

Fusion platform of WSL and I-CL, July 1981

Workers' Socialist League/ International-Communist League Fusion conference, Sunday 26 July 1981. Draft platform document

The fusion of two revolutionary tendencies in the British labour movement to form the Workers' Socialist League is in our view a major step forward in the fight for the method and principles of the Trotskyist Programme.

The fusion is the most substantial since that which brought about the formation of the Revolutionary Communist Party in 1944. We embark in 1981 on the building of a new organisation confident that we can carry forward the political gains of those militants in both movements who have learned the need to intervene in and lead the struggles of the working class if they are to culminate in the revolutionary overthrow of the decaying and degenerate capitalist system. Capitalism is inseparable from the exploitation by the bourgeoisie of the working class 'at home' and (since 'advanced' capitalism became imperialist) of the workers and peasants in the neo-colonies and the colonies abroad.

It is a vicious system geared to buttressing the strong against the weak, to serving the handful of capitalists against the millions of workers, and to keeping many millions in poverty so that a few may prosper.

Capitalism exalts property and degrades life. It is a bankrupt system which has nothing to offer the masses of women but a double oppression as class and sex, humiliation, degradation and exploitation of them in their allotted role as mothers and wives and daughters. It is at the root of the racialism and nationalism that poisons society and divides worker from worker. It is a system of massive waste and social disorganisation, and at the same time it forces the working class to fight every inch of the way to better or even maintain its wages and conditions.

Having once been progressive, in that it developed, in the only way then possible, the productive resources of humanity, it is now a totally reactionary force in history. (Its expansion after World War 2 gave it merely the appearance of health. By the late 60s, the boom had given way to creeping stagnation, followed in the 70s and 80s by the biggest crises since the 30s.) The post-war boom was not a new epoch of limitless capitalist expansion as many in the bourgeois and Labour leadership predicted.

Today the ruling class can keep their system going only at the cost of large-scale unemployment and attempts to cut the living standards of workers in the 'rich' parts of the world; of massive starvation and bloodshed in the 'poor' two-thirds of the world; and of the ever-present threat of the destruction of humanity through nuclear war.

The only way out for the working class is to take power and bring the resources of the modern economy under

a rational working class plan. Having overthrown capitalism and established social ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, the working class will build towards a truly communist society, in which at last the principle will be: "From each according to his or her ability, to each according to his or her need."

The crisis of leadership

The working class is the motive force of all real progress. But the present condition of the labour movement prevents it from playing the role — which it alone can play — of revolutionary reorganiser of society. The existing labour organisations are under bourgeois or Stalinist domination in varying degrees. This domination shows itself in a thousand different ways, but chiefly in the conception that the working class and the ruling class have a common interest. This crisis of leadership manifests itself absolutely in times of decisive clashes, in the defeat of the class. It manifests itself relatively at other times in a loss of effectiveness in struggles on wages and conditions. The social democratic parties are controlled throughout the world by a distinct group of Labour bureaucrats, dedicated in general to diverting the mass parties away from the kinds of direct action which alone can defend and extend workers' rights. These same careerists and manipulators control the trade unions in many parts of the world, where they play the same role.

Elsewhere, however, it is the Stalinists of the Communist Parties who have captured the leading positions in the labour movement and who use them, not in the interests of the workers, but in the interests of class collaboration.

Nowhere in the world today do the workers' organisations reflect and represent the willingness of the working class to fight for its basic needs and for a solution to the world crisis.

At the hands of this leadership, workers are persistently held back from spontaneous struggle, diverted and confused. The independent strength of the class is not fully prepared or mobilised; the independent interests of the class are always dissipated in compromise and collaboration. Where, despite this leadership, the spontaneous struggles of workers pose the question of power, the process of leadership betrayal ensures that the class is politically unprepared to answer the question in its own interests. The strength of the working class is blunted in its day-to-day struggles and in those politically more significant struggles where the question of power is posed.

The continued existence of world capitalism to its present over-ripe stage is the direct result of this crisis of leadership. Time after time in the past decades, in country after country, in response to the convulsions of what could have been capitalism's death agony, the

workers have moved against capitalism. Each time the apparatus of the Labour organisations, political parties and trade unions has held the class back, demoralised it, derailed it, deflected its blows from the weakest points in the enemy's defences; in every decisive clash the workers have been misled to bloody defeat. Under this leadership, every single major gain of the working class has been threatened. Even where the strength of workers has been the major force in toppling reactionary governments, the politics of class collaboration has always left the working class vulnerable to the threat of bloody counter-revolution. Capitalism, the most dynamic and adaptable system in human history, has survived despite the murderous crises by which it has been wracked throughout most of this century. If it is permitted to pay the necessary price in an ever-increasing toll of proletarian misery and degradation, there are no insoluble crises for capitalism. The bourgeoisie will not fall automatically into history's abyss. It is a highly conscious force, struggling for its positions, capable of defeating a misled and ill-prepared proletariat time after time and even of dragging it down into nuclear war. The victory of the proletariat depends on conscious preparation, on its ability to struggle effectively and successfully to deliberately take control of society out of the hands of the bourgeoisie. (And this consciousness is the necessary prelude to the scientific control of nature which is the pre-requisite for socialism.)

'The Communist Parties were founded after World War 1 to oppose the renegade Social Democratic apparatus which had become the hangman of the European revolution. The results of the Social Democratic betrayal of the post-war revolutionary upsurge were to mean the isolation and degeneration of the one victorious workers' revolution, and, within a decade, under the influence of the burgeoning Stalin dictatorship in Russia, the new Communist Parties began to play the same sort of role, ever more openly, ever more treacherously — and far more effectively in that they claimed to carry the banner of the October Revolution.

Despite their successive acts of renegacy, it has required a whole historic period, the experience of the Hungarian revolution and the break-up of the Stalinist monolith, to present again the opportunity for the solution of the crisis of proletarian leadership in the building of a new mass workers' international and of new national sections of this international revolutionary party.

Through giving an independent and practical lead on every issue facing workers in struggle, through building a base in the working class, the WSL (and the TILC) are determined to fulfil their responsibility in this historic task.

The Transitional Programme

In the epoch of social democracy, before the international labour movement collapsed into national fragments at the feet of the warring bourgeoisies in 1914, socialists operated with a minimum programme

and a maximum programme.

The maximum programme was the millennium, the unseen goal in the far distance, the subject of abstract propaganda, holiday speeches and moral uplift; the theoretical property of an elite within the loose parties of social democracy. The minimum programme consisted of limited practical goals and the immediate aims of the working class. The failure of social democracy to link the daily class struggle with the goal of socialism led to its gradual accommodation to capitalism and eventual collapse.

The communist movement, reorganising itself during and immediately after World War 1, based itself on the need for the revolutionary working class struggle for socialism and resolved to have done with the minimum/maximum division. It opposed the reformists' consignment of the masses to passivity.

It declared: "The alternative offered by the Communist International in place of the minimum programme of the reformists and centrists is:- the struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for demands which in their application undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, which organise the proletariat, and which form the transition to the proletarian dictatorship, even if certain groups of the masses have not yet grasped the meaning of such proletarian dictatorship."

