

INTERNAL BULLETIN NO.26

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Democratic centralism in TILC ..... Report by Smith, endorsed  
by January 8-9 NC

Information on the TILC

Further articles for the Internal Bulletin should  
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to the centre.



Statement on Democratic Centralism in TILC and the December TILC meeting

Presented to WSL NC by Smith, Jan 8-9 1983.

Amended text carried unanimously

The conference was held on Dec 27-31 inclusive in London. It was attended by the WSL, the LOR, the RWL, the TAF and by Socialist Fight (Australia). A Chilean cde attended as a sympathiser, and cdes from the Hackney group attended.

The conference was overall a very negative exercise. The RWL and the LOR came to the conference determined to press a stance they had adopted from the time of the Summer School 1982 - to either establish the TILC as a democratic centralist international tendency forthwith or alternatively to establish a definitive date this year for establishing democratic centralism. Failure to achieve this at the December conference would result in the call for an international tendency within TILC; failure to establish d/centralism by the end of this year would result in that tendency being turned into a faction.

My visit to the LOR in Milan in November was an attempt to convince the cdes that such a course of action would be very destructive. I was unsuccessful despite long discussions. The LOR had shifted their position radically from the previously agreed position at the formation of TILC. This was that there are two necessary preconditions for establishing a d/centralist TILC: first - and by far the most important - the establishment of the minimum political basis for a d/centralist structure (which it was agreed did not exist at the time TILC was set up); secondly - and which must flow from the first - a demonstration in advance that we can generate the necessary organisational resources to function a credible international centre.

I defended this position, and argued that the necessary political conditions for d/centralism do not exist in TILC at the present time. TILC doubled in size during 1981 with the fusion of the WSL and ICL and of the SLDC and RWL in the USA. Both of these fusions have created problems in developing TILC into a distinct political tendency at an international level.

In the WSL the fusion has run into difficulties. A sharp discussion emerged over the Malvinas and now focuses on other questions towards our first conference. This situation has a negative effect on the development of the political homogeneity of TILC and complicates a move towards d/centralism.

The fusion of the SLDC and the RWL has broken down under conditions which, in my opinion, call into question the healthy state of the internal regime of the RWL, despite the serious attempts which the group has made - and with some impressive successes - to turn to the unions under very difficult conditions. Such politics cannot but affect the political line of the organisation, as is shown by the sectarian way the Labour Party slogan is presented in the USA.

Not that the SLDC cdes were blameless; far from it. But the majority ( a large majority) refused adequately to conciliate when only conciliation would have achieved the success of the fusion. Leland Sanderson, for example, at the TILC conference described Steve Zeltzer as "a shyster, a petty crook and a compulsive liar" - positions which Leland claims he had held since before fusion.

I told the LOR cdes that this factor alone, in my opinion, is enough to prevent the introduction of a d/centralist structure and necessitate a political development. I told them that in my opinion the timescale of the WSL ( setting October 1983 as a target date) was about right to try to achieve that.

The LOR responded to this by saying that, yes, these problems exist, but they can only be resolved under a d/centralist structure.



They insisted that d/centralism was a prerequisite for reaching political agreement.

By the time of the TILC conference a month later the LOR position had hardened even more. Before the conference could be opened they, together with the RWL, challenged the status of the conference. They proposed that the conference be given the status of an "international pre-conference" preparatory to a conference in mid 1983 which would establish a d/centralist structure. This was motivated very sharply. Leland S in particular declared the TILC Secretariat to be "bankrupt" and to be working against the development of TILC.

Throughout the conference the matter of d/centralism arose repeatedly, with the RWL pressing organisational points in that direction and the LOR providing the political support for such moves,

At the end of the conference the debate on d/centralism was very hollow. It was plainly more related to a desire to relate to the discussion inside the WSL from a d/centralist position than any consideration that d/c itself was politically principled or feasible.

The manoeuvrism was shown by the position of the LOR and RWL on the international document. Whilst proclaiming that a "revisionist tendency" had gained the upper hand in the WSL, they supported the document as "an adequate basis for a d/centralist TILC". Yet this document was agreed by the whole WSL Executive! It was just a tactical move in order to have a document and clear the way for a move to d/centralism.

In contrast the TAF cdes throughout all this held a generally constructive position. They agreed that d/centralism was not immediately achievable, but were concerned that there should be a serious attitude towards achieving it. They were critical of the WSL resolution, which tended to put the blame on the organisational inadequacies of the other groups. In making our assessment of the problems of TILC, we recognise that as the leading section of TILC we have on occasions lacked sensitivity in our relations to the international comrades and have failed in certain situations to respond in a suitably sensitive way to their concerns. However it would be absurd to explain the recent dramatic developments in TILC in terms of incidents and failures by us to be sufficiently sensitive.

