

THE CRISIS OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AND OUR TASKS

Document redrafted for discussion summer 1983

- Cunliffe

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1) Practical experiences and tests of the political positions of the various currents of the Trotskyist movement have proved even in the period since 1970 that there is an urgent need to regenerate the Fourth International politically and reconstruct it organisationally. We have seen in that period the USFI majority sponsor guerrillaist adventures in Latin America and tail-end centrist, ultra-left and Stalinist forces in Europe. We have seen the same comrades make subsequent abject self-criticism of their Latin American policies. We have seen the supporters of the American SWP (and the French OCI) carried along by the fraudulent "democratic" rhetoric of a witch-hunting Socialist Party leadership in Portugal in 1975-6: and we have seen the same SWP refuse to defend the most basic of democratic rights of the Simon Bolivar Brigade against the Sandinista leadership in Nicaragua in 1979. We have seen the SWP argue in the early 1970s on the need to build Leninist parties and not simply tail end petty bourgeois guerrillas in Latin America: we now see the same party expressing the most craven support for Fidel Castro's brand of populist Stalinism, and tail ending petty bourgeois leaderships in power in Nicaragua and Grenada. We have seen Nahuel Moreno and Pierre Lambert proclaim a new international grouping, the FIIC as a "tendency more orthodox than ever": and we have seen the FIIC nine months later split again in two, leaving its militants even more confused and divided. We have even seen our own attempts at reforging the Trotskyist programme and developing an international tendency capable of fighting for it founder on the rocks of sectarianism.

The problems remain great. But there are opportunities to come. Behind the hollow triumphalist rhetoric and ad-hoc regroupments of the larger tendencies there remains an unresolved political crisis which will continue to undermine those who ignore it.

2) Though it may appear to take an organisational form, the crisis of the FI is above all political in its content and its origins. A small and still very isolated Trotskyist movement has been unable since the war to establish a coherent, consistent and adequate analysis of the many major and complex events that have substantially changed the world from the pre-war period of 1938. With Marxists forced time and again to respond from the sidelines or from long distance to struggles and developments which they could in no way influence or control, twin pressures came to bear. On the one hand, the pressure towards empirical, opportunist adaptation to the apparently "progressive" face displayed by this or that section of the existing leadership; on the other the pressure towards sectarian indifference to the real complexities and problems facing the workers' movement. These twin forces have had a major impact on the theory and practice of our movement since the war.

But though the pressures arise inevitably from the objective situation of Trotskyism and its extreme disadvantages, they have been compounded rather than combatted by the leaderships of the major international currents. There has been little serious attempt to hammer out a rounded programme and perspective for the key struggles of the international working class. Instead each round of struggle has been met either by stale formulae, empty phrases and inappropriate slogans, or by empirical schemas, abrupt about-faces, and adaptation to the most overtly "left" components of the spontaneous movement or the bureaucratic leadership.

Time and again, too, the leaders of the main currents have run from any reexamination or serious debate on their own past practical mistakes and the lessons of the movement's failures of analysis. This denies the role in the movement of dialectical materialism, which starts with practice and constantly returns to it, enriching and developing the theory of the movement; and it negates the role of democratic centralism as the mechanism for analysing, criticising and developing the practical work of the Marxist party. It leaves the movement constantly floundering in the same confusion, staggering from one blunder to the next, viewing the class struggle as Henry Ford viewed history, as "one damned thing after another".

This introverted, misguided defensive attitude towards past experience indicates a sectarian fixation on preserving the narrow interests of the leading elements of a grouping rather than any awareness of how to develop the group as a whole and build a serious Marxist leadership.

At the same time a refusal of such leaderships to examine their own weaknesses militates against any serious developments on political issues where the movement as a whole has been deficient for decades - such as women's oppression and the development of women and sections of the specially oppressed into political leadership.

This same sectarianism, coupled with the development in some of the larger groupings (and even in some quite small ones) of a fixed hierarchy of quasi-bureaucratic "leaders", explains the increasingly frequent resort to extreme organisational means to muzzle discussion and tendency struggles in organisations which present themselves as "Bolshevik". This in itself has heavily contributed to the scattering and to the theoretical poverty of the cadres and groupings of today's "Trotskyist movement".

3) Despite - or rather because of - such profound political weaknesses and organisational dictatorship, the Trotskyist movement today, like a shattered mirror, presents itself to the world as a chaotic mass of fragments, each of which may in the right light glint with at least a fraction of the former brilliance, but none of which in themselves can ever constitute or reconstruct a viable and authoritative Fourth International. Our organisation and our co-thinkers internationally are one of those fragments: perhaps politically brighter in some respects, but numerically smaller and in no way an embryo international. It is from no position of detachment or superiority that we must recognise that never before have there been so many currents jockeying for the limelight as "the" Fourth International; and yet never before have those groupings appeared so inadequate to the task of giving leadership to the international class struggle.

4) If the process of disintegration and decay is not countered by a sharp struggle for programmatic clarification and reconstruction, there is a real danger of a substantial loss of cadres, which would inflict a substantial reverse upon the struggle for a revolutionary international. We pledge ourselves to play the fullest possible role in such a struggle.

5) The two starting points for such a political fight are:
(a) The recognition that the essential principles and method mapped out by the Theses of the first four Congresses of the Comintern and by the first three Conferences of the FI (1936 Conference of the Movement for the FI, 1938 Founding Conference, and 1940 Emergency Conference) retain validity and potency today.