Following the isolation of the Soviet revolution and the ebbing of the revolutionary wave that it generated, and the rise to power of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, the international revolutionary aims of the Communist International were abandoned in favour of the policy of 'building socialism in one country'. The method of the transitional demands of the Communist International was discarded by all but the Left Opposition, led by Trotsky, which eventually became the Fourth International. Its founding document, the Transitional Programme, summed up all the previous revolutionary experience of the communist movement.

The demands of the Programme have been widely misunderstood, ignored, or opportunistically distorted in the 40 years since they were formulated, but in today's class struggle, the capitalist crisis makes any perspective of systematic reforms. There is a growing contradiction between the readiness of the working class to fight and the determination of their official leaders to betray, which means that the struggle for transitional demands (and the kind of independent working class organisation to which they lead) offers the most effective way of challenging and exposing the labour bureaucrats.

Future cadres of the revolutionary party will be found among the fresh layers of workers thrown into conflict with their misleaders in the course of the class struggle. But forces drawn from a middle class milieu will become a drag on the building of the movement if they do not acquaint themselves at first hand with day-to-day struggles and problems of the workers' movement.

Day-to-day struggle alone however does not create communists, and a fight against middle-class diletantism must go along with opposition to any

tendency towards syndicalism and nationalism among worker comrades. It is in this process of struggle that the selection of communists takes place. At every point the intervention of Trotskyists must be aimed at developing a perspective for victory and taking forward the political understanding and consciousness of workers in struggle.

A readiness to fight for the demands and methods of the Transitional Programme, and to give leadership in all struggles — no matter how partial — must be the general orientation of the Trotskyist movement.

The interventions of Marxists must flow from an understanding, given the deep crisis of leadership, of the political significance of even some apparently minor class battles. In the course of the fight our understanding of the programme must be deepened and developed — particularly the knowledge that its correct application is not a formal question, but derives essentially from a correct understanding of the period through which the workers' struggle is passing.

Whatever the struggle — whether it be for transitional demands or simply on basic union rights — Trotskyists must resolutely draw the lessons from the conflict with the trade union and Labour bureaucracies which will inevitably result from the struggle sooner or later, in one form or another. Our method is not to denounce the bureaucrats as a ritual, abstract, propagandist routine, but to spell out the steps needed to win the struggle, to seize on any positive steps taken by the bureaucrats, to put the bureaucrats to the test, to denounce them when they sell out and sabotage the struggle, to draw the lessons, and to build new leaderships in the workers' movement based on these lessons.

Our intervention must be based firmly on our appraisal of the counter-revolutionary role of the reformist bureaucracies — but must seek to help workers learn this truth in the course of the struggle, not simply to confront them with a ready-made conclusion based on our perceptions and our experience.

We are convinced that the method of the Transitional Programme consists not in the mere repetition of the words on its printed pages, but in the actual mobilisation of the working class independently of the class enemy, and in conflict with the bureaucrats who aim always to tie them to the employers and the capitalist order.

We cannot make it a condition of our participation in any struggle in the workers' movement that it should begin with a rounded programme, including correct positions on governmental questions. To say that only movements with a worked-out programme can be successful would be to miss the meaning of the programme, which has the central role of mobilising the independent strength of the working class and raising it from its existing level of consciousness to a grasp of the need for socialist revolution in confrontation with its bureaucratic leaders and the various centrist and other hangers-on.

For these reasons, Trotskyist work in the unions, while grounded on the programmatic principle of working

class independence, must be flexible in form and organisation.

The WSL will work for a genuine mass national rank and file movement, aiming to unite workers for militant policies, transform the unions, establish rank and file democratic control, and oust the bureaucracy. As part of this work we will promote rank and file caucuses in industries and workplaces. Within any such rank and file grouping we fight for communist policies and for communist leadership on the basis of our politics, raising key transitional demands as they become tactically relevant, while avoiding any ultimatism or sectarianism.

But we reject the method of the British SWP, which limits rank and file industrial groups almost entirely to militant trade unionism, and which uses rank and file groups as a substitute for the struggle to call the bureaucratic leaders to account, rather than as a means for that struggle.

In this we follow the method of the Transitional Programme: "Therefore, the sections of the Fourth International should always strive not only to renew the top leadership of the trade unions, boldly and resolutely in critical moments advancing new and militant leaders in place of routine functionaries and careerists; but also to create in all possible instances independent militant organisations corresponding more closely to the tasks of mass struggle against bourgeois society..."

Trotskyists must spearhead all struggles against attempts to shackle the unions to the state — through repressive legislation, incomes policy, court interference, compulsory 'arbitration', etc. — or to the employers, through forms of workers' 'participation' and similar class-collaborationist systems designed to suck leading trade union representatives into acting as an arm of management in the imposition of speed-up, sackings and wage controls.

For similar reasons, Trotskyists resolutely oppose capitalist import controls, which effectively tie workers in any country to nationalist efforts to protect their 'own' bourgeoisie against 'foreign' competitors at the expense of workers in other countries.

All forms of outside interference in the machinery of the workers' movement — including the imposition of secret or postal balloting designed to split the mass strength of the working class and pressurise trade unionists as 'individuals' — must be combated.

At the same time the struggle against the reformist and Stalinist trade union bureaucracy must include specific demands for the regular election of all full time labour movement officials, for them to be subject to recall at any time, and for them to be paid no more than the average wage of the members they represent. In some countries (for example, the USA, Argentina or Turkey) where the existing trade union organisations are tied more or less openly and directly to the political parties or the state machinery of the bourgeoisie, the struggle for the independence of the unions is obviously linked to the fight to break such reactionary links and, where appropriate, to fight for the unions to

construct independent, Labour parties to represent the class interests of the proletariat.

Marxists, following on the method spelled out by Trotsky in his discussion with SWP(USA) leaders on the Transitional Programme, fight for such Labour Parties to be established not on a reformist platform but on a full and adequate programme of transitional and democratic demands. However, we do not present that programme as a take-it-or-leave-it ultimatum. We recognise that in the very break by trade unions from bourgeois parties an important opening could be created for the struggle for independent working class politics. It is important that every avenue for propaganda and agitation on the class divide between the labour movement and the organisations of the bourgeoisie is exploited by Marxists and the necessity for class political independence retained in the forefront of political work in these countries.

In many more countries a fight is also necessary against the system of stringent 'no strike' clauses inserted by employers who fully exploit the fact that plant-level strike action is illegal and subject to vigorous repression by national union officials. Wages and social benefits must be fully protected against inflation by a sliding scale of wages based on a cost of living index compiled by elected committees of workers and their families and must be negotiated at least every year; and workers must assert the right to strike on any issue without fear of legal penalties and bureaucratic victimisation.

In the present period of prolonged economic crisis and recession the fight against unemployment embraces two interrelated struggles: the defence of existing jobs, and the organisation of the unemployed alongside their employed brothers and sisters in the fight against cuts in benefits, cuts in public services, and for mass action against the class enemy.