In the vote, the WSL resolution was carried, with the LOR RWL and TAF voting against, and SF voting with us.

This creates of course a very serious situation in TILC. Not so much the moves themselves, but what they represent which in my opinion is a sectarian regression by both the RWL and LOR. They both have a sectarian past - like all of us, but more recently. The influence of the WSL in TILC was pulling them away from this. Various factors - including the disunity in the WSL - has halted that process.

The LOR now have a policy of entry into the LCR(USFI) in Italy - if not into the USFI more generally. This seems to represent a sectarian shift.

All this puts TILC in a serious crisis which could well result in its break-up. We should not however sit back and allow that to happen - to the extent that we can prevent it. For our own political development we need an active international orientation.

We should therefore argue against the organisational moves of the RWL and LOR, and create the maximum political discussion. We should not only circulate their documents inside the WSL but also ensure that we reply to them and to any other material they may produce.

Smith: edorsed unanimously by WSL NC.



## Information on the TILC.

Founding Document : "Declaration of Intent"  
(adopted Spring 1980)

### INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD TROTSKYIST MOVEMENT.

The TILC declares its view that:

\* The post-war history of the Trotskyist Fourth International has been marked by a succession of splits and fusions in which at each point the political and programmatic issues at stake have been inadequately discussed on each side. The TILC analysis and balance sheet of that history is well-known and extensively documented.

\* Underlying these splits and fusions has been a political crisis in the Trotskyist movement itself, reflecting the continuous material and ideological pressures on its forces from imperialism, Stalinism, the reformist bureaucracy and petty bourgeois nationalist and other radical currents. Such pressures have resulted in adaptationist political positions which abandon or revise basic elements of the programmatic struggle for leadership in the working class, compromise the independence of the class from alien political formations, and thus depart from the methods and principles elaborated in the 1938 Transitional Programme.

\* The fragmentation of the post-war movement - though a product of profound political disagreement - has served in practice to further restrict the ability of orthodox Trotskyism to combat and defeat such revisionist tendencies: it has walled off whole sections of the post-war movement from practical experiences in other countries and continents; it has entrenched the various factional groupings in a subjective defence of their positions, linked to a steadfast refusal to examine the political lessons of the post-war struggle for the FI; and, since 1953, it has effectively destroyed the FI as a single authoritative organising centre of the world party of revolution - thus jeopardising any prospect of establishing a single, agreed programmatic response to the crisis of leadership facing the international working class in the 1980s.

\* We emphasise our view that NONE of the international groupings now proclaiming themselves Trotskyist can lay any exclusive claim to represent the political continuity of Trotskyism. Yet there remains quite clearly a "world Trotskyist movement" - in the form of a wide range of organisations which see themselves as based upon the 1938 Transitional Programme, and which are composed of militants who aspire to be, and regard themselves as revolutionary Marxists, continuators of the struggle of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

\* This world movement, while oscillating around the Trotskyist programme, is politically heterogeneous and diverse. Internally divided and confused, in a constant process of change and adaptation, and above all handicapped by a refusal to examine the lessons of not only more distant past events but even recent past fiascos - such as the role of Trotskyist forces in the Portuguese events of 1974-76.

The movement thus has many 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 betrayals of Stalinism, or to further the strategy (however ill-comprehended) of Permanent Revolution.

In some countries, such struggles, even if coloured at times by opportunist deviations, have been taken deep into sections of the proletariat; in others, even limited and hard-pressed forces, sometimes tainted with sectarian methods, have at least taken steps to provide translations of basic Marxist and Trotskyist literature to lay the



basis for future revolutionary propaganda. Numerically, these scattered and diverse forces of Trotskyism have expanded in the post-war period as a reflection of the crisis of Stalinism and reformism and the increasing self-confidence and political development of the working class.

\* The TILC fights for the reconstruction of the Fourth International. In this formula we sum up:

(a) Our rejection of any notion that we alone as an organisation can proclaim ourselves to be the sole continuity of the Trotskyist programme and thus to constitute "the" Fourth International: indeed we do not accept that any such direct political continuity has existed since the uncompleted struggle against Pablo split and effectively destroyed the post-war FI in 1953;

(b) Our insistence that what is required to lay a firm basis for unity and common discipline among Trotskyist forces is not organisational juggling and negotiations between the existing fragmented organisations, but a thoroughgoing political discussion on the programmatic conclusions to be drawn for today's struggles from the post-war experiences of the sections, and on the operation of democratic centralism on a world scale. We insist that the FI must be more than simply an assembly of people who have not (yet!) betrayed the working class: it must be the living and conscious organised form through which revolutionaries hammer out and fight for a programme adequate to the tasks of today's class struggle.