But also:

(b) That the many rich and varied events and experiences of the international workers' movement - and within that of the sections of the FI - in the post-war period mean that the 1938 Programme in itself is no longer an adequate basis to secure the fighting unity of a revolutionary international in the 1980s. A fuller and broader programme must be developed as a guide to action in the class struggle of today and as a test of the revolutionary practice of organisations which would wish to play a role in reconstructing the FI.

6) Since the drafting of the basic Theses on which the FI was formed, there have been the varied processes of the emergence of deformed workers' states in Eastern Europe, Asia and Cuba; there has been the successful liberation of much of the colonial world from the direct grip of imperialist rule - and the emergence in such struggles of new types of populist petty bourgeois leaderships posing new problems to the working class; the development of capitalism in the "boom" period brought an increase in the size, strength and militancy of the proletariat, not least in the exploited countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia; and while the Kremlin bureaucracy has gained in military strength relative to imperialism, and in world-political weight (enabling it to act as an alternative patron to Third World regimes in conflict

with the imperialist powers), the post-war period has seen the same bureaucracy assailed by repeated struggles for political revolution and suffer its own internal splits arising from conflict of national interest.

The sum total of these changes is a world substantially different in many respects from the world of 1938 - so different as to make the Transitional Programme a crucial starting point, but inadequate on its own. We must reject any notion of turning the Programme from its original purpose - as a guide to action - into a semi-Biblical, immutable text or ikon, which would in practice obstruct the necessary programmatic debate and development so vitally needed 45 years later. Such an approach - whether it be the opportunist "broad church" version (simply seeking to regroup, in the 1980s, "those who accept the 1938 Programme") or the wooden dogmatist version ("the world is basically the same as in 1938") - runs absolutely counter to the method of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, who fearlessly criticised in order to build upon the political conquests of the past.

7) Too often the post-war Trotskyist movement has shrunk from a bold analysis of new problems, falling back on the one hand upon "orthodox" repetition by rote of quotations from Trotsky's writings, or, conversely lightmindedly "junking the old Trotskyism" in a wanton capitulation to empiricist and opportunist politics in a complex and hostile political environment.

This confusion has provided the framework of the splits and fusions which have produced the chaotic, divided Trotskyist movement of the 1980s.

A failure to grasp and explain the forms taken by the counter-revolutionary politics of Stalinism in overturning capitalism in Eastern Europe opened wide the door for adaptation to Titoism and illusions in mass CPs from 1949 onwards. This in turn laid the political basis for the split of 1953 and subsequent confusion over China, then Cuba, etc. Unanswered, the same political problem still lies behind the political accommodation by some currents to the Vietnamese Stalinists today.

A failure to comprehend the processes of petty bourgeois nationalist struggles, and a lack of any coherent programme for proletarian political independence from such leaderships, formed the background to the false positions on the Castro leadership in Cuba which split the International Committee and stored up perpetually-recurring problems for the "United" Secretariat on Algeria and a spate of struggles in the 1960s and 1970s.

The muddled and idealist notions of Mandel's "new vanguardism" on the one hand a lapse by the SWP(US) into reformist-style electoralism on the other, ensured that neither main wing of the USFI was politically equipped to offer a lead to the Portuguese working class in the revolutionary events of 1974-6. The SWP(US) tail-ending of the Portuguese Socialist Party was echoed in possibly even more crass form by the "anti-Pabloite" OCI, proving once again that anti-Pabloism is no guarantee of correct politics. The uncorrected blunders and adventures of the past had thoroughly disorientated the majority of the Trotskyist movement.

By 1979 it was not so much new problems which wreaked havoc on the Trotskyist groups - it was the reemergence of the old, but still unresolved, problem of orientation to petty bourgeois nationalist leaderships - this time in Nicaragua. History repeated itself, this time as farce, with the SWP(US) boldly endorsing the expulsion of their own Morenist "comrades" from Nicaragua by the "revolutionary" Sandinistas. The USFI, with the departure of Moreno's Bolshevik Faction, found itself split not into two but effectively into three, since the political divisions between the European leadership and the SWP have grown relentlessly as the SWP has been sucked further into the politics and method of Castroism, jettisoning its Trotskyist heritage en route.

And in 1981 the theoretical, programmatic and practical bankruptcy of the self-styled "orthodox" regroupment, the FIIC, was underlined when the election of a social democratic government in France blew aside the diplomatic agreements laboriously constructed in compendious documents.

8) We emphasise our view that none of the vast array of organisations now proclaiming themselves Trotskyist can claim any exclusive role as the political continuity of Trotskyism. The organisational fragmentation of Trotskyist

currents has helped worsen the political disarray, by generating mutually reinforcing one-sidedness. Sectarian self-proclamation has made it worse again.

The Trotskyist spectrum has enormous and obvious weaknesses. But it also has important strengths. Only within the forces that have struggled to develop as Trotskyists is there to be found - however imperfect - an attempt consciously to combat the counter-revolutionary politics of Stalinism or to further the strategy - however ill-comprehended - of permanent revolution. Numerically, these forces have grown since the mid '60s and especially since 1968 as an expression of the crisis of Stalinism and the increasing militancy and self-confidence of the working class internationally.

