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"All that glisters...": A reply to the platform  
of the 'Internationalist' Tendency

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## ALL THAT GLISTERS . . .

### A reply to the Platform of the "Internationalist" Tendency

By Jack Cunliffe.

"Not all that tempts your wand'ring eyes  
And heedless hearts, is lawful prize;  
Nor all, that glisters, gold."

(Thomas Gray: Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat)

It is easy to see what has attracted a number of comrades towards the "Internationalist" Tendency: in an organisation which they feel is bogged down in political confusion or saddled with political positions with which they disagree, and under conditions where they feel nobody in the central leadership of the League is mounting the kind of political fight they wish to see, the Tendency appears to offer a bold statement of opposition and a rallying point for a fight. There is no doubting the fact that it has successfully set itself apart from the majority not only of the leadership but of the organisation as a whole: but I feel that a closer examination of the political platform put forward by the Tendency shows that it falls in fact way short of the kind of clarity and programmatic orthodoxy to which it lays claim, and in fact can only compound the kind of confusion it apparently seeks to combat. Far from offering a beacon in the darkness, the light offered by the Tendency is more akin to a will o'the whisp, which can leave its followers hopelessly adrift in the struggle for the principles they seek to uphold.

This document is intended to show in some detail why this is the case.

#### An opportunist text

Though the Tendency and a number of its positions have been characterised as sectarian in their trajectory, the document announcing the Tendency can best be understood as an opportunist text, in that it seeks to hold together comrades holding a wide variety of political positions by adopting ambiguous formulations and implicitly hinting rather than forthrightly stating political positions.

So vague and so diplomatic are the phrases that several of the Platform theses (2,5,7) are - at face value - effectively no more than re-statements of the common position of everyone in the League. They are not "Tendency" positions at all. If they mean just what they say, nobody who disagreed with them should be in the WSL. So why do comrades feel they are contentious? Plainly because behind the bland phrases lies a significance which is not explained in the text. We have to probe beneath the surface to find this meaning.

Elsewhere the formulations are so curiously sloppy - presumably reflecting an extremely low level of debate prior to the launching of the Tendency - that any comrades who have read the Transitional Programme (TP) should logically balk at putting their names to clauses 12 and 13.

Again, we can only assume from this that it is not the words on the pages of the Platform statement which are seen as the key issues for odes joining the Tendency: it is the very existence of the Tendency, its general stance of opposition to the leadership of the old-ICL and the "soft" forces of the old-WSL, rather than the Tendency's ability to formulate correct or consistent policies and positions of its own which are seen as the main thing.

For this reason we are forced to look not only at what is in the text, but also at what is not in the text - at the questions evaded and positions fudged - if we are to get a true assessment of the politics of the Tendency and the confusion which it is spreading rather combatting within the WSL.

The LP debate: A great tragedy of the first two months of debate on the LP question was that it was almost completely beside the point of the main differences that do exist on this in the League. The initial text on the LP

in my British Perspectives draft was never intended (by me) to stand as the organisation's final word on the topic, but rather to ensure that the debate got started and included some general points about our orientation to the labour movement. In the event, a large number of the initial aspects of that early draft - in particular its heavy-handed, a-historical and in some instances factually wrong characterisations of the Bonnite left - proved to be a liability in promoting the necessary discussion on how we should work in and through the MO as part of our overall orientation. The redrafted section in IB39 has since shown that on the question of analysis of recent events and the present conjuncture in the MO there are only secondary and minor differences: the disagreements that do exist are on questions of method, orientation and party-building within the broader context of our work in the labour movement.

The Tendency document, however, fails to make any worthwhile contribution on either level of the debate. On the conjunctural situation it is miles out in its assessments; and on the question of method its points are so vague as to be meaningless.

Orientation. In Clause 1 for instance, we read "Our primary orientation is to the working class." Who could disagree? But such a statement poses more questions than it answers. Where do edes say workers are to be found? Do they propose a diffuse orientation to the "working class" in general? Or do they recognise - as the WSL has always recognised - that as a small group we cannot reach the whole class, and must primarily focus on particular sections of the class - those organised in unions, the LP, other labour movement campaigns, those currently in struggle, or those we can potentially mobilise in struggle.

Since our break 10 years ago from Healy's "mass party" delusions we have accepted that our work must be primarily through the organised labour movement, often seeking to organise broad sections of the working class not directly under our own party banner.

The question that arises, and is the focal point of the current debate in the WSL is how we work in this way through reformist organisations to build a revolutionary cadre, and in particular how we ensure that we are recruiting and training proletarian forces in the League. In other words it is not whether, but how to orientate to the working class.

The Tendency tells us nothing about this. They confine themselves to telling us what orientation they reject: "the notion that work in the MO and MOYM is the central area of our work".

At face value, many edes critical of the current orientation of our work might agree with such a formula: but they should beware. Behind an apparently innocuous statement lies a welter of possible interpretations.

It is correct, in my view to say that the MO and MOYM in themselves are not the centre of our work. To insist that they are is incorrect because it one-sidedly focusses on one component of the reformist labour movement, to the relative belittlement of - particularly - work in the unions.

But though the MO and MOYM are not "the centre" of our work, they are central to it. The struggle against reformism in the workers' movement requires a political struggle against all those leaders who confuse, betray and hold back the working class. And the fight does overlap from the unions into the MO and vice-versa: it is a combined, all-round struggle to break the grip of reformism on the working class.

We should also ask the Tendency: if they are so adamant that the MO and MOYM are not central to our work, what work do they think should be central? Trade union work? Black work? Work amongst women? Unemployed work? While other EC/OC edes have - right or wrong - felt obliged to spell out their views on this, Morrow and the Tendency, in the name of "clarity" claim the privilege of complete obscurity.

