the Soviets.

Initially the leaders of the Bolshevik Party were almost unanimous in their opposition to Lenin's plans. But Lenin appealed to the rank and file of the party and succeeded in changing the course, not only of the party, but of history. He argued:

"Under such circumstances, whoever continued to cling to the formula of a 'democratic dictatorship' renounced, in effect, power and led the revolution into a blind alley.

The fundamental controversial question, around which everything else centred, was this whether or not we should struggle for power: whether or not we should assume power. This alone should be proof that we were not dealing with a mere episodic divergence of opinions but with two tendencies of utmost principled significance.

The first and principled was proletarian and led to the road of world revolution.

The other was 'democratic', i.e. petitbourgeoisand led, in the last analysis, to the subordination of proletarian policies to the requirements of bourgeois society in the process of reform."

In a word Lenin had consigned the old slogan of dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry to the dustbin of history, and embraced the Trotskyist position that working class power had to be fought for.

Lorimer suggests that Lenin came out against his old slogan because "the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has already become a reality ... for this formulae envisages only a relation of classes, and not a concrete political institution implementing this relation; this cooperation".

This is patently ridiculous. Can Lorimer really expect that a serious person will believe that a worker and peasant dictatorship was "already a reality" in April 1917? If it was a reality then why did not the worker/peasant dictatorship withdraw Russia from the war?

Why did it not expropriate the big land owners as it did after October? It did not do so because it was not a reality, and never could be while the bourgeoisie still controlled the levers of political power.

Like many political renegades before him Lorimer can play fast and loose with the slogan "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" because of its algebraic character.

Because the slogan does not spell out which class will be hegemonic in the dictatorship, various conciliators within the Bolshevik party were able to use it as a defence of their position. This happened not only in 1917, but also in the mid 1920s when Stalin appealed to the slogan in his defence of the "block of four classes" which led to the murder and the betrayal of the Chinese revolution.

Trotsky identified the dangers inherent in the political ambiguity of the slogan:

"The formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry bore in large measure an intentionally algebraic character. Lenin did not solve in advance what the political relationship would be between the two participants in the assumed democratic dictatorship, that is the proletariat and the peasantry. ... Yet I came out against the formula 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry', because I saw its shortcomings in the fact that it left open the question of which class would wield the real dictatorship."

Trotsky, learning the lessons of 1917 and the Chinese revolution formulated a much more precise slogan.

"With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semicolonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution to their tasks of achieving democracy and national

emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all the peasant masses."

This is precisely what transpired as a consequence of the October 1917 Russian revolution. The Bolsheviks lead a revolution which gave power to the Russian working class. What was decisive was not the role of the peasantry but the leadership of the proletariat.

While it is true that the appalling social conditions and revolutionary participation of the peasantry were necessary conditions for the success of revolution, it was only the decisive leadership of the working class that could utilise the social weight of the peasantry to achieve the revolutionary transformation of the entire social order.

In other words the working class was the leading force in the October revolution and the state that it established.

Lorimer does not see it in this way. In defending the two stage theory he argues that the October insurrection represented the establishment of the first stage which lasted until July 1918:

"The October Revolution began as a workerpeasant revolution and, then, eight months later, developed uninterruptedly into a proletariansocialist revolution. It was the continuity of proletarian political leadership that gave the transition from the bourgeois revolution to the socialist revolution its uninterrupted character, i.e., made them two stages of a single, uninterrupted revolutionary process."

What Lorimer fails to point out is that his first stage would be impossible without the proletariat taking power and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Furthermore, it went way beyond anything in the bourgeois minimum democratic programme. This included the abolition of private property in land, the creation of a single centralised bank, the abolition of the army and police and their replacement with Soviets and workers' control of production.

What is more, his view that the period from October 1917 to July 1918 represented the first, bourgeois democratic stage of the revolution flatly contradicts his contention, identified above, that Lenin dropped the slogan of dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in April 1917 because it was "already a reality".

Was it a reality or was it not? The confusions are compounded when it comes to commenting on the significance of the October revolution. Contrary to Lenin, Trotsky and the vast weight of socialist scholarship on the subject, Lorimer is at pains to deny that the revolution brought about the dictatorship of the proletariat. Over and over he maintains it was a "democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants" (which apparently had existed since at least April).