\* We direct our struggle in fighting to reconstruct the FI, therefore, both to the working class of the world - whom we fight to mobilise in independent struggle and to draw to the banner of Trotskyism in the building of national parties of the TILC - and to the forces of the world Trotskyist movement.

\* We declare in this light that we regard the world Trotskyist movement as a category composed of a number of widely divergent political currents - with many of whom we have fundamental and unresolved political disagreements which we are anxious to discuss. In its ranks, along with our own members and sympathisers, we would recognise the USFI and its sympathising sections, the forces of the Parity Commission (BF, LTT, OCRFI), the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, the IC and IST and a number of smaller international groupings and national-based groups which base themselves on their understanding of the 1938 Transitional Programme.

\* It is our declared objective to create - through the independent work of TILC in the class struggle, through our press and our propaganda, through every possible opening for intervention with other organisations of the world Trotskyist movement - conditions whereby the necessary political discussion and clarification can take place to lay a principled basis of agreement to unite the most principled class fighters, the most conscientious political leaders in a common, democratic centralist, reconstructed Fourth International.

\* We declare ourselves therefore fundamentally opposed to all these forces - empty sectarian ultimatomists on the one hand, barren opportunist charlatans on the other - who attempt to erect organisational or spurious political barriers to such a struggle. We call on the membership and the leadership of the organisations of the world Trotskyist movement to participate in the long-overdue process of clarification and programmatic development that alone can open the way to the reconstruction of the FI.

\* We have already tabled for discussion the document The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle, founding document of the TILC. We remain open to alternative suggestions as to the form and method of discussion. 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" Fourth International. In today's manifest crisis within the world Trotskyist movement for any grouping to take such a stance is a clear symptom of sectarian arrogance.

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### THE DECLARATION

1) \* More than 40 years after the founding of the Fourth International the historical crisis of humanity still remains reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.

\* In its deepening economic and political crisis, imperialism is challenged at every turn by the proletariat and the other oppressed layers of humanity in their struggle for an end to exploitation, oppression, and the abolition of universal want.

\* Mass struggles against despotism and military dictatorship have rocked the allies of imperialism throughout the world.

\* Struggles for national liberation have ousted colonial rulers from vast tracts of Asia and Africa, and continue to this day despite all the concerted military power of US imperialism and its fellow oppressors.

\* As the bourgeoisie toys with its last card of fascism (most obviously in Turkey) or military dictatorship, workers have surged forward to confront this threat of renewed barbarism.

\* Even while they seek in vain to resolve their crisis, the capitalists meet militant resistance from the organised strength of workers acting with strikes and occupations to defend jobs, wages, conditions and social services against attacks from the employers, the state and the IMF.

\* Even in their metropolitan homelands, the imperialists cannot rest easy.

\* New layers are constantly thrown forward into these struggles, and women workers in particular have fought to lift the dual burden they bear as wage-labourers and the objects of sexual oppression.

\* At the same time young workers, school and college students have been in the vanguard of struggles against imperialism and oppression (South Africa, Iran, Nicaragua) and across the world the militancy and revolutionary enthusiasm of the youth have played a vital part in igniting action against the attacks of the bourgeoisie.

\* Over the last 30 years, the international proletariat has made powerful gains, but also suffered serious setbacks and defeats.

\* Yet its enormous objective strength remains chained by the historic crisis of proletarian leadership.

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2) \* The contradiction between the needs of the proletariat and the actions of its leaders is as massive today as it was at the time of the struggles to found the Fourth International.

\* Workers have fought in heroic struggles towards political revolution in the degenerated and deformed workers' states (above all Hungary in 1956), yet these independent movements of the revolutionary proletariat have been crushed by the political tyranny of the Stalinist bureaucracies.

\* To fulfil their revolutionary aspirations, these workers need a new, conscious leadership from the forces of Trotskyism.

\* Workers in struggle against imperialism confront not only the forces of capital and the repressive apparatus of the bourgeois state but also their own leaders - the reformists, Stalinists and petty bourgeois nationalists.

\* The mass forces in struggle against imperialism and against the ruling Stalinist bureaucracies objectively need a new, revolutionary



revolutionary leadership to replace the counter-revolutionary betrayals of the old leaders.

\*The best elements in these struggles are actively searching for that leadership.

\*Yet most of them can only discover the constantly shifting varieties of centrism and degenerate fragments of the Fourth International.

\*For a new element has now compounded the crisis of proletarian leadership; that is the crisis of the Fourth International itself.