#### To organise or not to organise the left?

The diplomatic silence of Clause 1 continues into Clause 2. At face value we see a down-the-middle statement of the majority view - until we recognise

the question that is evaded in the first sentence:

"Our work in the MO is directed towards breaking workers from reformism as part of the struggle for revolutionary leadership in the class, not simply to helping the left to develop or evolve." (emph added)

The words "not simply" could be no more than a truism - of course everybody would agree that we must do more than simply "help the left to develop". Alternatively, the Tendency may mean something else: that we should not play an active role in the struggles of the MO left, but confine ourselves to propagandist "interventions" from a standpoint outside the actual struggle.

Do the Tendency agree that we should continue as part of our work to organise the left in the MO, and to struggle in that context to win workers to revolutionary politics? Or do they advocate a Workers Power-style abstentionist existence of propagandism and irrelevance? Clause 2 is open to either interpretation.

In the history of our organisation, our fight to break workers in the unions from reformism has always been seen as inseparable from the closest possible links with the sections in struggle. We have engaged alongside often inexperienced workers in often extremely partial struggles, devoted considerable resources to them, and fought in that context to draw political lessons on the role of the union bureaucracy, the general context of the class struggle, and the need for revolutionary leadership.

The weakness since fusion is that few areas of the fused organisation have followed through or adopted these methods in their trade union work - leaving us less involved in day to day union struggles than before fusion - while the same method has been only partially developed in the context of the MO work.

But instead of explicitly seeking to build on these strengths of our organisation and its history, the Tendency's Platform points no way forward, and instead merely rests at the level of discontent already rampant in the League.

#### Layers and Languages:

In Clause 3 we find still more confusion on orientation. We are told that we should orientate to "the most militant layer of the class". Provided we recognise that the "most militant layer" is not a fixed or stable category, but is to be read as that section of the class at the forefront of trade union and political struggles at any given point of time, then of course it is true that we should respond to those forces, and far better train, equip and mobilise our comrades to respond at local level to those struggles. Within them, we must aim to reach the best militants, to broaden their grasp of the struggles they are involved in, spell out practical and programmatic steps which can advance their struggles, and convince them of the need for a new type of leadership - a revolutionary party.

But if this orientation is not to lead the organisation into an incoherent course of zig-zags from one dispute to the next - and leave us becalmed in periods of comparatively little industrial action - we must combine our responsiveness and practical involvement in every serious struggle with a consistent overview and orientation to the workers' movement as a whole. The alternative is to transform the Tendency's phrase into the equivalent of the Mandelista "new mass vanguard" of the mid 1970s and adopt a completely empirical course.

Our press must combine agitational, educational and organisational material. But once again the Tendency's formulations fudge the issue. They call for "a clear revolutionary programme and bold revolutionary propaganda", in "a language they (workers) can understand". This all sounds fair enough until we ask what language the comrades envisage. Do they mean more popularised expositions of our revolutionary programme? Is the phrase therefore a criticism that SX is too heavy going in its propaganda? Or are they demanding more complex and advanced propaganda in our press?

Certainly we must endeavour to present what we have to say in language which workers can understand, if we don't want to wind up talking to ourselves. That would be equally true whatever position comrades take on the orientation of the WSL. In itself it is not a "Tendency" position.

We need to win workers' respect and attention; and we need to raise their level of understanding. The two sides of the task must be carried through simultaneously if they are to be done at all. We need an orientation as a movement, and we need to convey that and its implications in our press. While some comrades - and I tend to be one of them - feel that SX has been rather more successful at relating to the existing level of its audience, and reflected an excessive emphasis on the political problems of the existing labour left, rather than raising the level of our readership, there is no automatic answer to this in the form of a change of language in the paper. The question is one of method in our work in general, whom we seek to address politically, and how the experiences of our work are used to reinforce and expand our agitation and propaganda.

We could do all of that successfully through SX; or we could equally FAIL to do any of it even under the imprint of a "party press". To make a fetish of the "party press" label does nothing to advance the discussion on the content of our work and the content of the paper.

Indeed the very term "party press" as used in the Tendency Platform is profoundly ambiguous. What do they mean by it? On the one hand we have the Erswoll/Erswoll/Jonos document calling for a no-holds barred "Party Press" which would slap WSL and TILC on the masthead as a provocation to the chauvinists and witch-hunters in the MO leadership, hoping to go out in a blaze of "internationalist" glory. On the other, eds Morrow and others have argued verbally - as in the Midlands pre-conference aggregate - that by "party press" they do not even necessarily mean that the League's name need appear on the masthead, leaving us in doubt as to the significance of the term. Where would the comrades see a regularised League magazine fitting into this context?

Of course the "party press" slogan is attractive to wide sections of the League who are dissatisfied with this or that aspect of SX and legitimately frustrated by the lack of WSL publications to assist and direct towards recruitment. They feel - with some justification - that the League has largely submerged as a distinct force in the workers movement. But by their vague formulations the Tendency avoids telling its supporters or the rest of the movement just what it advocates.

#### Red Hornings and Registration:

The case is similar when we come to Clause 4 of the Tendency Platform. We find a form of words which could mean all things to all people. We have been told by many Tendency supporters that it is a slander to suggest that they favour a withdrawal from MO work. Yet the first sentence of Clause 4 could only logically be interpreted to mean just that:

"The choice posed by the witch-hunt is not one of a choice between staying in or getting out of the MO but between taking our politics to workers and not taking our politics to workers".

The clear implication of this rather opaque sentence is that if we stay in the MP, we cannot take our politics to workers; whereas - by implication again - if we get out, we can. Alternatively the sentence means that being in or out of the MO is utterly irrelevant compared to the (presumably distinct) task of "taking our politics to workers".