Where jobs are threatened or factories scheduled for closure, we fight for the principle of the right of every worker to a job, irrespective of the problems of the capitalist class. In answer to capitalist pleas of 'bankruptcy' and the concern of union bureaucrats to restore bankrupt firms to 'viability' at the expense of the jobs and conditions of their members, we counterpose the demand for the opening of the books of each employer, his bankers, suppliers and distributors to elected committees of trade unionists to uncover the real relationship of the particular firm to the whole system of exploitation.

We fight for the occupation of threatened factories, demanding full-scale official supporting action by the labour movement in the form of blacking action, supporting strikes, mass defence against eviction orders, etc.

Against calls by employers for redundancies we raise the demand of work sharing on full pay under the control of elected factory committees. And in each case we point to the necessity for the nationalisation of major industries along with the banks without compensation so that the necessary plan of production and defence of jobs can be implemented under

workers' management.

We raise similar demands for nationalisation in our struggle to organise the unemployed in the struggle against the system which denies them even the right to a job. Only a socialist planned economy could hope to create the three million jobs needed to wipe out unemployment in Britain.

In opposing the capitalists' attempts to drive wedges between employed and unemployed workers, we seek to recruit jobless youth and adult workers to Unemployed Workers' Unions, mobilise these unions in action alongside and also directed into the trade unions and the Labour Party as a vigorous challenge to the reformist bureaucrats whose betrayals have, time and again, helped the capitalists create mass unemployment.

In every struggle, we call for strike committees or occupation committees accountable to, recallable by and drawing new militants from mass meetings. We fight especially to involve women workers and young workers.

Where the struggle develops broadly enough to make it appropriate, we favour the further call for councils of action. We take up the fight for those within the existing organisations of the working class as a means of uniting it in a politically developing struggle which can overflow the normal channels.

Soviets — which can develop into the basis of workers' democracy — must be built out of Council-of-Action-type bodies at very high levels of struggle. They will only begin to counterpose themselves to the bourgeois system as an alternative form of government when a serious erosion of the working class's acceptance of Parliament has taken place, and when the state is in deep crisis.

Depending on the tempo of the class struggle, this can happen relatively quickly. Revolutionaries, by propaganda and by practical work in the class struggle, will help to make it happen. But a programme of building a system of Soviets in advance, before a decisive escalation of the class struggle, would be diversionary. Workers have to learn in practice that soviet-type bodies can play a role in furthering their struggles. The development towards workers' councils must be firmly linked at each stage to all the economic and political issues which can at the relevant stage of the development of the mass struggle arouse sections of workers to take action.

The future instruments of workers' power can begin life as bodies designed to unite and organise strikes for specific demands or to fight for the implementation of democratic demands such as the release of political prisoners, the right to demonstrate or free elections to a Constituent Assembly. They may even be defensive in character, for example, as bodies opposing welfare cuts. Revolutionaries must guard against formalism blinding them to the variety of ways in which workers' councils can develop, sometimes from quite unrevolutionary beginnings. They must equally guard against mystifying limited councils of action, equating them with one possible development from them, i.e.

Soviets. A bud is not a flower, and not every bud becomes a flower.

As Bolsheviks we see workers' councils as representing the unity and independence of the working class and its historic role in leading behind it the other oppressed masses. But this does not mean that workers' councils are sufficient in and of themselves to advance the spontaneous struggles of the working class. The crucial role in the development of such councils must be played by the revolutionary party itself. We argue that all representative organisations of the masses must be allowed to participate in these soviet-type bodies, and to fight within them for the adoption of their programme.

Given political leadership from a developing Trotskyist party we see such bodies as the future organs of workers' power. At some stage in the struggle it will be the task of revolutionaries to call for all power to devolve to these bodies and to develop the military means to demand it. But it is crucial not to outpace the developing mass movement.

In the post-war period, as the capitalist market mechanism becomes increasingly incapable of assuring the basic needs of society, the state has played an increasing economic role through nationalised industries and through state social security, health and education provisions won by the working class. These new conditions mean that additional demands not contained in the Transitional Programme must be developed and taken up by Trotskyists.

In an area of production so closely related to the machinery of the capitalist state, the demand for the opening of the books of the nationalised industries and public services acquires a particular importance.

On the one hand, this will expose those sections of the banks and those privately owned suppliers and contractors that profit from the exploitation of workers in the public sector; on the other, in making clear the case for nationalisation without compensation of these sections, and in revealing the way in which the public sector is run in the interests of capitalism, workers can use the figures uncovered to spell out the necessity for workers' control of this sector as part of the fight for workers' management of it, under a workers' state, as part of a workers' planned economy.

In advancing this challenge to control and property rights assumed by the capitalist state, the struggle against austerity cutbacks and closures in the public sector must centre on the fight for occupation of threatened facilities, backed up by supporting strikes, both in the public sector and private industry.

We seek to combine these forms of struggle with the fight for a workers' government.

In opposition to public spending cuts designed to help make private industry more profitable at the expense of the working class, we call for protection of public services against inflation, by automatic inflation-proofing of expenditure, with an index assessed by elected committees of workers in the public sector and the working class communities dependent on their services. We will fight for the election of workers'

parties' representatives who have pledged themselves to base their administration on the findings of these committees, and will seek to have all public services controlled by these committees on the basis of their studies of local and national needs.

The practical fight for such demands is the crucial 'bridge' between the present actions and consciousness of the working class and the actions and consciousness required to accomplish the socialist revolution. It is the task confronting every Trotskyist in each sector of the workers' movement.

Marxism

The basis of our activity is the scientific theory of Marxism, the only theory which gives a clear understanding of present-day society; of the necessity of revolutionary change; and a guide to the revolutionary action needed to bring about that change. Marxism is not a series of texts from the past but in its essence a scientific method, which allows for permanent development and regeneration of our understanding of the world and for definition and yet sharper re-definition of our action and goals in the light of experience.

Trotskyism

Trotskyism is the basic Marxist programme of the conquest of political and social power by the international working class and, on that basis, the end of exploitation and the setting up of a system of democratic self-rule by the working class.

It is the unfalsified programme of Lenin and Trotsky: based on the experience of Bolshevism — the most advanced practice of revolutionary Marxism ever attained — it links that past with the current struggles and revolutionary perspectives through the Marxist method of Lenin and Trotsky, guiding the practice of revolutionary Marxists. Trotskyism embodies the world experience also of workers' struggles, including the defence and development of Bolshevism by Trotsky and the Left Opposition, based on the independent interests and leading revolutionary role of the working class; complete commitment to building the political independence of the working class and unshakeable hostility to class collaboration in every form. It was fought out in a battle against the Stalinist political counter-revolution in the USSR and against its poisonous derivatives in the world labour movement. Trotskyism means reliance on the independent strength, activity and revolutionary creativity of the working class, which the revolutionary organisation strives to relate to and mobilise on the transitional demands. These can be a bridge between the immediate elementary class struggle and a working class drive for the overthrow of capitalism and workers' power. It is the programme of the workers' revolution, organically linked with the practical struggle to aid its development. Therefore it is not only a programme but a struggle to build revolutionary parties to fight for that programme. "The significance of the programme is the significance of the party."