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3)\* Today the Fourth International no longer exists as the world party of socialist revolution founded by Trotsky and the forces of the International Left Opposition in 1938. Indeed it has been disrupted both politically and organisationally by revisionist tendencies.

\*We have come together because its banner has been dragged through the swamps of opportunism and/or sectarianism by the leaders of the USFI, OCRFI and IC, which have abandoned the principles and the method of the Transitional Programme. In reacting to these problems, groups like the IST have plunged into the extremes of sterile sectarianism.

\*But the Fourth International will not be reconstructed as the world party of socialist revolution through the formation of another international organisation which puts itself forward with sectarian arrogance as the entire body of world Trotskyism.

\*We recognise the urgent need to develop, with both the leadership and the membership of these groupings, the fullest possible discussion on the continuing post-war crisis of the FI and on the lessons which this holds for the struggles for revolutionary programme in today's class struggle.

\*The recent split in the USFI over Nicaragua has led to the formation of a joint Parity Commission by the Bolshevik Faction, Leninist Trotskyist Tendency and the OCRFI - with the declared objective of convening an open conference of the world Trotskyist movement on the crisis of the FI. Only if such a conference is genuinely open and devoted to a thorough debate on the key questions Trotskyists have faced or are facing can it constitute a step forward on the path to the political clarification necessary for the reconstruction of the FI.

\*Confined for the most part to national isolation until now, some of these groupings will play the key part in the fight to reconstruct the FI.

\*But alongside them, the most developed militants must be drawn centrally into this battle, together with those forces prepared to break politically from the bankrupt leaderships of the USFI, OCRFI, IST and IC or ready to develop beyond a history of centrism, petty bourgeois nationalism or feminism.

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4)\* On the basis of agreement with the programmatic report The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle, and with the general lines of the Programmatic Basis, we now declare our intention to build a democratic-centralist international tendency, committed to the fight to reconstruct the FI.

\*This tendency will work to develop and expand the political fight for the reconstruction of the FI. to lead the struggles of the proletariat and its potential allies towards the revolutionary seizure of power and the world dictatorship of the proletariat.

\*From this conference our organisations have established an international liaison committee to act as the focus for our political discussions prior to the founding conference, and to draw up a document



stating the conditions of membership of the tendency, as well as to plan and commence coordinated intervention by consistent Trotskyists in the fight to reconstruct the FI.

\*This document will bring together the tendency's programmatic positions as the fundamental tasks confronting a Trotskyist leadership in today's class struggle.

\*This tendency itself will be formed only after principled agreement has been reached both on these conditions of membership and on national perspectives and tasks for the member organisations, together with a full commitment to enter into international discipline.

5)\*We issue the following call to all those forces engaged in the revolutionary struggle for international socialism:

\*The crisis of the Fourth International has added a new dimension to the historic crisis of proletarian leadership in the epoch of imperialist decay.

\*That crisis can be resolved only through the reconstruction of the Fourth International, to raise once again the banner of revolutionary communism and unite the workers of the world behind the leadership of one world revolutionary party.

\*Opportunism and sectarianism offer no way forward to the international proletariat, and they can play no part in advancing its struggles.

\*We take our stand on the traditions and experiences of the Communist movement, as embodied in the decisions of the first four Congresses of the Communist International and in the founding documents of the Fourth International, and we declare our resolve to struggle relentlessly against all attempts to dilute or distort these principles.

\*Being in no way sectarian, we do not oppose our own interests to the independent class interests of the revolutionary proletariat, and we set as our task the building of independent Trotskyist parties as national sections of a reconstructed FI.

\*Today our forces are small - but they will grow through the consistent and determined orientation we give to workers in their struggles against imperialist oppression, against the political dictatorship of the Stalinist bureaucracies, and the betrayals of their existing leaders.

\*History offers no alternative to humanity but a relapse into barbarism or the reconstruction of the Fourth International to lead the proletariat to achieve its historic tasks.

\*The same stark alternative lies before all those forces who are prepared to struggle for socialist revolution and the world dictatorship of the proletariat.

\*Unite with us now in the revolutionary unity of programmatic agreement, or stand on the sidelines as the courage, strength and determination of the proletariat are betrayed by today's leaders to a future of poverty, misery, fascism and war.

FORWARD TO THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL, WORLD PARTY OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION!

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#### Other TILC material available:

\*Programmatic Basis ("9 Points) .....10p

\*The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle ....60p

\*TILC Internal Bulletin

\*Resolutions from December 1981 meeting .... In WSR No.2.

\*Full account of TILC July meeting - IB13.

Copies available from the Centre. Add postage to orders.