Unless it is read in one of these ways, the sentence is on the face of it meaningless. In any case it is plainly designed to link up with the nods and winks of Clause 1 to suggest that only outside the MO can we relate to workers. Some eds within the Tendency or drawn towards its formulations would correctly pull back from the logical conclusion of this one-sided position on the MO.

Indeed from a one-sided view on the relevance of the MO to the class the Tendency goes over the top completely in its lop-sided view of the Registration issue. In a sense it may seem to be just bad luck for them that they nailed their colours so firmly to the mast of making the Register a matter of principle - particularly now that it has virtually faded from the scene as the centrepiece of the witch-hunt. But in another sense it is no accident that the eds have got it wrong.

The Tendency's starting impulse is to find ways and means of turning from work in the MO to other (undefined) forms of work. They have therefore seized upon the Register issue because it seemed to offer an argument for such a turn. In this respect the Tendency platform is the sectarian mirror-image of the way Carolan in IBs 23 and 45 has set out to use the conjunctural situation in the MO to press the case for a lowered political profile in our press - which he advocates irrespective of the witch-hunt or MO legalities.

In reality, the fight against the witch-hunt and the Register has been taken up by the whole of our organisation (hopefully including members of the Tendency) - and if anything most energetically and prominently by those edes who have advocated the view that Registration - if ~~the~~ left wing resistance is defeated - is a tactical rather than a principled question. The Register can indeed be opposed in practice not by passive external propaganda but only by organising with the left in the MO, and fighting in practice for a boycott and full-scale resistance to any expulsions of those that refuse to register.

The terrain of struggle however has now shifted to the expulsion of the M EB members. Our co-thinkers have taken up this fight too without slackening the struggle against the register. The Tendency has nothing to contribute on this, the real struggle now in the MO.

It is significant that the Tendency in Britain stand alone - even in the context of TILC - on the notion that the Register is not a tactical question but a principle. To arrive at this new "principle", the Platform text employs a double sleight of hand.

Firstly it asserts that to apply to register would "negate our fight against the witch-hunt". In fact of course it would merely indicate that despite our best endeavours we and the left had lost the first round of that fight, and had to regroup for round 2. Secondly, the edes drag in the red herring of "internationalism". The register, they claim, would "oblige us to repudiate all international links in favour of the 2nd International". This is not even an honest argument: the edes know full well that according to the letter of the Constitution it applies on a formal level even now. If we follow the logic of the Tendency, we should on principle, never have allowed any of our co-thinkers to join the MO. Indeed, logically, we should withdraw at once since its constitution prevents us from being affiliated to TILC!

To conduct a discussion on this kind of level is just silly. The fact is that even now we are engaged in a form of "illegal" work in the MO. And no matter how large we featured the words TILC on our paper's masthead, the probability is that we would be expelled from the MO by the witch-hunters not for our international affiliation to organisations few will have heard of, but because of what we represent in the British class struggle. (It is precisely for this reason that the Workers Power sectarians can be tolerated with their "full programme" in the MO).

The whole register question is introduced as a pretext on which to erect a "principled" argument for withdrawal from the MO. Significantly even in the acrimonious debates of the December TILC meeting, in which the edes of the LOR in particular appeared over-eager to write off the potential for further struggles by the MO left wing and draw a "final" balance sheet of its defeat, there were no voices raised to argue that the Register is a matter of principle.

The implication of the Tendency's stance is clear. While arguing against "voluntarily limiting our politics", they argue that if the

Register issue goes against us we should voluntarily "adopt illegal methods of work in the MO". In other words - behind a volley of phrases on the Mlavinas and Ireland - their proposal is to throw the towel into the ring and - on the basis of a tactical setback - to embark voluntarily upon a long term self-imposed withdrawal from serious organising work in the MO before any expulsions or proscriptions of our edes or our press take place!

This defeatist stance could only strengthen the hand of the right wing and of the soft left in the MO, redoubling the hold they exert on the left of the rank and file. In exchange for this self-isolation we would gain . . . NOTHING! Under the guise of hard, relentless political struggle and confrontation, the Tendency in reality is retreating before a fight and offering us propagandism in place of agitation.

#### The Specially Oppressed:

Once again, at face value, Clause 5 of the Tendency platform is not a "tendency" position at all. Though the weaknesses of WX are clear for all to see and only the most diehard factionalists of the ex-ICL are prepared to defend it; and though the tactics and strategy of our work amongst women plainly need much more discussion, it cannot be denied that WX - for better or worse - IS a "special method of work" for a section of the specially oppressed. The discussion is at a still more primitive stage in terms of special methods of work amongst gays: but the Tendency offers us no hints on this or serious proposals on organising amongst black workers.

Instead Clause 5 is once again an attempt without saying anything concrete to appeal to those edes who are understandably dissatisfied with the way the League has tackled this area of work. In this respect it is analogous to much of the RML's position on women, which boils down politically to a restatement of "orthodox" positions, coupled with restatements of the importance of women workers.

A serious attempt to implement Clause 5 of the Tendency Platform would also of course run in flat contradiction to the sectarian attitude to democratic demands spelled out in Clause 13.

#### MISSING THE TARGET

Clause 6, however, contains its own elements of confusion. It seeks to "reaffirm" (?) a "primary orientation to working class women in struggle" (my emphasis). This is - as it stands - a very narrow focus for our work amongst women. Do we orientate in the workers' movement as a whole simply to male workers who are at that moment in struggle? A movement that fails to respond to the spontaneous struggles of the class - men, women or youth - can never build a proletarian cadre: but a movement that makes its "primary orientation" simply relating to the struggles that erupt must lack any coherent strategy and face real pressures towards syndicalism.