Its traditions are those of the Bolsheviks and the Left Opposition:

workers' democracy;

unremitting struggle for theoretical clarity;

revolutionary activism on the basis of real and practical identification with the living struggles of the proletariat and with all oppressed sections and groups, whether in the capitalist states or in those parts of the world ruled by the Stalinist bureaucracies;

unbending hostility to capitalism and irreconcilable struggle against it and against those in the labour movement who stand for its continuation;

war against all that is specifically Stalinist in the labour movement; in the degenerated and deformed workers' states irreconcilable struggle against it and for political revolution and direct workers' power;

and war on all (especially avowedly 'Trotskyist') conciliation towards Stalinism, whether in the form of political accommodation to Stalinist movements and mimicry of them, or the form of theories of softening or disappearing contradictions and antagonisms between the working class and Stalinism.

We base ourselves on the traditions of Bolshevism in both its phases: on the experience of building the revolutionary party and making the revolution, and on the experience of the struggle by the Bolshevik rearguard against the Stalinist degeneration. We are guided by the first four Congresses of the Communist International and the fundamental documents of the Fourth International, particularly the Transitional Programme — all these we hold to have fundamental relevance for current struggles. The Transitional Programme we regard as the basic revolutionary programme of our epoch — the programme of workers' revolution, refined and flexibly structured for use by an organisation of revolutionaries fighting for the leadership of the working class in its day to day struggles.

Democratic centralism

The Workers' Socialist League fights to build a revolutionary party to resolve the crisis of leadership of the working class; a party, democratically controlled by an active working class membership, which preserves its political independence, makes effective interventions in the day-to-day struggles of the class that show an independent way forward, fights the ideological domination of the ruling class, and is able and prepared to lead the working class for the seizure of power.

The major orientation of the WSL's work is thus always towards the working class and the labour movement, aiming to build an organisation rooted in the workplaces and the working class communities. The WSL strives to develop as many worker comrades as possible into leading positions in the organisation — a crucial task if the organisation is to build strong roots in the class which will make the revolution. Non-worker members of the WSL must learn to involve themselves as closely as possible in the life and struggles of the working class and structure the rhythm of their lives

accordingly. To this end, they will be assigned to work in labour organisations, in workers' districts and as assistants to the factory militants of the WSL.

Only a self-acting, politically educated and critical-minded membership is capable of forging and consolidating an adequate revolutionary organisation and of solving its problems by collective thought, discussion and experience. From this follows the need of assuring the widest party democracy in the ranks of the organisation, maximum participation in resolving the theoretical questions facing revolutionaries, and regular and full information on all aspects of party life disseminated through the leadership.

The struggle for power organised and led by a revolutionary party is the most ruthless and irreconcilable struggle in all history. A loosely-knit, heterogeneous, undisciplined, untrained organisation is utterly incapable of succeeding in this task. A revolutionary organisation has to demand unconditionally from all its members complete discipline in all the public activities and actions of the organisation.

Leadership and centralised direction are indispensable prerequisites for any sustained and disciplined action, especially in an organisation that sees its aim as leading the collective efforts of the proletariat in the struggle against capitalism. Without a strong and firm leadership, having the power to act promptly in the name of the organisation and to supervise, consolidate and direct all its activities without exception, the very idea of a revolutionary organisation is a meaningless jest.

It is from these considerations, based upon the experience of international class struggle, that we derive the Leninist principle of organisation, namely democratic centralism. This principle is embodied in our Constitution and guides us in all our activities.

Permanent revolution

The diversity and complexity of many of the struggles in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, ranging from the struggles of the Indian workers and peasants, through the historic struggle of the Palestinian people for the liberation of their occupied homeland, to the guerrilla war in Zimbabwe and the struggle against imperialist puppet regimes — defy attempts to put forward a general catch-all programme of demands or unified pattern of tactics. But certain political questions and questions of method re-emerge again and again and require a clear answer by the Trotskyist movement.

Firstly, the Transitional Programme correctly lays stress on the leading role that must be played in the struggle of the colonial and semi-colonial countries by the proletariat. Trotsky sums this up in the formula of the permanent revolution. But in the light of opportunist interpretations of this theory in the post-war period we must emphasise that the term permanent revolution is not in any way a passive description of an automatic, objective process: rather it is a strategy to be applied and fought for in practice by the building of Trotskyist

parties in each case.

The leading role of the working class and its ability to mobilise the support of the peasantry on a programme of democratic and transitional demands rests on the ability of Trotskyists to combat the programme spelled out in various cross-class 'fronts' and 'alliances' and to expose the counter-revolutionary politics of Stalinist, reformist and nationalist currents.

As the Transitional Programme stresses:

"As a primary step the workers must be armed with this democratic programme..Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers.

"On the basis of the revolutionary democratic programme, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the national bourgeoisie." [emphasis added]

This does not of course rule out the fullest practical solidarity of colonial peoples in repelling military attacks of imperialism, its puppets and agents. For specific and limited tasks under certain conditions the proletariat and poor peasants can — without making any concessions in their own demand — wage a struggle jointly with sect[ions of the 'national' bourgeoisie against the imperialist enemy.

But it is wrong to seek to extend such temporary alliances to the level of a long-term political bloc, in which the independent programme and struggles of the working class and poor peasants are subordinated to the political demands of the 'democratic' bourgeoisie in the name of an "anti-imperialist front". This is effectively to abandon the strategy of permanent revolution and adopt instead Stalin's Menshevik conception of 'democratic dictatorship of proletariat and peasantry'. Every attempt to lead the working class down the road of seeking only democratic rights must be challenged and opposed. All recent events have shown that the national bourgeoisie can only lead the struggle against imperialism up to a certain point. They are incapable of even defending democratic rights that are sometimes momentarily gained. Iran has particularly clearly demonstrated the validity of Trotsky's insistence that only a socialist revolution under the leadership of the working class can carry through even the struggle for democratic rights.

The alliance, as the Programme points out, must be not with 'the middle classes in general' but with 'the exploited layers of the urban and rural-petty bourgeoisie'.

The culminating point in such an alliance must be the struggle for the building of Soviets and the demand for a workers' and farmers' government independent of the parties of the bourgeoisie.

The task of the Trotskyists is through building revolutionary parties to carry out the patient propaganda work, agitation and organisation of the workers' movement and poor peasants around a programme of democratic and transitional demands which start from today's crushing material problems and lead workers and peasants to grasp the necessity for the socialist revolution.

A new tide of mass struggles is jeopardising the status

quo in Latin America. This resurgence of workers' and popular militancy has manifested itself in different forms — from union conflicts in Chile and Brazil, mass mobilisations in Peru and Bolivia, up to revolution in Nicaragua. Such a flow of class struggle undoubtedly represents a general, decisive turn — shifting to Latin America the main burden and maximum intensity of current social conflicts. But the crisis of proletarian leadership proves crucial in such a connection, as revealed in both the treachery of petty-bourgeois leaders (Sandinists in Nicaragua), and in the objective or subjective inadequacy of Trotskyist forces to offer an alternative. The recent experience of the revolution in Nicaragua stresses the role of nationalist forces committed to class collaboration with the national bourgeoisie.