We fight for the reconstruction and political regeneration of the FI by which we sum up:

(a) our rejection of any notion that we alone can proclaim ourselves to be the sole continuity or representatives of the Trotskyist programme or "the" FI;

(b) our insistence that the steps needed to lay a firm basis for unity and common discipline among Trotskyist forces today are not organisational negotiations and rearrangements between existing currents, but a programmatic clarification of the movement on the main issues confronting the proletariat in its struggles. The FI must be more than simply an assemblage of people who have not (yet!) betrayed the working class; it must be the living and conscious organised form through which revolutionaries confront problems and hammer out a programme adequate to the tasks of today's class struggle.

9) Among the issues that must be tackled in the development of such a programme, some stand out as particular items of controversy and confusion.

(a) The analysis of the economic crisis of capitalism and its origins in the post war "boom" period, which so many empiricists saw as the end of economic crises, the dawn of "neo capitalism" or a "permanent arms economy", posing not the preparation of proletarian revolution, but the pursuit of long-term structural reforms. Nowadays few can be found ready to admit to or defend the long-discredited theories of the "boom": but our movement needs theoretical answers and a coherent grasp of the contradictory processes of the boom as well as the forces now at work within the global recession as well as a closer discussion of the relationship between probable future upswings and the tempo of class struggle.

(b) The contradictions of Stalinism, which so confused and disorientated the centrists of the 1930s have been multiplied many times over by the expansion of Stalinist rule into Eastern Europe in the 1940s, China and South East Asia in the 1950s, and into Cuba, as the Kremlin first supported and then gradually assimilated Castro's petty bourgeois leadership in the 1960s. Further complexities have arisen from the growing splits that have shattered the pre-war Stalinist monolith, as national Stalinist bureaucracies, pursuing their own vested interests, have been increasingly prepared to clash and even break with Moscow - following on Tito's split in 1948, Khrushchev's secret speech of 1956, and the Sino Soviet split. The emergence in the 1970s of an openly reformist "Eurocommunist" trend among the non-ruling CPs (under pressure from the petty bourgeois intelligentsia and seeking a niche in the capitalist establishment) was to a degree camouflaged by phony "democratic" phrases, which in turn engendered fresh illusions of a self-reform of Stalinism among some Trotskyist currents. Others have looked to "breakaway", dissident or newly-assimilated elements of the Stalinist movement - Tito, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Castro - to evolve under "mass pressure" in a progressive centrist or revolutionary direction. Some have imagined that objective pressures would push the leaderships of the Western CPs into revolutionary action; others have abandoned any hopes of existence other than as a submerged pressure group inside such CPs.

The post-war struggles for political revolution in Eastern Europe - in a manner envisaged but never witnessed by Trotsky - raises additional questions of programme and perspective that must be more rigorously pursued.

(c) The new problems posed by Stalinism are to a degree paralleled by the new lease of life given by World War 2 to the parties of social democracy. With the forces of revolution weakened by Stalinist and imperial-

ist repression in advance of the post war upsurge of working class struggles, it has time and again been the reformist apparatus (often more or less openly assisted by the agencies of imperialism) which has stepped in and stemmed the tide of militancy for long enough to hold the line for capitalism. The Trotskyist response has tended to waver between primitive sectarianism in the face of mass social democratic formations and opportunist capitulation, being sucked right into the reformist apparatus itself, with disastrous results in both cases.

(d) The third major political phenomenon which has grown in scope has been the emergence of a baffling array of petty bourgeois nationalist movements in the ex-colonial countries and at the head of struggles for national self-determination. These range from radical sections of army officer corps, through to mass-based organisations - even ostensibly Marxist groupings, left wing splits from Stalinist parties which can even appear spontaneously to echo elements of the Trotskyist analysis or policy. In the face of this kind of challenge, and the damaging weakness of Trotskyist forces in the countries of the Third World, the pressures towards opportunist adaptation have been particularly strong. In place of developing coherent and principled slogans, tactics and orientation towards the building of a proletarian leadership in the given struggles, the tendency has been to relegate such a fight to the indefinite future and prioritise instead "solidarity" with the existing petty bourgeois organisations and their leaderships.

(e) A fourth, less discussed, problem is the continued bourgeois domination of the labour movement in a number of countries - the most obvious being the USA, but also including Argentina. The recent emergence in Brazil of the Workers Party as a large-scale centrist grouping offering a political alternative for the working class indicates the potential for serious work to undermine bourgeois domination; but decades of work by Trotskyist currents in the USA has left the question of a Labour Party there more abstract in 1983 than it was in the 1930s. These problems must be confronted by our movement.

(f) Revolutionary struggles in Central and Latin America have raised once again discussion on the problem of broad, cross-class "anti-imperialist fronts". To what degree can Marxists endorse or engage in such fronts as a serious means of combatting imperialism, without politically disarming the proletarian forces and repeating the disastrous Popular Front experiences of Chile and Spain? How tactically is it possible to relate to the militant forces already involved in such fronts, while preserving political independence?

(g) Related to this is the problem of the relationship between democratic and transitional demands. In Portugal in 1974-6 this problem centred on the link between the demand for a genuine Constituent Assembly, independent of the officers of the Armed Forces Movement, and the fight for mass-based soviets in the workplaces and working class districts. While the SWP(US) and OCI threw their energies into promoting the "democratic" call for a Constituent Assembly, and derided the real movements that were taking place towards workers' control, the USFI majority shamelessly tail-ended the AFM's moves to establish phony "neighbourhood councils" as "soviets" - under their control. But the problem is not simply one of past history. The building of an opposition to Khomeini's bloody regime in Iran; the fight against right wing dictatorships across the Third World and in Turkey; and the struggle against Stalinist repression all raise serious problems in the relationship between democratic, transitional and revolutionary demands, as well as the development of proletarian methods of struggle and proletarian leadership fighting for democratic demands.