It is true that the WSL's work amongst women since fusion has been characterised by its failure to turn our members and the broad organisation into most of the struggles waged by working class women. The list of our missed opportunities began with St Mary's hospital and embraces a wide range of strikes, struggles and campaigns. But this can best be answered by defining an orientation of the movement in terms of our objectives - to build an organisation of working class women based in the labour movement, that enables us to organise working class women, mobilise them in struggle, relate to their spontaneous struggles, and offer them leadership and policies which will advance their struggles and convince them of the need for a revolutionary socialist party.

This is a two-pronged orientation. We must simultaneously establish a basic structure of regular work amongst working class women through the labour movement - TU branches, MO women's sections, and certain campaigns (Nac etc) which we seek to turn towards working class estates and unions. And within this overall context we must make specific, direct approaches to women in struggle, or to mobilise struggles on particular issues - childcare, rents, cuts, unionisation, sexual violence, jobs, or other issues. In no case must we substitute general solidarity work in support of struggles (MO resolutions, etc) for our own direct work



on picket lines with strikers themselves, in campaign meetings and with the leaders of campaigns and struggles, giving them encouragement, leadership, political advice, tactical guidance and fighting policies. This is the element that has been so weak in much of our work amongst women since the fusion - with a few notable exceptions. It is the failure of WX to relate in this way to the struggles of working class women which has reduced it to the petty bourgeois rump it has become, rather than develop from the promising beginnings we anticipated at the time of fusion to build a real fighting organisation with a structure and base of support in the working class. The Tendency's position in Clause 6 therefore relates to a real political problem. But their solution fails to come to grips with it.

It is certainly possible to orientate towards women in struggle in a "miserable economism" fashion which would leave us simply tail-ending a string of partial trade union struggles without developing them politically or creating a longer-term framework for the organisation of working women. It is equally possible to become bogged down in the routine leftism of MO women's sections or to capitulate politically to the woolly notions of petty bourgeois feminism. Another danger is that the organisation - in a backlash against the drift of WX over the last period lurch onto a crazily sectarian course of ultimatism towards the wider women's movement, rather than patiently arguing our politics in the context of broader campaigns.

For any comrade to castigate an active intervention into class struggles of women workers as "miserable economism" is an indication of their remoteness from such struggles and the class, and their inability to build a working class women's movement "broad" or narrow.

But such aloofness cannot be answered by the Tendency's equally narrow focus. An example of how the positions of the existing leadership of the women's commission can be combatted by a balanced political approach is given by the authors of IB34.

There is no logical connection between this question of orientation and the points about positive discrimination in the second part of Clause 6. The polemic is surely misdirected. Who in the League has a position of substituting positive discrimination for the mobilisation of working class women? The appalling weakness of WX is not its support for positive discrimination but its lack of any effective political direction or structure, and the absolutely factional and subjective attitude shown by its leadership against the edes of the old NSL who attempted to strengthen its work by bringing in the methods we had developed in struggle.

The tendency gets it wrong too on the politics of petty bourgeois feminism - which WX has tail-ended. The problem has not so much been its (far from uniform) emphasis on 'separatism' as its drift towards the method and programme of reformism, and its failure to draw class lines in the struggle for women's liberation.

Instead of sharpening the debate on the theory and practice of WX and our actual work, the Tendency's hints and nudges lead the discussion away from the key political issues, while making no concrete proposals.

#### Youth:

Clause 7 shows a further confusion between the question of to whom we should orientate the movement, and the tactical mechanism by which we pursue that orientation. As the League - a couple of hundred people - we cannot hope to orientate to "working class youth as a whole" (note it is not "working class youth in struggle"). We must seek tactical means to extend our reach, our influence and our ability to win working class youth. The MOYM is in this respect a useful means to an end: offering working class youth a framework in which they can make political experiences and learn in struggle.

In certain instances, the MOYM cannot serve that function - either because dominated in an area by M, or - more rarely - because key layers of militant youth refuse to join it. While it is reasonable that in such circumstances we use CX groups as a means to organise and develop youth contacts, it is vital that this tactic really is used "flexibly" rather than transformed into a rigid formula for all occasions and all areas.



It is reasonable to say that through such groups where we build them we should seek to "win youth to our politics and draw them with us into the struggles inside the mass labour movement" (assuming that we ourselves pursue those struggles rather than using the witch-hunt to withdraw from them). But to do this in practice means that even within the CX groups there must be a political fight to win the youth to an understanding of the importance of their involvement in the MOYM and the unions. This is not because we are "substituting" the MOYM for working class youth "as a whole", but because we regard the MOYM and the work we can do through it as the most readily available tactical means of reaching broad layers of working class youth. Once again the logic of the Tendency's formulations is to erect a basis for sectarian abstention from the struggle in the MOYM and thus to miss out on important aspects of the political development of our youth contacts.

### Anti-imperialist politics

Point 8 of the Tendency platform enters into new realms of political confusion. The obligation upon every communist to give unconditional support to the defence of anti-imperialist fighters against the attacks of the imperialists and their agencies becomes entangled with the notion of giving uncritical support - which is nowhere part of the Leninist tradition.

It is indeed in marked contrast to the insistence in Clause 6 upon rigid demarcation between our class politics and the politics of petty bourgeois feminism that the Tendency appear to oppose any such class criterion in our approach to the politics of petty bourgeois nationalism.

Yes, comrades, we are obliged to stand for the defence of the republican fighters: no we are not obliged to endorse their actions at any particular point. Yes, comrades, we must stand firm against the media witch-hunters and their cronies in the labour movement: but no, this does not mean we should deny the social and reactionary consequences of some of the actions of the republicans. We criticise those actions from the standpoint of their inability to advance the Irish struggle, and from the standpoint of the Irish, and international proletariat.

The strategy of guerrillaism cannot be so neatly separated from the tactical methods it adopts, or the tactical targets it selects. Through both runs the political method and approach of petty bourgeois nationalism.

