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Discussion article

Democratic Centralism and TILC; An initial reply
to Comrade Morrow.....Parsons

Conference document

The Crisis of the FI and our Tasks; The case for
its rejection and an alternative approach to the
reconstruction of the FI.....Parsons

The NCCC-A neglected area of our work.....Parsons
(This is a discussion article which includes a short
resolution).

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DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM AND TILC: AN INITIAL REPLY TO COMRADE MORROW : PARSONS.

Morrow's document is one of the most dangerous type in that its simplicity allows it the appearance of a coherent perspective and thus makes itself attractive at a time when things seem to be going wrong.

Time does not allow a detailed critique of "Towards an International Tendency ; Problems and tasks" and so these are really just outline notes. There are no simple answers to the problems of forming a tendency ,just a few questions which Comrade Morrow is obliged to answer.

As I understand it Comrade Morrow's theses are that firstly there has not been sufficient serious attention paid to the establishment of an international tendency and secondly that it is possible to move more or less immediately to a democratic centralist structure in the TILC.

I have a certain amount of sympathy for his first argument. As far back as the January '78 conference of the WSL I put a resolution calling for the establishment of an international tendency within 12 months. I continue to believe that it is a crucial and urgent priority for the movement. However ,it is of course easier to advocate and even believe in something than it is to do it.

It seems to me to be the grossest arrogance of Comrade Morrow and his co-thinkers that they alone are the "Internationalist" section of our movement. The problems which have arisen over the last year or so have nothing to do with any retreat, any "national Trotskyism" or anything other than the political problem posed by the organisational difficulties of moving towards a democratic centralist tendency within which major political differences have emerged.

Comrade Morrow brushes aside these differences as being of a comparatively minor character. Thus his only significant references to them read as follows . . .

"In general I agree with Cunliffe when he states 'I would regard the material problems as far more serious than the political differences'" (No date or reference for the Cunliffe quote) p.2.

"On the political problems I am inclined, like Cunliffe to think that these can be resolved by a process of patient discussion" (No date or reference again).p.4.

"The present differences are not, in my view, any wider than those existing within individual national sections, or for that matter existing between WSL and ICL pre-fusion. We still do not, for example have agreement in WSL in the TILC founding documents.

What differences have emerged in TILC, I think, are of the type we might anticipate in an international Trotskyist tendency and even welcome given the present condition of the world Trotskyist movement as a source of deepening the process of discussion and clarification towards greater homogenisation of our selves as a tendency. We should not, I think, take the somewhat sectarian stance of those like Worker's Power who would demand agreement on every factual dot and comma before accepting there is a basic principled agreement."(p.4)

So, as you can see, Comrade Morrow does not attempt to look at the concrete political differences which have proved a barrier to the establishment of

democratic centralism. Moreover, if comrades compare the formulations quoted above with those in the statement of the so-called 'internationalist' tendency platform then the situation becomes far more serious and indeed Comrade Morrow's evasive document on democratic centralism and the TILC becomes far more sinister than it at first appeared.

"The contention that there is not the necessary political agreement within TILC does not hold water as the so-called political differences pale into insignificance beside the yawning differences within the WSL since fusion and between the WSL/ICL prior to fusion."

("internationalist" tendency platform - my emphasis)

Now which is it comrades? Are the differences within TILC no wider than those within the WSL and between the WSL/ICL pre-fusion or do they pale into insignificance beside the yawning differences within the WSL and the WSL/ICL pre-fusion?

This is no academic point. Whatever there might be of use in Comrade Morrow's document is rendered useless by his refusal to examine the actual differences which exist in TILC.

Fundamentally the political problems which exist within the TILC come down to the RWL. Comrade Morrow makes no attempt to examine the differences we have with that organisation and justify his charge that the differences with them are no wider than those which exist within the WSL now. He could of course mean by this that some comrades in our movement are in fundamental agreement with the RWL's programmatic positions, method of party building and internal regime. If this is the case then he should say so and indeed the comrades concerned should be called upon to justify their positions. If he thinks that the differences we have with the RWL "pale into insignificance" beside the differences within WSL and between the WSL/ICL pre-fusion he should justify this statement.