Indeed, the petty-bourgeois Sandinists have openly engaged in cooperation with capitalist forces, despite the total collapse of the state structure. In this way the Popular Front regime provides the condition for reconstructing de novo the bourgeois state apparatus, starting from army and police, (progressively liquidating the popular militia), while harshly repressing militant workers. This is paralleled by an economic policy respectful to foreign and local capitalism, despite extremes of destruction and starvation. Such a course is in obvious accordance with the Cuban (and Kremlin) policy of "peaceful coexistence".

This Nicaraguan experience once more recalls therefore the need to dismiss the false concept of permanent revolution as a "democratic stage" spontaneously "growing over" to a "socialist" one. And it highlights the necessity of combining a united front with petty-bourgeois anti-imperialist forces with a continuous exposure of the limitations of their anti-imperialism, stemming from their incapacity to break from the "national bourgeoisie".

In those Middle Eastern and black African countries where 'progressive' bourgeois regimes hold sway on the basis of 'nationalised' industry, while denying the most elementary democratic rights to the working class, women or national minorities, the task of Trotskyists is to elaborate a specific and concrete programme of demands showing the path of struggle for workers' management of industry, an end to sexual and national oppression, and the need for a genuinely internationalist foreign policy that can definitively break these countries from the grip of imperialism. And in rendering unconditional support for national liberation struggles such as those in Kurdistan, Ireland and Palestine, it is vital that Trotskyists also spell out clearly to the international workers' movement the programmatic bankruptcy of the existing petty bourgeois leaderships of these struggles.

A revolutionary, Trotskyist leadership must be constructed in each case, which is capable of preserving the independence of these struggles from compromises with imperialism or the counter-revolutionary pressures of Stalinism, and which recognises the necessity of rallying the support of the

international workers' movement.

The Transitional Programme clearly spells out the general principles from which the question of a programme to mobilise the small farmers must be approached — stressing the necessity at each stage for the construction of independent organs of control by workers jointly with the poor peasants.

The colonial revolution in the current period can move rapidly forward against a weakened imperialism. But these revolutionary struggles will only achieve the possibility of leading to the overthrow of capitalism if Trotskyist parties fight to take the lead in drawing from the outset a clear class line and elaborate a concrete programme that in each case orientates to the leading role of the proletariat.

In the struggle against imperialism in the colonial countries it is therefore crucial for revolutionaries to base themselves firmly on Trotsky's watchword for the united front in the advanced capitalist countries — march separately; strike together! Such a policy offers the only clear perspective to the struggles of the toiling masses, and also the best means of exposing the treachery and inconsistency of the 'democratic' national bourgeoisie.

It is at all times necessary for the working masses to pursue an independent way forward in the struggle for the class interests of the proletariat.

These basic positions and principled considerations lead us to the following positions on the living and immediate issues on the ideological, political and economic fronts of the class struggle

Women

We fight for full and equal rights for all women, for female emancipation from the male domination which throughout history has coexisted with class society and which has its roots in class society. We fight, in particular, for the emancipation of women of our class, suffering a double and triple oppression, who have most vividly been described as 'the slaves of the slaves'.

Women's liberation presupposes the root-and-branch reorganisation of society. It will be one of the most profound revolutions in history. The necessary social reconstruction demands a proletarian revolution.

Women's liberation is necessarily based on the proletarian revolution — or else it is either utopian, reformist or both.

Mass working class women's movements were built in association with the early Second International and the Communist International. They were destroyed by fascism and Stalinism and vanished.

Today a movement is being reborn, in ideological chaos — because it has to rediscover so much, and because no mass revolutionary movement exists to help it. Yet it is a healthy ferment, this chaos.

We are committed to the struggle for working class leadership of the women's movement, which must be linked firmly to the working class struggle for power, and ideologically educated to make that link. At the same time the labour movement must be thoroughly

transformed so that women can play their full part in it. A revolutionary working-class based women's movement must be built. For the first time in history it is possible to build it at a time when a mass female industrial proletariat exists. We fight to build it and to draw the radicalised middle class layers of women towards the politics of revolutionary socialism, which alone can lead them to achieve the real liberation of women, keeping in mind an imperative need for a sensitive approach to the movement, recently reborn, of the doubly-oppressed half of humanity.

We support the Women's Fightback campaign on this basis and will work, in a careful and patient way, within it for our class-struggle politics.

We pledge ourselves to fight to make the WSL an organisation which women revolutionaries can find habitable and accessible, and can play a full role in.

Imperialism and national liberation

We give unconditional support to the struggles of the oppressed peoples everywhere fighting against imperialism, and to the organisations leading that fight. At each point we put forward the class-based policies and perspectives necessary to carry that fight through to victory. In this process we distinguish between the by-and-large petty bourgeois nationalist leadership and the working class and peasant mass bases of these organisations. Our unconditional support to those in the struggle against imperialism does not lead us to hold back political disagreement and conflict with nationalist, reformist and Stalinist leaderships. On the contrary, it demands that we take up the struggle for a class line in opposition to such leadership more and more urgently. We seek to give the maximum support to the building of revolutionary workers' leadership in the oppressed nations, through fighting for independent international class solidarity action and through the fight for the reconstruction of the Fourth International.

Communist internationalism does not counterpose itself to the struggle of oppressed nations for national rights of self-determination and independence — any more than the communist programme is counterposed to the fight to preserve democratic rights. The programme of communist internationalism subsumes the struggles for national liberation, including national separation; it absorbs the progressive elements in the nationalism of oppressed nations, the elements of struggle for freedom from oppression and of assertion of the right to national identity into its own programme, and fights for these (and against the bourgeois and chauvinist versions of such demands) from the position of the working class and of the communist international programme of the working class.

It recognises that the road to the real world-wide unity of the working people will not be over the protesting backs of the oppressed nations and peoples of the world, on tracks already laid down by brutal capitalism — but that it runs through a whole period of reconciliation including freedom of separation, leading

to a voluntary world federation of workers' states, and thence to the stateless United Communist world system.

We support the struggle for a united and independent Ireland and for an end to the political and military interference in Ireland by British imperialism. We also pledge ourselves to give all possible assistance to Irish revolutionaries in the task of building an independent revolutionary workers' party in Ireland.

The struggle for the political independence and leading role of the working class in international solidarity action in no way detracts from the obligation of Trotskyists to participate in and build mass anti-war mobilisations. We seek to weaken imperialism's ability to wage wars against the oppressed masses of the world and against the deformed and degenerated workers' states. We seek to draw together broad layers of society opposing particular instances of imperialist military aggression.

In such campaigns, far from dropping or soft-peddling our fight for the leading role of the working class and principled anti-imperialist demands, we should use every opportunity through our own propaganda, agitation and serious work in the labour movement to expose the limitations of pacifism, reformism and chauvinism, and win sections of the mass anti-war movement to a Marxist programme.