What should be spelled out is (1) We first and foremost oppose British imperialism, and defend the oppressed Catholic minority and their struggle; we blame the violence upon the oppression they suffer; (2) We stand four-square opposed to any attacks by the British or Irish bourgeoisies upon the struggles of the republican movement; (3) We mobilise to this effect consistently in the British workers' movement and combat the chauvinism of the labour bureaucracy; (4) In this context we express our political assessments and criticisms. If approached from this starting point, any attempt to portray the League's positions on Ireland as "pacifist" could be easily disproved.

Plainly there have been articles in SX which many comrades fool have fallen short of this. The Tendency comrades have latched on to a question of wide concern in the movement, and one where extreme care is needed if we are to hold a line between tail-ending the republican leadership on the one side, and sectarian or pacifist denunciations on the other. The problem is that - as on every other issue raised so far, the Tendency has little to say - and manages in its brief statement to get things wrong.

### Permanent Revolution

The Malvinas debate showed that there are large numbers within the WSL keen to defend ~~the~~ the method and spirit of Lenin's theory of Imperialism, and develop this in the context of the post-war period. Such a position is not unique to the Tendency. What distinguishes the signatories of the Platform is that they seem to acknowledge no need to go beyond Lenin's contributions on the topic: and they combine this with their own reading of the concept of Permanent Revolution.

On this, the Tendency is extremely misleading. They tell us:

"We see these (anti-imperialist) struggles as proceeding within the framework of Permanent Revolution" (emph added).

Such a statement indicates a woeful failure to grasp the meaning of Trotsky's theory, which offers not a passive "framework" to explain the spontaneous evolution of struggles, but an active strategy for revolutionists. In general terms, anti-imperialist struggles have been halted at the stage of formal independence, and the consolidation of power by a more or less radical bourgeois or petty bourgeois regime balanced precariously between the power of the masses on the one side, and imperialism and Stalinism on the other. These struggles have not proceeded "in the framework of Permanent Revolution": nor, in the absence of Trotskyist parties of any appreciable size and influence, will they do so.

Our fight for the conception of Permanent Revolution is not to provide a more satisfactory analysis of events, but to equip the proletariat of the backward countries with the leadership, programme and awareness of the need to take the leadership over peasant and petty bourgeois forces in a combined struggle for the completion of democratic tasks simultaneously with socialist revolution.

As the Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle points out:

"The Transitional Programme correctly lays stress on the crucial 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 permanent revolution. But in the light of opportunist interpretations of this theory in the post war period, we must emphasise that their term permanent revolution is not in any way a passive description of an automatic process; rather it is a strategy to be applied and fought for in practice by the building of Trotskyist parties in each case."

The main opponents are of course the petty bourgeois nationalists, reformists and Stalinists who each envisage their own variety of 2-stage (or half-completed) revolution.

There are of course others within the WSL who pour scorn on the relevance of Permanent Revolution in Latin America, where formal political independence clearly exists, and where - in the case of Argentina - the size and influence of the peasantry may be negligible.

These comrades forget that the model of revolutionary struggle on which Trotsky constructed his theory was independent, imperialist Russia. The content of the theory was as a programme to counterpose to the advocates of two-stages. And this aspect too is applicable in Argentina, where years of dictatorship have doubtless reinforced illusions amongst sections of the workers' movement as well as the urban petty bourgeois forces (all politically dominated by Peronist nationalism) of the possibility of a stable "democratic" Argentina. Key to the struggle for socialism must be the development of a proletarian leadership capable of forging a principled programme combining democratic and transitional demands, and designed to mobilise behind the working class the most radical sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie who might otherwise provide the fodder for the "democratic" posturings of the Peronist leaders.

Yet in the bald and passive formulations of the Tendency we have nothing but confusion - compounded many times over by their references to Palestine under the heading of Permanent Revolution and the fact that they try to make support for the TILC position (and indeed the existing, majority WSL position) into a "Tendency" position. Ironically, the extremely primitive resolution which the comrades actually tabled on Palestine for Part 1 of the conference showed that the comrades lag a long way behind the positions arrived at last summer by the WSL majority and TILC as a whole.

#### Stalinism: a world tour:

The substitution of vague generalities for clear statements of position reaches ridiculous levels in Clause 10 of the Tendency Platform. This paragraph alone - coming after Tendency comrades have raised none of the issues, least of all Kampuchea - could potentially open up a vast political discussion on Stalinism. But we get the impression that this is not what the comrades actually want - hence the sketchy references and evasions.

They throw in three completely different examples of problems on the slogan of "self-determination" in relation to Stalinism in a single sentence! Perhaps this is because the comrades wish to span political disagreements in their own ranks, and therefore restrict themselves to uttering supposedly pregnant phrases rather than positions.

On Poland, for instance, some comrades within the Tendency take a far more hostile line than others to the leadership and the radical wing of Solidarnosc. On Afghanistan it seems that - from past positions - some comrades in the Tendency would actually support the initial Soviet invasion as well as now opposing the withdrawal of troops. On Kampuchea, the advocates of "troops out" and "self determination" are in general terms more likely to be opponents of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The sentence, in short, does nothing to advance the discussion on Stalinism, and appears simply as a failed masterstroke of diplomacy.

#### TILC and democratic centralism

Clause 11, like its predecessors, is deceptively and innocuously worded. The first sentence blandly states that the Tendency supports the transformation to d/c "as proposed by the Italian and American comrades at the December TILC conference". But what they actually proposed at that meeting was that a d/c structure be adopted by the summer of 1983 - three or four months from now: or else they would launch a faction, fighting for the removal of the TILC leadership.