Comrade Morrow should tell us how he approaches the question of political agreement or difference. It is not a straight forward matter. Plenty of movements which might have paper agreement with us on general political truths eg. "the centrality of the transitional programme" have fundamental disagreement with us on its application.

To read Comrade Morrow's document you would not know that the US fusion which TILC forced through 18 months ago has blown apart. He makes no reference to the existence of a second group of TILC supporters in the USA. What does Comrade Morrow think of the proletarian Tasks Tendency? Does he seriously believe that the experience of the US fusion and its complete failure places no question mark over the future of a democratic centralist internationalist tendency which includes the RWL?

Indeed Comrade Morrow's silence on the RWL and his formation of a tendency precisely at the time one is called for by the LOR/RWL gives rise to grave suspicions on the part of many comrades. What is the relationship between the RWL/LOR tendency in the TILC and the so-called 'internationalist' tendency? These questions need answering before we can even begin to discuss Comrade Morrow's view that international democratic centralism can be launched now.

resources. However, at a time when the political tensions in the movement are temporarily sharpening during the pre-conference period it would have been useful if he had posed his suggestions as a development of, or an alternative to, the proposal already made by Comrade Oliver and myself. Last September we called for a leading full-timer to be assigned to international work only (see 1B20 Oliver/Parsons "Save the fusion." Sept. 1982). Rather than his concerns over international work being attached to a tendency struggle they could then have played a part in developing the will to solve the very real problems which lie in the way of relocating our resources.

Until the questions I have posed are answered by Comrade Morrow it is not possible to go any further with the debate. I hope he clarifies his position soon.

Parsons 30/1/83.

ERRATA Insert at the top of this page the following which was omitted during typing.

'Even if the political problems did not exist in the form they take at present Comrade Morrow's document is not much use in casting light on precisely what democratic centralism would mean in practice. For example, he might have used the Falklands/Malvinas debate to illustrate the mechanics of democratic centralism as he understands it. He might have used other examples such as Poland.'

One thing he does which I consider useful is to put forward some interesting suggestions for developing our international work through reallocation of.....'

Also page 1 para 5 Line 2 should read '.....to suggest that they etc'.

The Crisis of the FI and our Tasks: The case for its rejection and an alternative approach to the reconstruction of the FI.

The SWP(USA) is preparing to split from the USFI. While this is a wholly logical development, considering its adoption in recent months of totally revisionist concepts, it is still nevertheless an event without precedent in our world movement. It is one thing to take up increasingly opportunist, or for that matter sectarian, positions it is another to repudiate the struggle for the FI. Cdes with some knowledge of our movement might be able to point to other defections eg Pablo, the LSSP, Posadas, Healy etc in order to show that the SWP turn is not exactly new but no one will be able to find a parallel for what is happening now. The party of Cannon, the party with whom Trotsky elaborated the Transitional Programme, the party of the 1953 'Open Letter' has, in many ways, enjoyed, even in recent years, an authority amongst Trotskyists which no other single party can match.

The reverberations of the SWP's split from us will echo throughout the world movement. In the USFI it will create a storm. This might not be a very public storm but it will nevertheless be one. All over the USFI its members will be asking themselves "Why did it happen?", Even if they refuse to ask it themselves they will be open to our posing of the question.

Now in a situation such as this any document which we produce must focus on this one development. It must answer the question "What are the implications for us?". Instead we have a wooden almost timeless denunciation of our whole movement. The SWP's present evolution, whatever limited emphasis is placed on it, becomes, in the context of the document as a whole, simply another example of how bad everything is. Its importance, as far as the authors are concerned, or at least so it seems to me, lies in the fact that it confirms our general analysis.

I would sum up the approach of the document as nothing more than "Spartacism with a human face". The following quote from p2 is, in fact, little different from the spartacist notion of subjective Trotskyism.

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

The only positive element in our world movement, it would appear, is the general struggle to develop as Trotskyists. Of course, there are isolated remarks here and there in the document which suggest there might be something positive about specific movements, or sections of movements in specific instances (eg the Vargaites in Poland) but the overall impression is that like observing a dog walking on its hind legs we are surprised it happens at all. In any event such glimpses of the good things our cdes are doing as do creep into the document are quickly followed by careful qualifications and overwhelmed by the sheer welter of insults, denunciations and dismissive side-sweeps. Thus we read on p1 "..... the Trotskyist movement today, like a shattered mirror, presents itself to the world as a chaotic mass of fragments, each of which may in the right light glint with at least a fraction of the former brilliance, but none of which in themselves can ever constitute or reconstruct a viable and authoritative FI."