He maintains that if Trotsky acknowledged the existence of "the Bolshevik/Left S.R. coalition government..." this would have "forced him to admit that a 'democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants' had been constituted in Russia, during the first democratic stage of the October Revolution."

The existence of such a government was not a problem for Trotsky:

"In the event of a decisive victory of the revolution, power will pass into the hands of that class which plays a leading role in the struggle – in other words, into the hands of the proletariat. Let us say at once that this by no means precludes revolutionary representatives of nonproletarian social groups entering the government. They can and should be in the government: sound policy will compel the proletariat to call to power influential leaders of the urban petit bourgeoisie, of the intellectuals and of the peasantry. The whole problem consists in this: who will determine the content of the government's policy, who will form within it a solid majority."

The DSP not only refuse to raise the spectre of working class power and socialism in countries like Indonesia, but they actively tail groups like the PRD who peddle illusions in bourgeois politicians like Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Contrary to what Lorimer suggests then, Trotsky could conceive of a government with representatives from classes other than the proletariat. The existence of such a government did not constitute a "transitional stage of worker peasant state power in a proletarian revolution, in a predominately peasant country." What defines the class nature of a government is not the personnel who compose it, but which class is hegemonic in the government as expressed by the class interests that it defends. The Soviet government was a government of and for the working class.

It was a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The DSP claims to maintain a "Leninist theory and policy of a two stage, uninterrupted revolution". While Lenin never formally renounced the two stage theory of revolution nor expressed his support for permanent revolution on paper, his practice in 1917 showed that he accepted its conclusions.

When it came to the crunch he pushed for the workers to play the leading role in the revolution and to seize power, thus dominating the revolutionary government.

Lorimer has failed in his effort to subject Trotsky's writing on Permanent Revolution to a "sustained critique". He has also failed to show when and where, in 1917, the practice and policy of Lenin differed in any way from that of Trotsky, summed up in the theory of Permanent Revolution.

Trotsky was not only able to see the weaknesses in Lenin's two stage theory and the slogan of democratic dictatorship, he was also able to distil the lessons of 1917 and the failed Chinese revolution into a more rigorous theory of Permanent Revolution.

What Lorimer's pamphlet shows is that the DSP, like the original Mensheviks and Stalinists, use the orthodoxy of a two stage theory and the old Bolshevik slogan of a democratic dictatorship, as a cover for inaction, vacillation and betrayal.

The DSP solution to the questions raised in the democratic and national struggles in semicolonial countries has at its fundamental base the idea that a mass movement, in and of itself, will be enough. What puts them at odds with the real practice of Leninism is that Lenin recognised, as did Trotsky, that only a proletarian revolution could solve the problems in backward countries like Russia.

In countries like Indonesia today, working class revolution, supported by the peasant masses, is ultimately the only way to achieve the democratic and social objectives that can relieve the miseries inflicted upon millions of workers and peasants by capitalism. The DSP not only refuse to raise the spectre of working class power and socialism in countries like Indonesia, but they actively tail groups like the PRD who peddle illusions in bourgeois politicians like Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Like the Mensheviks during the Russian revolution, the DSP continually stress that there can and has to be a bourgeois democratic solution before a socialist solution can ever be raised. The DSP have more in common with Menshevism and Stalinism than they do with Leninist Bolshevism.

Marxist have a name for groups like the DSP who embrace revolution in words and renounce it in deeds. We call it centrism.■

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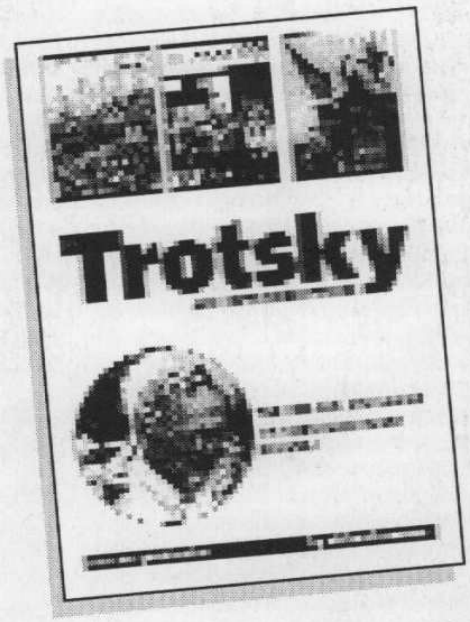

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