In other words the Tendency is lending its support to an ultimatum that we move ahead to d/c without any steps towards political clarification, discussion or - least of all - homogeneity between the groups of TILC being seen as a prerequisite for such a development. Far from being reasonable, such a plan is ridiculous - indeed politically suicidal for TILC, which would be a unified tendency in name only and a sitting duck for our political opponents; and the Tendency know it is ridiculous. For them to declare that "we reject any attempt to create endless organisational and political (!) barriers to d/c" is pure hypocrisy.

The comrades know that one of the principal organisational and political barriers to d/c is the breakdown of the US fusion and the highly questionable internal regime within the American section - a breakdown which we not only did not create, but did everything in our power to prevent, and a regime which we have pressed to reform.

The comrades know that a further political and organisational barrier to d/c in TILC is the fact that the American and Italian sections have chosen to mount a full-scale political offensive against the leadership of the WSL, branding us as "revisionists", our internal regime as "Stalinist", and seeking to intervene not only politically (which is their right) but organisationally in the WSL through the launching of an international tendency in TILC.

To suggest that such political differences "pale into insignificance beside the yawning differences within the WSL since fusion" is pure nonsense. There is no component of the WSL that I know of who openly characterise the whole leadership of the group as "revisionist" and "Stalinist". If there were, it would seriously question their future membership of the organisation, since past experience has shown that those who use such extreme terms in internal debates regard the label of "revisionist" attached to the leadership as a political "licence to kill", flouting the constitution, lying, manoeuvring and in general seeking to smash rather than build the organisation.

It is profoundly regrettable that the Italians and Americans - and now even the Danish comrades - have resorted to such terminology in their discussion of differences with the WSL. It plainly indicates that - unless we are to stand on their heads the founding principles of TILC, and advocate disciplined unity with revisionists and Stalinists - there can be no prospect or principled basis for short term unity in a common d/c tendency. To establish such a basis we would need in the course of discussion either to convince the comrades that their characterisations of us are false, or they would need to remove the "bankrupt" leadership of TILC and the WSL

and instal a leadership to their satisfaction. They appear to be intent on the second course of action rather than the first. This is even more unfortunate when we recognise that for the most part the offensive waged by the RWL leadership against the WSL leadership has been conducted on a non-political, manoeuvrist basis, designed in no way to clarify issues but simply to create conditions to divide the WSL.

To brush these problems aside and demand that we simply proceed to set up the facade of "democratic centralism" is to resolve nothing, and make no serious contribution to the reconstruction of the FI. The Tendency cdes who wish to see progress towards d/c would do better to address themselves to furthering the political debate within TILC, which currently rests at the most rudimentary level. The RWL document criticising JO'M's SX articles on Socialism and Democracy, for example, refers to the task of revolutionaries as to "take over the state" - showing that the cdes have yet to grasp the ABC of Marxism.

The NC resolution which we put to the December meeting of TILC recognised that the political and organisational problems are real issues; it spelled out a projected timetable for discussions and the resolution of problems in order to create possible conditions for d/c by Autumn 1983. Immediately after we adopted that resolution we became aware that the LOR and RWL were intent upon declaring an international tendency. We did everything possible to try to dissuade them from their course, which has been seen in practice to do nothing but impede and derail any serious process of discussion and development of TILC.

It is now obvious that the only reason TILC has not actually split is because the RWL and LOR cdes wish to continue their attempts to intervene into the "revisionist-led" rank and file of the WSL. Comrades can deny this only by denying every available fact. From such a starting point, to take the decision to establish d/c - which is in effect to conduct an international fusion - would be pure lunacy.

When TILC was formed in December 1979, with each of the political components apparently on a converging political course and our agreement newly-discovered, we gave ourselves two years to test that agreement in practice, and be certain that there was a political foundation for d/c beyond paper resolutions. Yet now, with new differences having emerged in the last 12 months, the RWL, LOR and TAF denouncing the WSL leadership as "revisionist", and with less sign than ever that those differences can be resolved, the Tendency advocates that we move immediately to establish d/c in the summer or autumn of this year!

The proposal is not serious: it is an attempt to enlist the understandable frustrations of ex-WSL cdes angry at the problems in TILC and keen to blame these entirely on the leadership of the ex-ICL.

The impulse towards internationalism is a fundamentally healthy impulse amongst our comrades, and a powerful factor in shaping attitudes towards leadership. It is easy to sympathise with cdes' frustrations: it is possibly even more frustrating to have to carry through the day-to-day administrative work of TILC realising that there is little chance of serious discussion on the documents we draft or a positive approach to the work at the next meeting.

But there is no way forward in TILC or any international work unless we recognise the need for political agreement, mutual respect and the clarification of differences as the basis for sound unity. Ironically, it is the comrades who have the most negative view of the "premature", "ill-founded" WSL/ICL fusion and the unresolved political problems it created who now most strongly advocate an even more premature and problem-ridden fusion at international level!

The problems of TILC cannot be bulldozed aside, escaped or jumped over; they must be confronted, argued out, and a clear basis for d/c hammered out.

#### Workers' Government

The difference over this question as set out in Clause 12 appears to be between a propagandist and an agitational approach to the slogan. But in the process of putting their view, the Tendency succeed in introducing an ele-

mentary mistake which questions how seriously the issue has been discussed. The second sentence proclaims that "The crowning point of our programme is soviets, not a workers' government". Yet the crowning point of our full programme is, precisely, a workers' government: the dictatorship of the proletariat. Soviets are a means to achieve that objective, not an end in themselves, as the German proletariat discovered to its cost in 1918-1919 - when soviets politically dominated by the social democrats emerged all over the country, only to betray the revolution.

The Tendency's blunder arises from a misreading of the Transitional Programme, which in fact states that "The slogan of soviets ... crowns the programme of transitional demands."