As far as I am concerned "The Crisis of the FI and our Tasks" spits on the history of the struggle of all the sections of our world movement to build the FI. My own approach is somewhat different. I look at our movement not with rose tinted spectacles but from a point of view which starts not from its weaknesses but from its strengths. I can be as sharp a critic as anyone if the need arises but in my general approach to analysing the world Trotskyist movement (WTM) I believe we have to look for the positive contributions, encourage them, publicise them, find ways of linking our work with them, seek to draw them together.

Is it really the case that we can find nothing positive in the USFI's ability to group so many cdes in so many different countries in one world movement? Is it really the case that cde Moreno has built nothing of worth in his long struggle to construct Trotskyist parties in Latin America and elsewhere? What can we learn from his undoubted

ability to draw into his movement whole chunks of centrist and left reformist currents? Is it really the case that the Lambert movement can contribute nothing to Trotskyism? What about Hugo Blanco? As I understand it the ICL claimed to have learnt some positive things from LO where is this spelled out in the document? If we seriously monitored the progress of the NFM then we might also find important forces within the present international groupings. Not just contacts we could 'win' but ones from whom we could learn. We once had a limited dialogue with some Swedish USFI ones - now it seems we are more interested in independent groupings such as the RWP of Sri Lanka many of which are hopelessly sectarian.

We should not look at each segment of our movement in isolation. Very often the developments in one have profound effects in the others. We should look at the role played by particular organisations, both nationally and internationally based, at particular stages of our movement. For example, the historic struggle of the SWP led by cde Joe Hansen against the guerrillist majority of the USFI. This struggle saved hundreds of cadre for Trotskyism, strengthened the growth of the Marxist tendency and, when the SWP tried to cut it short, unleashed a new development in our movement - the Leninist Trotskyist Tendency, which attracted large numbers of politically healthy cdes fighting for consistent Trotskyism.

The old WSL made some limited attempts to relate to the LTT - especially in Belgium - but the Lambertists beat us to it and we gained nothing. Throughout that period we were hampered by our fears of opportunist adaptation. For the latter half of 1977 and early 1978 we were hamstrung by a faction fight with the first wave of spartacists and then just over 18 months later another wave appeared. In August 1979 with the USFI gearing up for an major explosion we were locked in a dispute, which incidentally went to a national membership meeting, over the wording of an agreement to even discuss with them!!!!!!

The 1979 split in the USFI was around the burning issue of the time - Nicaragua. The divide was between those who fought for the independence of the working class and the construction of a Trotskyist party and those who to a greater or lesser extent capitulated to the Sandinistas, leaving aside whether or not the split was unprincipled and whatever the shortcomings of the FI(IC) which was formed in its wake, the significance of that organisation was that it grouped the cdes who had passed the test of Nicaragua. To be sure the FI(IC) experience does reflect the weakness of our world movement but our dismissal of it is far too smug and arrogant. As we have found since our own fusion and in the present problems of the TILC it is not that easy to bring different traditions together. Indeed if you look closely at the ICL/WSL fusion document you can't help but notice the way in which different, sometimes contradictory, positions were included in it. Do we think that this was unprincipled? Or is it a fact of life in the present day Trotskyist movement that concessions have to be made if fusions are to be possible. Of course, we have tried to bring out the best in each previous tradition and we have had the benefit of being able to blend our work on a day to day basis. It is far more difficult on an international scale. I don't know enough about the FI(IC) to make a definitive judgement on the reasons for its demise but I think that it is far too simplistic to blame the hastiness of the fusion or the diplomatic nature of the Founding Theses.