(h) Among the most central of democratic demands is the equality of women, and their liberation from sexual oppression. Conspicuously, few of the main currents of Trotskyism have devoted either theoretical or practical effort towards development of a proletarian perspective for women's liberation. For similar reasons, though women have been recruited to these organisations, most remain subordinate to the central, male-dominated, layers of leadership, fulfilling rank and file duties or organisational donkey work. This is a major challenge in the reconstruction of the FI.

(i) Even some of those organisations which have struggled to develop a fight against women's oppression have pulled back from the all-out struggle against sexual oppression involved in fighting for gay liberation under capitalist and Stalinist rule. The American SWP, aping Fidel Castro's state propaganda, denies that gays are oppressed in Cuba, while its trade union members succumb to generalised backwardness in the USA and abandon any fight against anti-gay bigotry in the USA. Other organisations accept or connive at anti-gay bigotry: some even echo it within their own ranks. Such positions - a failure to combat bourgeois prejudice and morality - amount to a refusal to fight for the full democratic programme. They must be debated out if the movement is to be equipped to champion the struggles of the most oppressed.

(j) A further dimension of the democratic programme is the fight for the self-determination of oppressed nations, and its relationship to the struggles of the working class. Particular problems in this context include the development of a programme for the unification of Ireland and the liberation of Palestine from Zionist rule. But other problems of self-determination arise in the case of nations oppressed by Stalinist bureaucracies - within the USSR itself, China, and the cases of Kampuchea and Afghanistan. These issues have been barely - if at all - discussed in a programmatic context within the Trotskyist movement.

(k) There are many other political problems to be confronted: not least the development of a serious Trotskyist programme geared to the needs and problems of the workers and peasants of black Africa and continental Asia. But an immediate problem that must be resolved is the type of organisation required of an authoritative Fourth International. A decisive move towards democratic centralism, in which the rights of minority tendencies and factions are accepted in the context of the binding authority of majority decisions, must run alongside the development of a serious proletarian orientation centred not simply on sending petty bourgeois members into manual workers' unions, but on intervention, agitation and organisation on an independent programme in the mass workers' movement of each country.

10) Some currents calling themselves Trotskyist have hardened into positions and practices which make them definitively lost to revolutionary politics. Gerry Healy's withered, witch-hunting "International Committee" is now reduced to the role of a prostituted political appendage of bourgeois and petty bourgeois Middle Eastern demagogues. The Posadist, and now the Spartacist organisations, adapting wholesale to Stalinism, have now lined up as apologists and advocates of Stalinist counter-revolution in Poland.

Other currents, however, even if in most cases their wholesale political reform is hardly to be imagined, have sufficient political vitality to require us to pay attention to them, seek discussions where appropriate, and relate tactically.

(a) The most numerous and the closest to a healthy tendency at the present time is probably the United Secretariat. Founded in 1963 in a merger between the SWP's supporters and the Pablo/Mandel International Secretariat, the USFI's long history of internal confusion and tendency struggles has not generated much political clarity, but has at least kept alive a relatively democratic internal regime and helped produce a collective leadership less than usually dominated by any particular individual. But the rapid and continuing political degeneration of the SWP(US) threatens to pull the existing structure apart, and makes it necessary to look at the non-SWP USFI as a separate political entity.

On the credit side, the USFI as a whole is the only major current to have conducted discussion and practical work on women's liberation - though much of that work has followed the adaptationist path of tail-ending petty bourgeois feminist movements, and lacked any real proletarian content or strategy. USFI cadres and contacts appear to have played a positive role in the Polish struggles, advancing the discussion on workers' control - though the USFI itself was slow and inadequate in raising the perspective of building a revolutionary party in Poland.

On Cuba and Vietnam, the non-SWP USFI showed some signs of an increasingly critical stance towards the Stalinist leaderships in the period following their own belated 1977 self criticism of the USFI's guerrillaist line in Latin America from 1969.

And the "turn to industry" implemented since the late 1970s has meant that large numbers of USFI members in Europe have turned their backs on white collar and public service unions and are now in industrial unions.

But on the negative side, the politics they fight for within these unions are still frequently generalised and abstract propaganda (anti-war, anti-imperialist) rather than agitational work geared to the development of industrial action and new leadership. In industrial struggles - like other mass movements - the USFI are very able riders of bandwagons, but generally unwilling or incapable of steering them or challenging those in the driving seat.

The strong pressure from the aggressively Castroite SWP has cramped the beginnings of political developments in the USFI on the Cuban question. It has also shaped positions on Iran and on Central America, where the USFI leaders still accept and retail without criticism the SWP's adverts for the "revolutionary" leaderships of the FDR/FMLN, Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada.

The offensive role of the SWP makes it near-impossible to convene the once-more-overdue World Congress of the USFI, which would almost certainly bring tensions to a head and result in a split.

Still - after 20 years - lacking any coherent attempt at a programmatic document, the USFI's politics, in their strong and weaker points continue to be derived from empiricism and adaptation rather than analysis or any willingness to fight for leadership against the stream. Where the USFI strikes a right note, it is most often because thousands of others on the left of the workers' movement have already struck it of their own accord; and where the USFI gets it wrong, they are seldom alone.