Why is this? Because, says Trotsky, the soviets "arise only at the time when the mass movement enters into an openly revolutionary stage ... If the factory committee creates dual power in the factory, then the soviets initiate a period of dual power in the country."

The dynamic within each of the transitional demands is precisely towards the consolidation of the fighting strength of the working class in an all-round challenge to the power and prerogatives of the capitalists and the fight for workers' control. But the goal in view is workers' power. Dual power is not in itself the objective.

"Dual power in its turn is the culminating point of the transitional period. Two regimes, the bourgeois and the proletarian, are irreconcilably opposed to each other. Conflict between them is inevitable ... In the case of victory, the power of the soviets, that is the dictatorship of the proletariat and the socialist reconstruction of society, will arise." (TP.)

Is this denied by any substantial element in the WSL? If so their view has not been openly argued. Even if we look at the most diluted and vulgarised statement of our attitude to the workers' government - the statement adopted by SX - we find there the following paragraph:

"Even under a workers' government, the working class itself would only serve and protect its own interests by organising itself outside the rhythms and constraints of Parliamentary politics, expanding its factory shop stewards' committees, combine committees, trades councils etc, and creating new action committees, to be an industrial power that could as necessary dispense with the Parliamentarians."

In isolation from the kind of mass struggles which make councils of action a concrete possibility posed in real life as a means to develop the fight, however, neither the fused WSL (nor indeed the old WSL) has made a fetish out of propagandising for them - any more than we raise every day abstract calls for a general strike, workers' militia or revolutionary insurrection. It is in this sense that the following paragraph of the SX statement explained that we do not counterpose called for councils of action to the existing struggle:

"But to counterpose the full revolutionary programme of a state based on workers councils (sic!) to the actual political processes within the actual labour movement is to make the revolutionary programme empty words."

This does not (as Erswell/Erswell/Jones absurdly claim) "reject the perspective of propaganda for a workers' government based on organs of struggle": it says nothing about propaganda. It simply declares that our agitation will be geared to the developing processes of struggle within the workers' movement - in the way the WSL has always done.

But the Tendency's formulations suggest that they are turning their backs on this method, and making propaganda their main preoccupation. Their (possibly correct) categorical rejection of the workers' government as a "necessary stage or strategic goal" is coupled with a strong hint that in most conditions they would not even advocate it as a tactical slogan: "This does not imply ... that we should not raise the slogan of a workers' government at specific points in the class struggle as considered tactically appropriate" (emph added). When such instances may be, we are not told; presumably it would exclude the present period.

Yet Trotsky's view in the TP was very different. Distinguishing between the transitional demand for a workers government and the Stalinist concept

in which it is counterposed as a "stage" to the completion of the socialist revolution, Trotsky points out that they "...transform it from a bridge to socialist revolution into the chief barrier upon its path."

He goes on:

"...In any case one thing is not to be doubted; even if this highly improbable variant ( a Workers'/Farmers' government) somewhere and some time becomes a reality and the workers and farmers government in the above mentioned sense is established in fact, it would represent only a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat.

However there is no need to indulge in guesswork: the agitation around the slogan of a workers'-farmers' government preserves under all conditions a tremendous educational value ...

...It is impossible to foresee what will be the concrete stages of the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses. The sections of the FI should critically orient themselves at each new stage and advance such slogans as will aid the striving of the workers for independent politics, deepen the class struggle of these politics, destroy reformist and pacifist illusions, strengthen the connection with the masses, and prepare the revolutionary conquest of power."

Between Trotsky's clear sense of the need for an agitational, aggressive political fight in the mass organisations of the class, and his confidence that tactical sense rather than pre-ordained schemas is the key - and the Tendency's timid, sectarian formulations, theoretical blunders and propagandist orientation the gap is obvious. Tendency supporters should draw the appropriate conclusions.

#### Democratic demands and the Marxist programme

There is no clearer testimony to the sectarian and confused direction of the Tendency's politics and its failure to grasp the transitional method than its references to democratic demands in Point 13.

Road logically, it discards agitation for democratic demands. Yet this attitude is out of key with Trotsky's approach - and with that of the TILC document the odes claim to uphold - the TPitCS.

Trotsky insisted in the TP that:

"The present epoch is distinguished not for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day-to-day work, but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution.

The FI does not discard the programme of the old "minimal" demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is revolutionary perspective. insofar as the old, partial, "minimal" demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism - and this occurs at each step - the FI advances a system of transitional demands..."

It is clear that on a whole range of fronts the "old minimal demands" (and some newer minimal demands - such as women's rights and gay liberation) still do preserve in 1983 at least part of their vital forcefulness. The prime examples indeed focus on the very kinds of special oppression which the Tendency declares its commitment to fight in Clauses 5 and 6. Others range from national self-determination to unionisation rights, and include struggles against a wide variety of state repression.

Tell us, comrades, was the old WSL wrong to campaign against the trial under the Official Secrets Act of Aubrey, Borry and Campbell? Should we have not demanded that the last Labour government repeal that Act - and simply raised transitional demands? Or were we not correct to use the case to conduct a campaign simultaneously on the democratic demand (scrap the act) and on the level of propaganda and agitation against the state machine in general?

Plainly we were right: and the Tendency is wrong to dismiss out of hand any bridge from today's consciousness to the type of transitional demands we seek to develop: we need flexibly to relate to a wide variety



of issues which do not directly appear in our standard "programme" of transitional demands, or fit "off the peg" slogans.

Trotsky pointed out that:

"The Bolshevik-Leninist stands in the front-line trenches of all kinds of struggles, even when they involve only the most modest material interests or democratic rights of the working class."