It certainly is the case that the scattering of the FI has led to a tendency for many movements - certainly those which are based on one strong national organisation to develop their understanding of Trotskyism and thus their critique of other cdes on the basis of their own national or continental experiences. We should look carefully at our own movement for example. I believe that we are marked by what we have learnt in the British class struggle and moulded by our experience in the British Trotskyist movement. In the pre-fusion WSL I argued that our understanding of how to apply the Transitional Programme was unique. That is to say that no-one including Trotsky and those who collaborated with him had previously shared it. Of course, that does not mean that it was wrong as such but it does mean that it cannot be used as a blueprint against which to check the Trotskyist credentials of others.

We accuse Lambert's movement of excessive stalinophobia and elevating the tactic of the united front to a strategy. Well, that's as maybe, but isn't it just possible that the PCI has had an experience of stalinism which is a little different from our own. Since when have we had to deal with stalinism in the shape of a mass party? Is it also not the case that the Lambertist position on the united front derives from the problem posed by two mass parties

of the working class. Surely we, in grappling with such a problem directly, day to day, rather than from our safe haven across the channel, would have to take this into account.

Moreno is also marked by his experience in Argentina and Latin America generally. Look at his book on the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Is it not the case that the Stalinist tendencies of his approach derive in part at least from his lack of experience of democratic rights? Similarly the anti-imperialist united front. Is this not a theory, right or wrong though it may be, which arises from the need to solve concrete problems. Are we to simply sit back here, having never in our lives had to deal with the development of a revolutionary strategy for Latin America, and blithely dismiss the advocates of such a theory as opportunist?

No doubt Trotskyists in Buenos Aires, Paris or even Brussels look at our present orientation to the MO and draw the conclusion that we have opportunist deviations. These would include comrades whom we would accuse of opportunism.

Let's look for a moment also at our document, 'Aspects of the International Situation and our Tasks'. In the opening pages while talking of the problems of revolutionary strategy in Central America we say the following... "The forces to construct such a proletarian vanguard are largely organised in the left wings of existing cross-class fronts. Trotskyists must take this reality into account in developing their tactics" (top of p.3). Imagine we were all transported to Central America and had to "take this reality into account in developing our tactics". Would it not be the case that we would be far from agreed on how to do it? Is it not the case that some of what we would consider deviations are in fact that necessary mistakes we would have to make in sorting out the application of our general principles in the heat of the class struggle? Moreover, could it not also be the case that some of what we consider to be errors or even reflections of opportunist method are in fact more or less correct applications of the Transitional Programme and its method in the given circumstances?

All this is not to suggest that national Trotskyism is not a problem - far from it. What I am trying to say is "has it created within the various segments of our world movement damage which is irreparable?" How do we begin to break it down rather than bemoaning the fact that it exists? Clearly there are real differences but these can be discussed out if genuine attempts are made to work together. We can use the positive sides of our own fusion to encourage others.

We say in the 'Crisis of the FI and our Tasks' that the Transitional Programme is insufficiently developed. We like others have failed to develop it very far although we have made some effort. If we believe that a fuller and broader programme must be developed as a guide to action in the class struggle of today and as a test of revolutionary practice of organisations which would play a role in reconstructing the FI, then what are the implications for our relations with other groupings?

The effect of the fusion on our approach

There was quite a difference between the international work of the WSL and that of the ICL though both organisations were heavily marked by sectarian attitudes to other Trotskyist groupings. The ICL's unique analysis of the FI led it to reject virtually everyone as even remotely useful. Indeed it did not even use the term world Trotskyist movement. To a certain extent this was a reflection of a healthy desire to begin the process of political regeneration but it also prevented the comrades from relating in a positive way to the debates and developments in the world movement.

The WSL despite its Healyite origins and perhaps to a certain extent because of its traumatic faction fights with the Spartacists was beginning to break from sectarianism and developing a much more healthy orientation. A vivid indication of this was the investigation of and report on the Morenists which was drawn up by two of our leading comrades. Whatever weaknesses this report had it was fundamentally very good because it took a positive approach. For example it examined the Peronist period in terms of the problems faced period in terms of the problems faced by Trotskyists, and what they were trying to do - not just from the point of view of a 'Trotskyist' making scheme based on 'Thou shalt nots'. I would date the halting of this process at the foundation of the TILC. I well remember the founding conference and the pressure exerted on us by others there to include a rushed characterisation of Moreno. It took some argument within our delegation

to resist this pressure. Since then we have made up for our initial delay with a vengeance. The following Christmas, I think it was, we adopted a dreadful document on the Parity Commission and the 'Crisis of the FI and our Tasks' is firmly rooted in the trajectory of sectarian regression on which we had by then embarked. The fusion with the ICL has hardened up that regression. Cdes who feel that the theme of the coming conference will be the struggle to stop sectarian regression in our domestic politics should realise that this like charity must begin at home.