(b) The current political situation of the American SWP is perhaps best summed up by the tenor of National Secretary Jack Barnes' (still unpublished) December 1982 speech hailing the "revolutionary" turn by the CP of El Salvador. Barnes denounces "90 percent" of Trotskyists as "hopeless sectarians", and sets his sights for a new revolutionary international on the rulers of Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada (along with the Salvador CP and similar like-minded folk). Barnes' move to embrace Stalinist forces in El Salvador as well as in Cuba has run alongside SWP endorsement of the Vietnamese leadership, and fits into a pattern of "love Castro, love his friends" which has meant uncritical attitudes to the Ethiopian regime, Khomeini's "Islamic republic" ("revolutionary Iran"), and the leaderships of the PLO and the Stalinist-dominated ANC of South Africa. The SWP's press has defended the Bulgarian bureaucracy against "imperialist conspiracy", and argued against "imperialist lies" on the Soviet economic crisis: the cancer of Stalinism is spreading rapidly.

As part of this political realignment, the SWP leaders have gone so far as to discard Trotsky's crucial theory of permanent revolution, and reverted instead to Lenin's discarded theory of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" so beloved by the Mensheviks and Joseph Stalin. Trotsky's bitter struggle against Stalin's counter-revolutionary bureaucracy is reduced in Barnes' speech to an interesting collection of historical writings. The Marx centenary saw the SWP give lavish praise to the Nicaraguan, Grenadan and Cuban "Marxists", but only a fleeting reference to Leon Trotsky.

It is plain that the SWP regards its "comrades" of the USFI with barely-disguised impatience and contempt. But in view of the fact that there is little likelihood of Castro and co. launching the kind of "revolutionary international" the SWP would like to see, there is no immediate incentive to complete a split from the USFI, which many SWPers would (correctly) see as a definitive break from the Trotskyist past. As it is, the last few years have seen the SWP engage in a series of expulsions, supplementing the resignations of opponents of the current line and a bureaucratic Barnes leadership. The paper has diminished in size, as has the SWP membership. It is not clear, however, if the expelled forces or those still in the SWP have sufficient political coherence or resolve to mount any kind of fight back or new group.

(c) The rapid emergence and growth of Nahuel Moreno's Bolshevik Faction in the late 1970s flowed at first from his substantially correct break from the positions of both the SWP(US) (Hansen) and the Mandel wing of the USFI during the Portuguese events of 1974-6. Moreno, who had for many years previously been allied with Hansen in the Leninist Trotskyist Faction, took sharp issue with its adaptation to the Socialist Party in Portugal and its neutralist stance on the liberation struggle in Angola - where the SWP refused to distinguish between the anti-imperialist MPLA and the CIA/South African backed forces of the FNLA/UNITA. In challenging this line and simultaneously attacking the Mandeliste positions in Portugal, Moreno won the overwhelming support of the LTF forces in Latin America, and this momentum, backed up with skilful organising, brought the recruitment direct to Moreno's Faction of new leftward-moving centrist groupings - most notably in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America.

In the run-up to the 1979 World Congress of the USFI, the size and growth of the BF and the vulnerable point on which he had chosen to attack the Mandel and Hansen wings precipitated a hurried realignment, and the merger of the SWP and Mandel wings into a common "majority" bloc against the BF. Completely new documents were commissioned for the Congress, to be drafted by the SWP leadership. The deal was cemented by the Mandel wing's 1977 Self Criticism of their previous guerrillaist line on Latin America, which the SWP had opposed since 1969.

But instead of sticking to his largely correct initial line of attack - and drawing out the evasive nature of the new "majority" documents, which drew out no assessment of the Portuguese events nor of almost any other recent events in the class struggle, Moreno veered off to mount an attack of book length on the USFI "majority" document "Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat". Moreno's line of argument amounted in many instances to a Stalinist view of the dictatorship of the proletariat and even of the Stalinist states themselves, which he argues were "a thousand times more democratic" than the bourgeois democracies - in clear defiance not only of Trotsky's approach but of objective reality.

Before the Congress took place, however, the Nicaraguan revolution intervened in the proceedings. Moreno rapidly assembled the "Simon Bolivar Brigade" of members and sympathisers to go to Nicaragua and follow through the final stages of the fighting with the organisation of trade unions and, it was hoped, the building of a proletarian leadership independent of the Sandinistas. In the event, the civil war was concluded faster than Moreno and others had expected, and the Brigade largely missed the fighting. Its agitational work amongst the proletariat however incurred the immediate enmity of the Sandinistas, who deported the whole brigade - some via Panama, where they were roughed up by the cops. The SWP, grovelling to the Sandinista leadership, publicly supported this expulsion of their supposed USFI "comrades" and are widely thought to have actually proposed this course of action. Moreno naturally challenged this line in the USFI, only to find the SWP substantially supported by the Mandelites; the Bolshevik Faction promptly spilt, before the World Congress occurred.

The Morenists were opportunistically joined at this point by Pierre Lambert's OCRFI, which had previously taken little or no interest in Nicaragua and remained tactfully silent on its own assessment of the Brigade. There followed a whirlwind romance between the BF and the OCRFI, and the formation of an ostensibly open "Parity Committee" on an "orthodox" platform, from which independent forces were in practice excluded. At the end of 1980 came the launch of the Fourth International International Committee; yet nine months later this "orthodox" body foundered on the rocks of the Mitterrand election victory in the autumn of 1981.