The reason is threefold. By such struggles we establish a common relationship of struggle with the workers to whom we wish to orientate - and thus win their attention for our political analysis and leadership; at the same time we fight for or defend democratic rights which are of value to us as revolutionaries seeking to organise in the proletariat, and which materially improve the lives and conditions of the oppressed; and thirdly by fighting for democratic demands we can best create conditions for workers to recognise the limitations of such policies, and thus advance the consciousness of the most militant layers. In this sense our approach follows that of Engels on the relationship between achieving legal equality for women and the fight for their social equality:

"...the necessity for creating real social equality between them, and the way to do it, will only be seen in the clear light of day when both possess legally complete equality of rights."

The TPITCS is quite explicit on the connection between democratic and transitional demands:

"The renewed crisis of capitalism, added to its long-term economic failures, have meant that its survival depends more and more on the erosion of hard-won democratic freedoms in the imperialist countries.

These facts mean that revolutionaries are obliged to give democratic demands (freedom of expression and organisation, representative elections, release of political prisoners, etc) substantial prominence in their programme. Such demands respond to the objective needs of the mass movement, and are therefore often capable of strongly mobilising the masses.

To prevent these demands becoming a "democratic noose fastened around the neck of the working class by the agents of the bourgeoisie", revolutionaries must fight for these demands by linking them at all times with a programme of democratic and transitional demands."

The point is quite clear. Why, then, have the Tendency renounced such a combination of democratic with transitional demands?

The consequence of this can only be a sectarian counterposition of democratic demands to transitional demands, in place of recognising the need to link the two. And indeed even in the brief Para 13, the edes give us an example of such a futile counterposition:

"...the call for 'police accountability' (a utopian reformist illusion under capitalism) should never be substituted for workers' defence squads."

Politically, this is the equivalent of announcing that "the call for women's equality (a utopian reformist illusion under capitalism) should never be substituted for a crash programme of public works to provide free 24-hour childcare under workers' management".

The demands are - from the revolutionary standpoint - not counterposed or mutually exclusive demands. They do not even stand on the same ground. If we were to exclude from our programme every demand that is utopian under capitalism we would have little left. But in fact there is no instance in the WSL of anyone "substituting" the call for police accountability for a struggle to build workers' defence squads. If there were, the matter would be extremely serious.

The fact is that the utopian, democratic demand for police accountability has a wide currency in the labour movement. How do we best expose its utopian character, and educate workers on the role of the state? Simply by counterposing a completely different demand which heads at a complete tangent? Or by using the legitimate resentment and frustration which fuels the "accountability" demand to show in practice the nature of the state machine and the limitations of bourgeois democracy?

In Hackney, after much debate, we have adopted the twin demands: for a workers' inquiry into the death of Colin Roach, and also for an official



inquiry into the events at Stoke Newington police station. They are not exclusive. The workers' movement can and must conduct the propaganda exercise of collecting the information to assemble a real picture of the police racism and violence in order to mobilise the maximum class action in opposition to the state. But in the struggle to curb the arbitrary powers of the cops, workers can learn valuable lessons on the actual limits of bourgeois democratic procedures. Nor does either demand for inquiries cut across or negate a simultaneous struggle for workers' self defence against racist and fascist violence on the streets of East London.

The only people in the WSL seeking to counterpose one type of demand for another, or substitute one for another are the Tendency, whose sectarian method would leave us at a complete tangent to the type of campaign that has actually erupted around the Colin Roach case.

The fact is that our programme is constructed not as the Tendency would have us believe "precisely as a bridge" from today's consciousness of the working class. It is not precise at all: rather it offers general lines, and a general method of intervention in the struggles of the oppressed. All too often we not only need a "bridge to the bridge", but we find ourselves compelled in practice to struggle simply on the minimal trade union "programme" of increased wages, defending union rights or existing jobs and services - and seeking within that fight to raise political questions and offer leadership. This would only become a problem if the League's leadership were itself to jettison the transitional demands and method and simply adapt itself to a programme of minimum demands; or, on the other hand, if our impatience at the difficulties of raising the day-to-day level of struggles drove us into a propagandist, ultimativistic attitude to the mass of the working class. Unfortunately the Tendency platform suggests that comrades are succumbing to the second danger.

#### Which way next?

Irrespective of whether the Tendency is a British component of the TILC tendency comprising the RML, LOR and present TAF majority, or whether comrades in the Tendency are simply voicing their own "home-grown" suspicions, and their political hostility to the present leadership of the WSL, their struggle, no matter how earnestly motivated is doing nothing to clarify the League. Instead the comrades are simply confusing and misleading themselves and any others that they might influence. Indeed by masquerading as the "orthodox" opposition on some of the questions they raise, they render it far harder to establish a serious political debate on those issues and to win support for a real alternative.

Worse, it appears that a handful at least of the <sup>1</sup> tendency may have drawn the same political conclusions as those in TILC who regard the present leadership of the WSL as degenerate revisionists. Once this is embraced as a view, it can only be a matter of time before such comrades in one way or another cut their losses and split from the movement ... striking out on the road to nowhere. All around echo the siren voices of sectarian currents keen to lure in a handful of recruits from the WSL: within a short space of time any breakaway grouping will find itself torn apart by its own inner confusion, the manipulation of the RML and LOR, and the external pressures towards confusion.

Many odes in the Tendency are plainly motivated by a wish to build the WSL, and the feeling that their work is hampered or paralysed by its existing positions. In several cases - as I have explained - I believe it is their positions which - if adopted - could paralyse the movement. On other issues I would agree more with the spirit of the Tendency line than with their text.

But what is clear beyond doubt is that in the present situation the existence of a Tendency on such a sketchy and misleading platform can only create a growing polarisation down old party lines in the WSL which will benefit nobody. It is not too late for comrades to recognise that this is not the best way to fight - and certainly not the way to win.

Cunliffe, March 25 1983.