It is from this standpoint that we endorse the struggle within the British labour movement against the nuclear arms build-up by the Thatcher/Reagan governments, and fight within the campaign for a firm perspective of smashing the anti-Soviet NATO alliance.

Racism, fascism and the strong state

Britain's imperialist past has left a legacy of racism throughout the working class, a legacy which, if not systematically fought, can lead in the present crisis to a disastrous conclusion. For, if the unity of the working class is not established, the fascists will be able to mobilise and weld together a reactionary mass movement which can destroy the labour movement.

The reformist answer to the crisis does nothing to combat nationalist and racist prejudices within the class and indeed positively encourages the racists by refusing to break from the framework of nationalism. We are opposed to import controls.

The WSL is totally opposed to every manifestation of racial or nationalist prejudice. We oppose all immigration controls and advocate the removal of all racists from labour movement positions.

At times of economic and social crisis the fascists can emerge as a serious force in a very short time. Fascism does not appeal to reason and operates on the basis of very simple logic. It depends for its growth on success at the street level and therefore must be met and defeated there.

In the battle against the fascists we place no reliance whatsoever on the forces of the capitalist state to defend us. We must recognise that such occasions when the police deal effectively with the fascists will be the exception and more importantly will be a transient

feature of the state's behaviour. Even then they will 'even-handedly' strike at the left and labour movement at the same time, e.g., by banning all marches at the same time as those of the fascists. We do not give the state the right to arbitrate between fascism and the workers' movement.

The present phase of fascist attacks has led to the establishment of defence forces which have taken a variety of forms from area to area. Almost all of these defence forces are concentrated within the black community. It is the task of revolutionaries to build on the lead given by the black population to generalise the development of defence forces throughout the country. A central feature of this will be the direct involvement of the organised working class.

Defence squads have so far emerged to defend black areas and people from racist and fascist attacks. For this reason the primary slogan which should be used is "Build Community Defence". Our aim will be to develop street committees involving all who live in a particular area — whatever their colour.

The question of slogans is a complex one but they must essentially mean something to people and have the ability to move them. The rich experience which we will have in the coming period will suggest to us the actual wording of slogans. However we should attempt to use the following as guidelines:

- * Build community anti-racist defence;
- * Self-defence is no offence;
- * Support black self-defence;
- * Black and white, labour movement defence;
- * Workers' defence.

We reject a 'stages' theory which argues for black defence first and workers' defence later. We equally reject any formulation which suggests a group of people under attack should wait for one second for the official labour movement to help them organise.

We seek the self-organisation of the masses and a struggle within the organisations of the class to take a leading part in it.

The riots and the consequent statements from government figures calling for increased police powers herald a strengthening of the state machine.

We are committed to fighting every narrowing of democratic rights with the utmost energy. In particular, we must respond to the rampaging gangs of police with the following demands:

- * No extension of police powers;
- * Disband the SPG.

Where appropriate we should call for the removal of the police from whole areas such as Brixton and Toxteth and their replacement by defence committees based on street-by-street organisations.

Nationalism

We reject the nationalist/reformist politics of the "Alternative Economic Strategy" and of import controls, and counterpose a socialist programme. As an essential part of our alternative to the nationalism of the 'AES' we argue for the Socialist United States of Europe.

In the areas of advanced capitalism, the nation state has long been a roadblock to development. Nowhere has this been more incontrovertibly demonstrated than in Europe. The competition of Europe's major states has twice this century sparked as world-imperialist conflagration.

The nation-state structures in Europe have survived long beyond their natural historic time only because of the successive defeats of the working class.

The Socialist United States of Europe is our answer, both to the reactionary nationalisms of the major European powers, and to the EEC, their desperate attempt to overcome the national strangleholds of their system. The proletariat must unite Europe in a free socialist federation — all Europe, East as well as West.

Youth

Young workers are especially vulnerable under capitalism. Within the family they are often stifled. The education system is an obstacle race, grading them to fit the stratifications of capitalist society — irrespective of interests, abilities, desires.

Masses of youth go straight from school to the dole. Those who get apprenticeships work at a pittance for years longer than is necessary for the training process. Most trade unions make no provisions for recruiting youth into active membership. The dull and sluggish routine repels most youth and stifles others.

We fight for:

Full trade union rights for young workers including the right to strike. Special provisions for youth in the trade unions. Creation of junior workers' committees. The right for young workers unemployed since leaving school to join the unions and to receive unemployment benefit at the adult rate. For unionisation of YOPs schemes and full trade union rates of pay on all such schemes.

Further education opportunities for all young workers. Unlimited access to further education. An end to the use of apprentices as cheap labour. Ban on all work for apprentices not connected with the apprenticeship; reduced periods of apprenticeship. Trade union committees with youth representation to supervise apprentice training.

Full pay at 16.

For free abortion and contraception for all youth regardless of age.

A democratic Labour youth movement — free from the bureaucratic control of the Labour leaders and the pseudo-democratic centralist regime in the Labour Party Young Socialists maintained by 'Militant'.

We support 'Class Fighter' and the National Left Wing Youth Movement.

The Stalinist states

The Russian Stalinist bureaucracy and its various satellites and replications in the degenerated and deformed workers' states are an unconditionally reactionary, anti-socialist and anti-working class force. In the countries where they rule, the Stalinist bureaucracy oppresses the working class and, using totalitarian police state methods, prevents them from

taking control of society.

In Poland, the naked threat of new invasion and subjugation by the armies of the Russian and Eastern European bureaucracies (which also threatens the destruction of the newly reborn Polish workers' movement, Solidarnosc) has been a major factor in so far containing the drive of the working class to take control of society.

We stand for a political revolution of the working class against the bureaucracies of the USSR and the other Stalinist states. The social and political regime of the different bureaucracies has nothing in common with socialism or communism.

The WSL is for the defence of the Soviet Union — that is, we are against imperialist subjugation of the USSR, etc., and against the return of nationalised property to private ownership. With Trotsky we hold nationalised property to be progressive on condition that the working class can seize political control from the bureaucracy and therefore we are opposed to the potential embodied in nationalised property being destroyed.

Against capitalism and imperialism we defend the nationalised economies of the USSR and the other Stalinist-ruled states. Our defence is unconditional — that is, irrespective of the self-serving, anti-working class and reactionary policies of the ruling bureaucrats. We fight against their characteristic policies and against their rule, believing that under all conditions the best way to defend the potentially progressive survivals from the October Revolution (and the revolutions whose development was influenced by it and by the existence of the USSR) is to overthrow the bureaucratic tyranny and set up the democratic power of the working class.

We do not let considerations, calculations or fears concerning the military strength, etc., of the USSR in the face of imperialism affect our commitment to the political revolution of the workers against the bureaucracy.

What is the political revolution?

- (a) the smashing, through revolutionary direct action under the leadership of a revolutionary party, of the bureaucratic state apparatus, its dismantling, and the assumption of direct power by the working class masses through a network of workers' councils (the historically established form of proletarian democracy).
- (b) the simultaneous assumption of direct control in industry by the working class — control in which factory and area organisations will interact creatively with the central state power and organise the economy according to a democratically arrived at, and democratically controlled and implemented, working class plan.
- (c) the complete destruction of the bureaucracy as a social stratum by removing all material privileges, as well as destroying its totalitarian monopoly of control and power in society.