I feel that in the realm of the FI instead of the positive sides of each movement feeding off each other the opposite has happened. Perhaps we should re-issue the report on the Morenists and seek to deepen its analysis. I can't believe that if we did we would turn out such a scandalous "appreciation" of their work as that which appears in Crisis of the FI and our Tasks. Let's take our reference to m Moreno and the Falklands/Malvinas war and examine it more closely. "According to apparently reliable accounts from the Lambertists and others (who?) the major Morenist organisation in Argentina, followed a plainly class collaborationist and nationalist line in the later stages of the Malvinas war" (p4 col.1 - mye emphasis). This quote is scandalous for a number of reasons. Firstly its willingness to give credence to the Lambertists who a mere 266 lines later are said to have "an evil reputation for slander and violence against political opponents". Secondly its sheer unadulterated lack of a serious examination of what the Morenists were seeking to do in the war and the particularly difficult circumstances under which they were working. Thirdly its obvious purpose which is to characterise and catagorise these cdes as "plainly class collaborationist and nationalist" and thus people who are membership will be unlikely to make any effort seriously to study.

What is to be done?

Towards the end of the document we define our tasks as independent work, building factions within all the segments of the world movement and discussions. I think that on occasion in the past I might have given the impression that I see the FI being built reconstructed simply through the amalgamation of existing movements. This is not my view. There would indeed be no point in taking this approach as we do not have the weight to do it. We need to show that through our methods and programme we can make a firm relationship with wide layers of our class. Many of the Trotskyists towards whom we direct so much venom simply dismiss us as hopeless sectarians, incapable of growth or real influence. A central part of the painful process of reconstructing the FI will be convincing the, in practice, that we can deliver the goods.

Moreover, I am not of the opinion that everything in the Trotskyist garden is rosy. I agree with the contention that our movement needs political regeneration - or rather to make real political developments. This is why I am, and always have been, a firm supporter of the need to make TILC a central focus of our work. I do object to the sectarian politics of some of the sections of the TILC but even if we lost them the few forces which we would remain would be very precious to us. Together we have contributed towards clarifying the theoretical and practical problems faced by the world movement and we can continue to do so.

Finally, of course, it would be a denial of our Trotskyist role to simply latch onto other, bigger Trotskyist groups and abandon the development of our movement through our practice in the class struggle. Indeed we might well come across healthier forces than some of those such as the Iranian USFI group who besmirtch the name of Trotskyism.

I think the formula of building "Bolshevik Leninist" factions in existing Trotskyist groups and letting them expel us is extremely ill-thought out. It sounds very spartlike to me though no doubt the authors of the document will be able to give some slick, sophisticated explanation of the subtle difference. Certainly I think that simple prudence would prevent publication of the document or at least that section because it would put a swift end to our plans and guarantee no one of any significance would discuss anything with us. Workers Power, the spartacists and perhaps other groupings of riff-raff have the same approach to us as we have to the major segments of our movement. ("Bib fleas have little fleas etc."). WE wouldn't waste time talking to our fleas, why should the USFI, Moreno or Lambert bother with us if we think so badly of them?

I

Indeed what are we to discuss? It seems that we have dropped our absurd notion of the "open conference of Trotskyists" which was never at any stage remotely viable.

Our present formula is more vague and we have seem away, somewhat, from our insistence on history when we say that we have things to discuss about the problems facing us all in the 1980's. Then, of course, we suggest 'The Transitional Programme in today's class struggle' as a basis for discussion and this in itself causes problems. Not only is it out of date but also it has the disadvantage of being an all-round programme. What would be the practical outcome of such a discussion. It doesn't really matter because I doubt if anyone significant will want to discuss it with us - for the time being at least.

The problem which then arises is that the lack of discussion leads us to confirm our view of the forces we are so keen to condemn. They won't discuss about how useless they are and how right we are, therefore that just goes to show how useless they really are.