Moreno had drafted the evasive "Theses" on which the FIIC was launched. Though the document appears to be a programmatic statement, the most significant feature is its omissions: it says nothing on social democracy, popular fronts, women's rights or gay rights. It offers useless hybrid "compromise" positions on Stalinism and an unconvincing compromise on the trade union question where the OCI and BF had long held bitter differences.

Apparently in exchange, Moreno appears to accept Lambert's bizarre view of the post-war economic crisis, which insists that there has been no "real" development of the productive forces. The document as a whole was so diplomatically constructed that even after the split both sides still claim it as their own.

Since the split, Moreno's International Workers League (LIT) has donned a mask of triumphalism (going from strength to strength; gains from split...) to cover over the obvious crisis which has brought the loss of its Italian group, expulsions in Latin America and splits. Behind its public facade of democracy, Moreno's Factipn has engaged in bureaucratic measures and sharp practices comparable with Barnes, Lambert and Healy. His tendency, functioning with bravado and panache appears to be still growing, not least in the newly favourable conditions of Argentina, where the PST has functioned in clandestinity throughout the period of dictatorship, but where some of the biggest question marks hang over Moreno's politics, particularly in relation to the Peronist movement. Moreno's must be considered the least homogenous and regimented, but also the most empiricist and inconsistent of the larger world groupings.

(d) Pierre Lambert's international grouping the FI (International Centre for Reconstruction) continues to be heavily and bureaucratically controlled from his power base in the French PCI (formerly OCI), which is substantially the largest "Trotskyist" organisation in France with several thousand members. From the time that the Lambertists were driven out of the main, Stalinist-run union confederation the CGT in the 1950s, and because of their sectarian characterisation of the reformist CFDT as a "yellow" union, the PCI's main implantation in the French labour movement has been through the small Force Ouvriere Union, led by right wing social democrat Andre Bergeron. Decades of opportunist adaptation to the FO leadership have brought the PCI a large number of full-time and other positions in the union apparatus - and a record of consistently voting to endorse Bergeron's annual report to FO Congresses. This relationship, together with the PCI's leading role in the second largest student union in France - where again they work hand-in-glove with Socialist Party bureaucrats - helps account for the continual adaptation of the PCI towards the Socialist Party leadership in France and social democracy internationally - though the PCI remains aloof from entry work within the SP itself. The same factors help explain the PCI's shrill, one-sided attacks on the CP.

Having uncritically and enthusiastically promoted Mitterrand's election campaign, and initially played down the new governments' inclusion of bourgeois ministers, the PCI at first restricted its demands to top-level action by the government, without spelling out any programme of independent mass action by the working class. But as the Bergeron leadership has swung into opposition to elements of Mitterrand's vicious austerity measures, and students have taken up the fight against his educational "reforms", the PCI has followed suit, though its programme remains a classical combination of minimal daily agitation combined with maximalist propaganda for socialism and the building of the PCI as the revolutionary party - most reminiscent of Gerry Healy's WRP in the early and mid 1970s. And, in keeping with the same tradition, the PCI and its offshoots ignore the fight against women's oppression and for gay rights.

The OORFI's split in 1979 with most of its Latin American forces (subsequently to form the FIT) and its brazenly bureaucratic response to the Morenista forces in the 1981 split in the FIIC underline the notorious role of the Lambert leadership, who have an evil reputation for slander and violence against political opponents inside and outside their own organisations.

The prospects of such a leadership entering any serious dialogue with other tendencies, in which their own past record would be open to serious examination, is minimal. And the chances of any substantial opposition current gaining the elbow-room to wage a tendency struggle must be lower in the FICIR than any other international grouping.

(e) The French organisation Lutte Ouvriere has allied groups in the US

and other countries. Lutte Ouvriere's political evolution has been almost completely isolated from the main stream of Trotskyist organisations, and while they are ready to discuss and cooperate (of their current joint monthly supplement with the LCR), they do so from a position of profound alienation from other Trotskyist groups, and determined opposition to "quick fix" 'reconstructions of the FI'. Their politics are heavily economist and informed by a perspective which is somewhat quietist and sectarian - and catastrophist, only the catastrophe is always a long way off in the future (of their line on May 68, Portugal 1975, etc). Their leadership, aided by a structure and a semi-clandestine way of operating which ensures a rigorous selection of recruits and a top-down functioning, have a situation where while internal discussion is quite extensive and formally free, and LO comrades are positively encouraged to study the ideas of other tendencies, there is an almost total block on any serious questioning of LO's fundamental ideas, which are matters of moral commitment.

LO's position on the deformed workers' states is quite distinct in motivation and analysis from stac-capitalist views, but recognises only the USSR as a degenerated workers' state, and regards the subsequent Stalinist states as bourgeois in nature.

(f) The Fourth Internationalist Tendency (FIT), formed in 1979 following the split from the OCRFI of groups including its two most important Latin American sections, the POR (Lora) of Bolivia and Politica Obrera of Argentina, also includes smaller groups in Latin America as well as the Workers League of Palestine. The FIT proclaimed itself at its formation as a democratic centralist grouping, yet has retained in practice a federalist structure complicated still further by the profound "national Trotskyist" positions of the POR, which despite - or partly because of - its own long history in the class struggle of Bolivia, has little if any political respect for the other FIT sections, regarding them essentially as simple supporters of the POR, and Bolivia as the world centre of revolutionary struggle. From this standpoint the POR has failed to play any serious role in constructing or leading the FIT. The international face of the organisation thus tends to be that of PO which - like Moreno's PST - is seeking to exploit the new opening in the Argentine situation through the launching of a legal party and press.