The road to the political revolution will, as the events in Poland confirm, involve the development of struggles and demands the elaboration of a programme of

transitional demands.

These will include democratic demands — such as freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and organisation, the right to strike and the right to trade unions independent of the state. The rights of national minorities should also be championed as part of the struggle against the chauvinist, conservative Stalinist bureaucracies.

Increasingly, workers will demand the end of all bureaucratic privileges. They must be encouraged to go further and demand that the whole workings of the economy be opened up to the scrutiny of elected committees of workers. The secret diplomacy of the bureaucrats with their Stalinist colleagues and with the imperialists must be brought to an end.

Within the mass movement of the working class there must be a fight for a genuine workers' militia to defend militants and independent organisations from the attacks of the bureaucracy.

Such militias should act under the control of soviet-type workers' councils. While such councils will arise in mass struggles led by the working class they can spread to the poor peasantry and the army.

It is to popularise and wage the conscious struggle for such policies and other appropriate demands to mobilise the working class against the bureaucracy that Trotskyist parties are needed in all the degenerated and deformed workers' states.

The Labour Party

The Labour Party — in its ideas, its policies, its relation to the bourgeois state, and its record in government over 60 years — has shown itself to be tied and integrated into the established system. At the same time, the bedrock organisations of the working class, the trade unions, support and finance the Labour Party. It is a party which serves capitalism, but which can only do so because it is based on the organised working class movement, many elements of which want to bury capitalism. In that contradiction lies the potential of transcending Labourism.

The organic connection between the Labour Party and the unions allows for the possibility of large scale working class participation in the party.

Labour in government can be a strong party for capitalism, when, together with the trade union bureaucracy, it successfully blocks the spontaneous resistance and actions of workers and thus forces workers to bear the costs of capitalism's problems. Or it can be weak for capitalism when, as with 'In Place of Strife', its working class base rises up against it.

The WSL asserts that it is organically part of the political and industrial organisations of the working class. It does not concede that the Labour Party is ordained to be the exclusive property of its pro-capitalist leadership. Neither does it concede that only those workers within the established organisations are of concern to the labour movement. We seek to direct workers as an organised force to take up their struggles in the Labour Party as well, and to direct forces already within the Labour Party to give support

to every a working class struggle. The WSL will build an organisation based on Marxist politics inside the labour movement, not outside it and needlessly counterposed to it in the manner of the sectarian-abstentionist left.

We relate to the Labour Party by developing the contradiction between the working-class base and the pro-capitalist leadership and by attempting to mobilise the working class in struggles which will create the conditions for the masses to outgrow and break through the particular stage in its development represented by Labourism. We aim to help bring the political wing of the working class movement to a political-self-reconstruction on the basis of revolutionary socialist politics, methods and objectives. We pursue the struggle despite and against the conservative bureaucracy of the labour movement. We fight for our right, and the right of all varieties of socialist thought, to exist and organise in the Labour Party. We oppose any voluntary or unnecessary self-isolation. But if the bureaucracy forces it to a split, then in no case will we flinch or capitulate on our principles. The Labour Party should exist to serve the working class, and socialists should fight to make it do so. In no sense does the working class exist to serve the reformist Labour Party which serves capitalism.

The workers' government

The desperate decline of Britain, basically the decline of British industry's competitiveness and profitability, makes desperate measures necessary — and for the Tories desperate measures are measures that make the workers pay.

The repeated failure of different government strategies, Labour and Tory, prepared the way for demolition-squad Toryism. Put into office in the wave of industrial direct action that scuttled Heath, the last Labour government behaved as a straight-line capitalist government. It abused the confidence of the working class. Basing itself on the trade union bureaucracy (until 1978) on one side, and the state machine on the other, it ruled in defiance of Labour Party conference decisions. It got wage restraint and actually cut real wages for two years running. But what the ruling class learnt from that experience was the insufficiency of even a relatively successful (in their terms) Labour government. Yet the limits of the existing leadership meant that the working class challenge to wage controls could not be carried through to a decisive victory.

The employers desperately needed to make the sort of attacks Labour could not make without shattering its base. Thus Thatcherism.

In a situation where mass action was mobilised that actually brought down the Tories, a totally new political situation could be created. It would provide conditions of struggle in which a revolutionary organisation would call for a workers' government based on the organisations of struggle which would have developed. Whether a Labour government will be a more or less radical new installment of the sort of Labour governments we have had this century, or not, will he

determined by two things:

* by whether a real attack is made on the wealth and entrenched power of the ruling class, and,
* by whether or not it rests at least in part on the organisations of the working class, instead of those of the state bureaucracy, the military and Parliament — that is, whether in response to the direct demands of the working class it can do what the workers want, or endorse what they do (taking over factories, for example) without being a captive of the state machine. The working class itself would only serve and protect its own interests by organising itself outside the rhythms, norms, and constraints of Parliamentary politics, expanding its factory shop stewards' committees, combine committees, tenants' committees, etc., and creating new action committees, to be an industrial power that could increasingly force the left Labour leaders to either act along the lines of its demands, or be cast aside as masked defenders of the class enemy. In this way, the class could build the political and organisational strength to make the parliamentarians hostage to the workers' movement, and move forward to dispensing with them, crushing the counter-revolution that the ruling class would inevitably escalate and building a workers' government.

The Brighton/Blackpool/Wembley decisions to control MPs and to give the majority of votes on who shall be prime minister if Labour has a majority in Parliament to the CLPs and trade unions could open the way to a new kind of 'Labour' government — a workers' government, instead of the government of the trade union party which merely administers capitalism according to capitalism's own laws, a Labour government potentially accountable to sections of the organised working class. The extent of that accountability would depend on the extent of independent class mobilisation and organisation.

Revolutionary Marxists believe that there must be a socialist revolution — a clean sweep of the capitalists and the establishment of the state power of the working class, leading to the setting up of a workers' democracy. The big majority of the labour movement don't yet share our views. But we have a common need and determination to oppose and fight the Tory government and to oppose any moves, even by the Labour Party in government, to load the cost of capitalist decay and crisis onto the shoulders of the working class.

If we cannot agree on a root-and-branch transformation (or on precisely how to go about getting it) we can at least agree on a whole range of measures to protect ourselves and to cut down and control the capitalists. Thus we propose:

To defend and build on the breakthrough for Labour democracy at Brighton/Blackpool/Wembley, we must fight for the next Labour government to act radically in our interests and to base itself on the movement, not on the bosses' state machine. And at the same time we must prepare and organise ourselves to be able to protect our interests however it acts.

We must fight to commit the Party to radical socialist policies, and use reselection to make sure MPs are held to those policies.

But if the Labour Party were really to strike at the power and wealth of the bosses, they would strike back, using their army and state forces to repress the movement if necessary — or simply to cow the Labour government.