A perspective around which we can begin a serious approach to reconstructing our world movement.

We should deepen our struggle for the development of the TILC. This means fighting to cleanse its ranks of sectarian weaknesses; a real turn to the development of our work in the mass movements in countries where TILC groups exist; the growth of our understanding of the political processes taking place in a world vastly different from that which existed in 1938 ie. primarily a serious approach to understanding the concrete development of stalinism - especially in Poland; a serious approach to the concrete unfolding of the Central American revolution; a serious approach to the class struggle in the Middle East. On all of these we have only just begun to scratch the surface.

As far as the rest of our world movement is concerned we should put a stop now to the sort of negative, dismissive approach of the Crisis and Tasks document. Instead, a recognition that the FI movement, despite its divisions, is bigger than ever and growing in influence. The fact that some forces will fall by the wayside is inevitable. We should always look for the strengths, draw them out, build on them, publicise them, applaud them identify with them.

In retrospect we should have "seized the time" when the Bolshevik Faction and the LTT were formed in the 1975 -77 period. We should have joined the USFI. Between then and the 1979 explosion around Nicaragua we had the perfect opportunity to mould the development of broad forces fighting on essentially the same ground as ourselves. We let that opportunity slip away.

We missed out once again by not joining the FI(IC). We could have helped to shape its development. The least we could have got out of it when the split came was a doubling of our numbers internationally. Today with Moreno and Lambert divided and forces they could attract between them, but not alone, beginning to drift away it seems to me that at this stage in the history of our world movement there is no obvious case for joining either the IWL or the FICIR. However, the recent recruits to the IWL from the FMLN should be seen for what they are - recruits to Trotskyism on the basis of opposition to Stalinism and popular-frontism. We should celebrate their recruitment, publicise their "open letter to the FMLN" regard them as as much an addition to our forces as they are to cde Moreno's.

Does any present development within our world movement pose the question of fusing our forces with other groupings in a similar way to those of 1975 -1979 in the USFI and 1979 -80 in the formation of the FI(IC)? This is the approach we should take.

As I said in the first paragraph of this contribution the SWP's defection from our movement is an historic event. The SWP opposition could well become an extremely important force within world Trotskyism. They are naturally turning to Mandel for support and the latest information is that he has given it. These forces are not as far as I can make out characterised the excessively woolly and eclectic thinking which dominates the Mandelite forces - specially in Europe. Steeled in the crucible of the struggle for Trotskyism against revisionism they will be reworking their ideas in a serious way once they are faced with launching a new revolutionary organisation in the USA. Few if any and certainly not the ~~best~~ elements will leave the new group on the strength of reading pamphlets such as Trotskyism or *Castroism* (however good these might be). The SWP defection will, as Crisis and Tasks half-heartedly admits, create a further crisis within the Mandelite groupings but once again we are unlikely to win the best elements with our present approach. And into the process I have outlined comes the SL letter inviting fusion.

missions.

Surely the question we should be asking ourselves is this "Is there not a case for us to join the USFI?" Certainly not on a raid, certainly not with the view that we have all the answers, but recognising that the SWP defection will harden up the USFI membership and we would have another golden opportunity to fuse our forces with the best of them - to share experiences, learn from each other, strengthen each others practical work..

There is, at any rate, no question whatsoever that the next step for Trotskyists in the USA is to immediately, without hesitation and regardless of organisational concessions or seemingly questionable fusion formulas, join the SWP oppositions new grouping. Any US Trotskyist who fails to realise this is beyond saving.

If we reject an orientation towards fusion with the USFI, (and thus the SL in Britain) which we might do even with the method of this contribution, we must seriously consider the ways in which we can take initiatives which can actually affect the evolution of the world movement.

For example we might decide to launch a campaign for an open conference on the revolution in El Salvador. We should pose this as an educational exercise on the subject; as a useful forum for developing a Trotskyist perspective and as an organising discussion for a world solidarity campaign - The most abstract basis for an open conference that I can conceive of actually taking place would be something along the lines of what is Castroism? or which way forward for the Polish workers? Anything more general would be a non-starter. We have already, in the TILC statements, or could produce easily enough, useful contributions to conferences such as these. "The Transitional Programme in today's class struggle" is far too general and all embracing.