But our most fruitful relations with the FIT have been through the members of their Palestinian section, the Workers League who - partly because of their geographical isolation from the main Latin American sections - have shown themselves far more interested in developing an organised relationship with the WSL/TILC and, through articles for our press, letters and visits have worked to sustain a dialogue. The WL in addition appears to be the only component of the FIT to pay any attention to the role of women and women's liberation.

Our main problem in relating to the FIT - which on many political issues has formal positions close to our own - is their leaders' sectarian attitude to the remainder of the Trotskyist movement - not least towards the WSL. Discussions have time and again foundered when we have run up against their characterisation of the USFI as "counter-revolutionary" - a miserable hang-over from the FIT's Lambertist past. In addition, the FIT, though present as observers at the founding conference of TILC in December 1979, has proved unable to offer a reply to the TILC programmatic document: we are told that several drafts have been prepared and rejected: in practice, despite its "democratic centralist" title, the FIT remains deeply divided and almost paralysed, reluctant to engage in discussions which might expose and probe their divisions. This makes political debate extremely difficult.

(g) Another grouping openly laying claim to exclusive rights on the title "Fourth International" is headed by Michel Varga, who split/was expelled from Lambert's OCRFI in the early 1970s. The main strength of Varga's grouping has always been its links in Eastern Europe. The Vargaite grouping in Poland succeeded in the heat of the Solidarnosc struggles in producing positive programmatic leaflets and statements, to which we should have given more attention.

But at the same time, Varga's groups have gone in for excesses of self-proclamation, issuing wild calls for "European carworkers' conferences" attended by handfuls of Vargaites, announcing the "rebuilding of the FI" to take place in Lisbon in 1976, and since then proclaiming themselves to be the FI. Their forces have attained some size in Spain - though dogged by frequent splits, as militants have begun to reject the sectarian, often ultra-left and Stalinophobic, line. There seems little prospect of any fruitful dialogue with the Varga leadership.

(h) In addition, there remain a large number of smaller non-affiliated "Trotskyist" groups. Some are left-overs from the succession of splits and fusions that accompanied the revolutionary upheavals of the 1970s: some are national groupings seeking, with more or less enthusiasm, a way out of their isolation. Others are national groupings which seem happy to remain that way.

For the time being, the proliferation of splits and splinters appears to have halted, and the "independent" groupings have been reduced in number through a process of assimilation into larger formations; or through piecemeal disintegration, demoralisation and dispersal of fragmented groups in the ideological and programmatic chaos and the harsh objective conditions of the period. For the most part, these groupings are sectarian in character, jealously guarding the distinctive positions which justify their independent existence and reluctant in the extreme to contemplate any relationship in which they are less than a dominant majority. Examples include the Chilean LC (ex-USFI) and Samarakoddy's Sri Lankan RWP.

Other sectarian groupings - such as the degenerated elements recently split from TILC - opt for the Spartacist model of intrigue, manoeuvre and poaching of members from rival groups coupled with self-proclamation, in preference to political and programmatic development and the building of sections with real roots in the working class.

Some, more approachable, groups appear on the other hand to be unaffiliated largely by historical accident. One example is the Pabloite Freedom Socialist Party (USA), which is kept out of the USFI largely by the continued sympathising status of the SWP. Another example is the remnants of the USFI Leninist Trotskyist Tendency.

(i) The large Grant ('Militant') group in Britain and its political co-thinkers have subordinated their erstwhile Trotskyist positions to their long-term adaptation to reformist parties and their leaderships. Their combination of sectarianism and "objectivism" places them squarely in the post-1950 mainstream, though they add a distinctive political element derived from the "right" wing in the FI in 1944-48 (whose only other descendant is the British SWP). Their version of the "Parliamentary road to socialism" is a clear reflection of the pressures of British social democracy. Their attitudes make discussions with them improbable, though their ranks probably include many workers and youth worth winning.

(j) The SWP-Britain and its international co-thinkers have recently hardened their sectarian line on the basis of economism and "mini-max" politics, coupled with a profoundly pessimistic analysis of the British class struggle which has persuaded them to abandon their once successful "rank and file" groupings. Probably the SWP itself has purged its ranks sufficiently to make it impossible to win more than small groups from it in the future.

(k) It has been in this context of disarray and organisational chaos that we have been through the experience of the foundation and break-up of our own international grouping, the TILC.

Founded in 1979, the TILC drew its political components from two main traditions: those who had broken from Healyism in the mid 1970s (WSL, SLDC, Turkey), and who had correctly broken from the Greek CIL over their bigoted anti-gay positions, which reflected a general political backwardness and attachment to Healyite positions and methods; and those who had been through discussions and then broken from the Spartacist school of sectarianism (GBL, LOB Chile). The Danish group, developed in close liaison with the WSL

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contained former adherents of Cliff's International Socialists.

The launching of TILC became possible as a result of the persistent international work of the WSL in the form of discussions and documents on the crisis in the FI, coupled with respect for the practical work we had done in the class struggle in Britain. In the aftermath of the 1979 split and World Congress of the USFI we issued a programmatic draft and convened an international conference. There TILC was formed as a tendency which would intervene in the world movement and fight for discussions towards the broader political and organisational reconstruction of the FI.