Whoever wants to break out of the limits defined by the interests of the capitalists must be prepared to disarm the ruling class and destroy its state. Only the working class can do that, organised in squads like those which the flying pickets organise, which can arm themselves when necessary.

Any Parliament-based government that attempted really radical change would put its head on the block, and while the present armed forces exist the axe is in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

The power of the ruling class is not entirely or even essentially in Parliament. That is the terrain to which they now go out from their redoubts in industry, the civil service and the armed forces, to meet and parley with the labour movement and to put on a show for the people.

But if the labour movement insists on new rules for the parleying game, they have a reserve language to resort to — force. So have we.

In other words, we propose to militant workers to join with us in a fight for the labour movement to reconstruct itself and gain real control for the rank and file, and for a government of the labour movement to take radical measures against capitalist power. Effectively this means calling upon workers to fight with us within their existing organisations for a revolutionary programme and perspective.

We cannot say in advance how far such a struggle could go before it produced a major split within the reformist organisations. But the experience of the struggle would win important broad forces to the banner of socialist revolution and create the possibility of mobilising the class as a whole.

An essential part of this fight for the workers' government must be a drive to arm the labour movement — or at least big sections of the rank and file — with socialist politics.

If the labour movement is to be ready to offer a real socialist alternative at the 'next stage', the foundations must be laid and built upon now, and urgently. That is what the WSL exists to do.

The WSL and the Fourth International

The programme of socialism is a world programme or it is a utopia; socialism presupposes a working class seizure of all that has been progressive in the capitalist epoch, and it will build on the economic achievements of capitalism. Capitalism is a world system. Socialism in one country, even the most advanced country, is an absurdity.

Therefore the working class needs a revolutionary international party.

The WSL fights for the political regeneration and

organisational reconstruction of the Fourth International founded in 1938 by Leon Trotsky. We seek the maximum contact, cooperation and dialogue with the forces of Trotskyism internationally, as the means for reaching theoretical and political clarification and forging organisational links.

But the reconstruction of the Fourth International as the authoritative party of world revolution cannot come through a process of grouping and regrouping the existing forces claiming to be Trotskyist. The development of the class struggle on a world-scale in the coming period provides increasing opportunities to draw new layers of workers in struggle to the banner of Trotskyism and the Transitional Programme. These opportunities must be seized, not by organisational steps, but by the political struggle to take the Transitional Programme into the struggles of the working class. It is only through such intervention that new forces from the workers' movement can be drawn into revolutionary politics. It is only through the building of sections, based in the working class, and drawing new layers to Trotskyism that the Fourth International can finally be reconstructed as the authoritative party of world revolution. This may involve a whole series of splits and fusions. But it must involve political intervention, on the basis of the Transitional Programme, into the day-to-day struggles of the working class.

The WSL is part of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee, and seeks to develop it into a democratic centralist tendency, as our immediate contribution to the development of revolutionary forces. Success in this development will of course only be a step towards the greater task of political regeneration and organisational reconstruction.

We do not see the WSL as the nucleus of the revolutionary party, fully-formed except for our small size. Nor do we believe that we somehow stand remote from the difficulties and inadequacies of our movement, the Trotskyist movement, over the last 35 years. The revolutionary party will not be built simply through one-by-one recruitment. A whole process of splits and fusions, and also of ideological rearmament and regeneration will be necessary.

We seek to develop dialogue with and to win over the best forces from the other would-be Trotskyist currents. Here and now, however, we don't 'speculate', but build the WSL as the immediate contribution we can make now to preparing the future. We are pioneers of the future revolutionary party or we are nothing.

Disagreements

The WSL openly acknowledges the existence of different views within its ranks on historical questions of the Trotskyist movement, on the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, on the EEC and on the General Strike. A timetable has been fixed for a discussion and decision on Afghanistan, the EEC and the General Strike. In the meantime the different views will be expressed publicly in the press of the movement.

Once a decision has been taken by majority vote, that

is then the line of the WSL, and all members are obliged to support it in practical action. The minority may, of course, continue to argue internally and to try and change the policy. At the discretion of the majority public debate may also be allowed.

Since the historical questions are not questions of active political programme, no timetable has been fixed for a vote on them., The WSL will, however, strive for a common understanding, through internal debate and (at the discretion of the leading committees) public discussion.

Our immediate demands

As a platform of immediate class-struggle demands, we endorse the following.

* Organise the left to beat back the Tories' attacks!

No to attacks on union rights: defend the picket lines; no state interference in our unions.

No to any wage curbs. Labour must support all struggles for better living standards and conditions. Wage rises should at the very least keep up with price rises. For a price index calculated by working class organisations, as the basis for clauses in all wage agreements to provide automatic monthly rises in line with the true cost of living for the working class. The same inflation-proofing should apply to state benefits, grants and pensions.

* Start improving the social services rather than cutting them. Protection for those services against inflation by automatic inflation-proofing of expenditure. Stop cutting jobs in the public sector. For occupations and supporting strike action to defend jobs and services.

* End unemployment. Cut hours not jobs. Fight for a 35 hour week and an end to overtime. Demand work-sharing, without loss of pay. Organise the unemployed — campaign for a programme of useful public works to create new jobs for the unemployed.

Defend all jobs! Open the books of those firms that threaten closure or redundancies, along with those of their suppliers and bankers, to elected trade union committees. For occupation and blacking action to halt the closures. For nationalisation without compensation under workers' management.

* Make the bosses pay, not the working class. Millions for hospitals, not a penny for 'defence'. Nationalise the banks and financial institutions without compensation. End the interest burden on council housing and other public services.

* Freeze rents and rates.

* Scrap all immigration controls. Race is not a problem — racism is. The labour movement must mobilise to drive the fascists off the streets.

Purge racists from positions in the labour movement. Organise full support for black self-defence.

* The capitalist police are an enemy for the working class. Support all demands to weaken them as a bosses' striking force: dissolution of special squads (SPG, Special Branch, etc.), public accountability, etc.

* Free abortion on demand. Women's equal right to work and full equality for women. Defend and extend free state nursery and childcare provision.

* Against attacks on gays by the state; abolish all laws which discriminate against lesbians and gay men; for the right of the gay community to organise and affirm their stand publicly.

* The Irish people — as a whole — should have the right to determine their own future. Get the British troops out now! Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Political status for Irish Republican prisoners as a matter of urgency.

* The black working people of South Africa should get full support from the British labour movement for their strikes, struggles and armed combat against the white supremacist regime. South African goods and services should be blacked.

* It is essential to achieve the fullest democracy in the labour movement. Automatic reselection of MPs during each Parliament and the election by party conference

of party leaders. Annual election of all trade union officials, who should be paid the average wage for the trade.

* The chaos, waste, human suffering and misery of capitalism now — in Britain and throughout the world — show the urgent need to establish rational, democratic, human control over the economy, to make the decisive sectors of industry social property, under workers' control.

The strength of the labour movement lies in the rank and file. Our perspective must be working class action to raze the capitalist system down to its foundations, and to put a working class socialist alternative in its place — rather than having our representatives run the system and waiting for crumbs from the tables of the bankers and bosses.