Our aim in such open conferences should be to learn, to find points of agreement to help break down the barriers of mutual suspicion and distaste which exist between the major groupings of our world movement. We would not be there to maximise differences, score points or to recruit.

In order to develop our international work we need to ~~develop~~ devote more resources to it. At least one leading full-timer should be allocated to international work only. A systematic search throughout the movement for talents such as translation ability, a systematic education of our membership in the history and more importantly the present practice of Trotskyists throughout the world - these are indispensable if we are to progress.

Only when we start to understand that we can and must be part of broader forces struggling to build the FI will we be able to make the contribution which our practice in the class struggle insists that we can.

Parsons. 4/2/83.

THE NCCC! A NEGLECTED AREA OF OUR WORK:-

One of the most important contributions brought to the fusion by the old WSL was the experience gained in the various nursery occupations and the launching of the NCCC.

It is unfortunate that over the last 18 months or so our involvement in this area of work has gradually wound down. It is doubly unfortunate in that, properly approached, continuing work in the NCCC could have posed in the most fruitful way imaginable the relationship between an orientation to women in struggle and the construction of a broad movement.

When one considers that work such as this also raises all the problems of relating a single issue campaign (which attracts focus from the widest social spectrum) to the organised labour movement it increasingly emerges as a scandal that we have allowed ourselves to neglect it for so long.

At the outset I want to make it clear that I am not intending to apportion blame for this state of affairs without placing myself at the head of the list. There is no factional motivation in this document. I believe a number of us who understood the importance of the under-fives bear joint responsibility. Gathered together in a room we would be a pretty representative cross section of the political views right across the movement and therefore such discussion as might be generated by this document has the potential of being an extremely useful one.

It should be obvious why nurseries are important but it is probably worth going over it again;

- (a) Research has shown that the first five years of a child's life are crucial to his/her development.
- (b) Most research also shows that even from the first weeks of our lives we benefit from as much social interaction as possible and that restriction of our experience to immediate family can distort and limit our potential.
- (c) For women with children nurseries are essential for freeing them from the prison of home and the restriction of the mind and spirit which this can all too easily bring.
- (d) In particular "a women's right to work" becomes a cruel deception rather than a liberation slogan when a woman who can find a job must secure childcare in order to do the job in the first place. Moreover with today's limited provision she must, in most cases, depend on substandard care with the inevitable consequences of limited benefits to the child and, for her, psychological pressures due to guilt.
- (e) The reactionary ideology which is consciously being generated by the Tory government and which finds ready echos in the right-wing of the labour movement has meant cuts in government spending have quickly fallen on the under-fives.
- (f) The relative ease with which it is possible to generate the initial support for a fight against nursery cuts or even for expansion of existing facilities allows the opportunity for us to carry out successful work.

On top of this I would repeat - we have a wealth of experience and can therefore make an impact.

The purpose of this document is not to give a complete history of our work on the under-fives nor is it to provide a critique of such work based on hindsight. At some point I think perhaps I should try to do this but it would need a number of discussions with other ideas involved and can't be a rushed process.

What I can do is to draw out some highlights. The pamphlet "Nurseries : How and why to fight for them" is a good starting point for those who have not been involved. In my opinion every member of the movement should possess a copy and have read it. This is a little difficult now in that the NCCC has decided it "can't afford to reprint it" - the formula which hides the fact that the pamphlet has both staunch allies and I suppose you could say "determined enemies" in that organisation.

This is a unique pamphlet in that it started life as the results of experience in some nursery occupations, was used to crucial effect in another while in draft form and then in a final printed version proved indispensable in a totally successful occupation. It is thus more than a manual it is the embodiment of struggle, it lives and breathes the movement of people - especially women - standing up to the whims of capital and its agents in the labour movement.

The pamphlet and the struggles it has kept alive have, however, only been a starting point. While with modifications it will prove indispensable in other struggles it has a narrow and specific purpose and out of the earlier struggles and other more general campaigns came a broad movement, the NCCC.