But our launching of the new grouping came simultaneously with the emergence of the Moreno/Lambert "Parity Committee", from which, despite our efforts, TILC was excluded. Our embryonic "tendency", which had set its goal as democratic centralism within two years to allow a period to test out the positions of each of the groupings and win new forces, came under heavy pressure as the attractive pull generated by the ostensible "orthodoxy", size, apparatus and momentum of the Parity Committee drew in a number of potential supporters of TILC, and eventually broke up and sucked in the whole Chilean group, the LOB. Faced with a drying-up of external contacts, TILC began to devote more attention to consolidating itself as a tendency. Though this produced some valuable discussions and resolutions, it also led increasingly away from TILC's initial objective of intervening and fighting for a wider dialogue in the world movement. By the time of Moreno's split with Lambert in the end of 1981, it was not only the WSL which dragged its feet on any initiative for discussion.

It was at this juncture that the processes towards fusions in the USA and Britain began to have their impact on TILC. The impact was almost completely negative. Hindsight confirms that while the US fusion was ill-conceived from the outset, both fusions suffered through being over-hasty and ill-prepared, producing an immediate climate of factionalism and tension which produced a further turn inwards by TILC. With no clearly agreed line of march for international work in the new WSL, despite a highly promising and productive TILC meeting in December 1981 the work lost direction and became bogged down by factionalism. This was further compounded by the divisions over the Malvinas war.

With no effective leadership being given to TILC, and its perspective of intervention and the struggle amongst other tendencies increasingly submerged, there was a rapid slide back towards sectarianism by the RWL and the Italian LOR. Summer 1982 saw the RWL banging new nails into the coffin of the ex-SLDC minority, and turning its attention to the cultivation of a group of co-thinkers in Britain. The resultant fostering of a sectarian grouping inside the WSL further encouraged the RWL and LOR in their attacks on the WSL. The eventual travesty of a meeting in Spring 1983 at which the split in TILC was formally accomplished spelled out the extent to which the political initiative of 1979 had been turned by sectarianism into an organisational parody.

Though nothing further has been heard of the RWL/LOR/TAF wing of TILC since that meeting, it is obvious that the split is irreparable, and that the fiction of a "continuity of TILC" cannot be sustained by the sectarians, any more than the WSL, Socialist Fight and the comrades of the PTT(USA) can claim such continuity.

ADD SECTIONS 11 and 12 unaltered from original.

The Fourth International today lives on in the form of different factions. Their positions are generally centrist in nature, but with special features, in reality these positions still do not reflect a complete break from the programmatic basis of Bolshevism. Although the SWP-USA currently functions pretty much as an appendage of the Havana bureaucracy, and may definitely and openly adopt such a role (depending on the results of the current struggles), on the whole the positions of the would-be Trotskyist factions do not reflect directly the influence of social forces alien to the proletariat. This makes them unlike the Stalinist, social democratic and also the centrist parties of the 1930s.

We reject as schematic those conceptions which, starting from the reality of the centrist FI, draw the conclusion that all politically degenerated organisations are irreparably lost to Trotskyism, and which extrapolate from theoretical, historical or analytical differences instead of basing judgement on living political and class struggle actions. The task facing serious Trotskyists is to build a Bolshevik Leninist faction based on the political lines of the Theses and Resolutions of the 1936, 1938 and 1940 conferences and on programmatic answers to major tests of the class struggle since 1940, expressed in a platform responding adequately to the current class-struggle problems posed to Trotskyists and the international proletariat.

But while rejecting the sectarian position that considers every politically degenerated Trotskyist organisation as lost for Trotskyism, Bolshevik Leninists must at the same time reject as delusory any hypothesis of a spontaneous evolution of the revisionist factions towards orthodox Trotskyism.

Instead it is necessary to engage in a struggle for the regeneration and Bolshevik reorganisation of the FI. It is necessary to promote the formation of Bolshevik-Leninist factions linked both to each other and to independent Trotskyist organisations within the framework of an international Bolshevik-Leninist Faction, which must itself be based on democratic centralist methods, both nationally and internationally.

Such factions should in general avoid engaging in splits. Instead they should made the centrist leaderships responsible for any administrative measures - such as expulsions - which might occur. Only a flexible, dialectical strategy for its regeneration, combining independent work in the labour movement with factional intervention within the other organisations, whether formally Trotskyist or leftward-moving centrist, will allow us to accomplish the complex process which - through splits, fusions, partial regeneration and the growth of independent work - will enable us to reconstruct a genuinely authoritative FI.

For this reason we must - under the sole conditions of maintaining the political independence of the orthodox Trotskyist faction - be ready to adjust our tactics to concrete developments in the situation of the Trotskyist movement.

¹³ We declare ourselves fundamentally opposed to all those forces - empty sectarian ultimatists on the one hand, barren opportunist charlatans on the other - who attempt to erect organisational or spurious political barriers to a process of discussion and programmatic clarification which alone can lay a principled basis for the reconstruction of the FI. We call upon the memberships and the leaderships of the organisations of the world Trotskyist movement to participate now in the long-overdue struggle to confront and resolve the political problems that have divided and rendered impotent the FI built by Leon Trotsky.

We have already tabled for discussion the document "The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle", as an attempt to enlarge upon the principles and method of the 1938 Programme. We remain open to alternative suggestions as to the form and basis of discussions.

Our one clear and inflexible precondition is that we will in no way commit ourselves to recognition of any grouping as an exclusive continuity of Trotskyism or as "the" FI. In today's manifest and deepening crisis of the world Trotskyist movement for any grouping to adopt such a stance is nothing more than sectarian arrogance.