The NCCC has affiliations from 93 individuals and 129 organisations including trade unions, Labour Parties, local campaigns, community and women's groups etc. It is fast becoming the authority on childcare - particularly the under-fives although it is not restricted to this area - and also the focus for those who generally want to do something but have no specific idea of how to go about it.

There are clearly difficulties due to the pre-occupations of some of the dominant figures who concentrate their activities in general research and propaganda and tend to downgrade defence of provision via direct action. However, the work that these people do is in itself important in that it helps to create a framework within which the defence of a specific nursery can easily operate. This framework is a growing awareness and discussion of the issues posed by restricted childcare provision and also a network of potential allies which has grown, is growing and is a genuine nationally based organisation. Through this network, most of whom are to say the least some distance from Trotskism, we can reach many struggles we do not even realise are going on and thus play a direct part in giving them leadership.

It is in my opinion, therefore, important that we approach NCCC work not as people who wish to concentrate our attention solely or even in some cases primarily in the narrow confines of occupations but who will take responsibility for building the campaign generally- through affiliations and helping to initiate broad discussion on the issues involved ie. the care for nurseries, types of provision etc.

A central feature of our work should be the involvement of local parties, particularly women's sections, trade unions and tenants organisations in general discussions with a view to beginning a campaign for more provision or preparing a climate in which to oppose cuts. Such consistent routine work - often

involving long periods of time keeping up with developments in local provision maintaining a local group and so on must not be ditched for months on end with us only reappearing to oppose cuts.

The NCCC has been able to feed into MO discussions even at the level of NEC subcommittees material on childcare issues. Such propaganda work plays a crucial part in creating a framework into which struggles at local level can be located.

It is important that we make every effort to commit local labour parties to policies on childcare generally and in particular the under-fives. Such activity as this is a central part of renovating the movement.

In one city for example the comrades had the benefit of one of the occupations. Strenuous attempts were made to continue the Nursery Campaign after that defeat and one year later a series of further cuts were implemented. The comrades were able to provide a focus for an albeit partial resistance to them and through a purely propaganda exercise involving a Day of Action pulled a dozen councillors and an MP into a room and brought parents along to put the case for more nurseries while the children were entertained.

It should be said that almost all the cuts went through but the rapid response to them and continued propaganda on a general basis has helped to do two things. Firstly the Council is very wary of how it approaches cuts in this area and secondly the impact of the propaganda exercises has been very interesting.

The MO has been a consistent target of the propaganda and this has now born fruit. At a recent Policy Conference a set of resolutions were passed which included acceptance of the principle that free nursery provision is a right for those who want it, support for an investigation by the Council into needs and a commitment to meet them, the establishment of a joint social services/education committee to investigate the possibility of unified 'care' and education provision, flexible hours for working parents, increased recruitment of nursery teachers, fighting for workplace nurseries etc. These resolutions came from three independent sources. The task now will be to bring those policies to the attention of the class in the runup to the elections, force candidates to take them seriously, attract women to the MO and stimulate local campaigns around these issues. One of the ways the local womens organisations will be renovated is on the development of mass campaigns on these issues.

I feel very strongly that many of the debates which have divided our women comrades have been false debates, unnecessarily polarised. In the NCCC the issues it raises and the type of thoughtful flexible work it requires we have a classic focus for testing out our supposed differences. After all one of the things which made this an even more exciting aspect of the fusion than it was and is anyway was the fact that the ICL was also involved in important defence of provision work. It is not too late to take up where we have tended to tail off and in doing so contribute not only to a struggle around this important area of work but also to contribute something to resolve the differences which have paralysed so much of our work.

On other points,- In various disputes within the NCCC in the past we have worked directly with some of the most middle class "petty-bourgeois" feminists I have ever come across. I sometimes wonder why if it's possible there it is such a crime elsewhere.

I have not attempted a report of NCCC activities but they are quite wide-ranging and include in recent months the establishment of a Black Working Party.

NB. I AM ASKING FOR A VOTE ON THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION AT CONFERENCE.

"This conference reaffirms our commitment to the struggle against cuts in nurseries and a determined campaign to extend provision. We instruct all comrades who have any experience of this area of work to meet at the earliest possible date to prepare a report and proposals for activity. This report and the proposals should be discussed by the Women's Commission and passed to the NC with a view to their implementation."

Parsons.

25/1/88