

Collin Morrow, Jan. '82

The formation of the T.I.C. in December 1979 represented a major political development for the W.S.I. Since its formation, following the expulsions from the W.S.P., the W.S.I. has maintained a serious orientation towards international work stemming from its commitment to the reconstruction of the E.I., but the development of the T.I.C. represented a qualitative turn in that work since it gave concrete material expression to that struggle for the reconstruction of the E.I. and extended our intervention within the world Trotskyist movement onto the international plane in a real sense through our common membership of a clear programmatic basis with the other T.I.C. sections.

TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL TENDENCY: PROBLEMS AND TASKS.

From the very beginning, however, our commitment to the reconstruction of the E.I. into a democratic centralist international tendency, only on that basis could we take our fight for the reconstruction of the E.I. into the heart of the world Trotskyist movement. Only on that basis could we carry forward the development of consistent Trotskyists on a principled programmatic basis. The Declaration of Intent adopted at the December 1979 Conference clearly spells that out, as did the notion of the T.S.I. E.C. adopted at the national conference on October 1979.

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by COLLIN MORROW. JANUARY 1983.

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The deadline for the formation of the tendency was set as 1981. In the Easter of 1981 it was agreed to postpone this, initially until the following summer and then, subsequently, at the 1981 Summer School, to December 1981. That perspective was reaffirmed at the December 1981 T.I.C. Conference. December 1982 was passed; the new proposal adopted is that we "aim" for autumn 1983 allowing that we may, because of the political process involved, not achieve this general aim. This resolution was carried by the British and Australian sections against the votes of the Danish, Italian and American sections.

For my part I want to declare in advance that I remain fully in favour of the formation of an international tendency, and regard it as an urgent priority both for the W.S.I. and for all the T.I.C. sections. In doing so I recognise that there are many others in the W.S.I. who favour democratic centralism in general, but do not see it as a possibility in the T.I.C. at present. I want, therefore, to outline here how I see some of the problems involved in such a step, and how I think they should be approached.



## TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL TENDENCY : PROBLEMS AND TASKS.

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The formation of the T.I.L.C. in December 1979 represented a major political development for the W.S.L.. Since its formation, following the expulsions from the W.R.P., the W.S.L. has maintained a serious orientation towards international work stemming from its commitment to the reconstruction of the F.I.. But the development of the T.I.L.C. represented a qualitative turn in that work since it gave concrete material expression to that struggle for the reconstruction of the F.I. and extended our intervention within the World Trotskyist movement onto the international plane in a real sense through our coming together on a clear programmatic basis with the other T.I.L.C. sections.

From the very beginning, however, our commitment, and the commitment of the other T.I.L.C. sections, was to the transformation of T.I.L.C. into a democratic centralist international tendency. Only on that basis could we take our fight for the reconstruction of the F.I. into the heart of the World Trotskyist movement. Only on that basis could we carry forward the regroupment of consistent Trotskyists on a principled programmatic basis. The Declaration of Intent adopted at the December 1979 Conference clearly spelt that out, as did the motion of the W.S.L. E.C. adopted at the national aggregate on Octobre 1979.

The basis of this transformation of the T.I.L.C. into a democratic centralist tendency was to be " principled programmatic agreement, both on major international issues, and on general perspectives and methods of work with the proletariat in the countries of member sections." A timetable of two years was proposed for the carrying through of the necessary discussion on both national and international perspectives and on \*\*.

discussions prior to the founding conference of the tendency. Thus, the Liason Committee's existence was, from the outset, fundamentally related to the process of forming the democratic centralist international tendency. It was never seen either as an alternative to the tendency, or as a long-term organisational project of itself.

The deadline for the formation of the Tendency was set as Xmas 1981. In the Easter of 1981 it was agreed to postpone this, initially until the following summer and then, subsequently, at the 1981 Summer School, to December 1982. That perspective was reaffirmed at the December 1981 T.I.L.C. Conference. December 1982 has passed; the new proposal adopted is that we "aim" for autumn 1983 allowing that we may, because of the political process involved, not achieve this general aim. This resolution was carried by the British and Australian sections against the votes of the Danish, Italian and American sections.

For my part I want to declare in advance that I remain fully in favour of the formation of an international tendency, and regard it as an urgent priority both for the W.S.L. and for all the T.I.L.C. sections. In doing so I recognise that there are many others in the W.S.L. who favour democratic centralism in general, but do not see it as a possibility in T.I.L.C. at present. I want, therefore, to outline here how I see some of the problems involved in such a step, and how I think they should be approached.



Finally, I want to argue that the formation of a democratic centralist tendency cannot be some general goal for which we strive, like workers control, with little anticipation of immediate success. It is an urgent, burning necessity in terms of our struggle in the crisis ridden World Trotskyist movement for the reconstruction for the F.I.. We have a political responsibility to ensure that it is achieved this autumn.

## 2. WHAT ARE OUR PROBLEMS?

There are, in my view, two separate sets of problems which need to be taken account of if we are to establish an international tendency. Firstly, there are the problems of an organisational character; secondly problems of a political character. We have to avoid the one being treated as contingent on the other. If the main problems are essentially organisational, then they should be resolved within the framework of a clear political commitment to establish the tendency in the Autumn. We do not, in the W.S.L., allow our organisational difficulties to determine our political decisions. Nor should we with T.I.L.C.

If, however, the main problems facing us in the formation of an International Tendency are of a political character then they must be addressed as such, and not confused with the organisational problems which can and should be tackled separately. We will need to determine the nature of these political problems and assess to what extent they should be treated as a barrier to the formation of the democratic centralist International Tendency, barriers which must, as a matter of principle, be resolved prior to and as a prerequisite for the launching of the International Tendency. Only in such a manner can we proceed to resolve our present difficulties.

In general I tend to agree with Cunliff when he states, " I would regard the material problems as far more serious than the political differences".

## 3. THE ORGANISATIONAL PROBLEMS

The material, organisational problems of T.I.L.C. are not hard to find! The organisations which constitute T.I.L.C. are all small, some very small and (in the case of France) ultimately as small as possible. Small size means small resources, and therefore T.I.L.C. has functioned on a shoe string. This is no reflection of any section, simply a hard fact of political life. As a result, as Cunliff has pointed out, T.I.L.C. has barely functioned between its thrice yearly meetings. The T.I.L.C. secretariat has largely operated within the framework of other W.S.L. leadership bodies. And the practical work of functioning T.I.L.C., following up contacts etc. has fallen to Cunliff, a full time party worker with other commitments, not least as joint editor of our paper. As a result, documents are delayed, or not produced, the T.I.L.C. bulletin has never effectively functioned, and major initiatives, such as that of T.A.F. in Poland, or in following up the contact with P.O.R. de PIE in Bolivia - are stifled or stumble to a halt for want of effective international organisation and the appropriate resources to function that.

Cunliffe makes the point on several occasions that such difficulties are not related to the complication of having to function the T.I.L.C. Secretariat as effectively a part of the WSL, with the inevitable ensuing conflicts of demand on scarce resources. Kinnell has argued (NC at the Summer School) that we should not proceed towards democratic centralism until these organisational problems have been solved providing a secure framework for a tendency, and has



outlined some steps which could be taken to improve the organisation of the work. I would offer a somewhat different outlook on the subject. In my view the failings of the T.I.L.C. at an organisational level relate precisely to the functioning of the T.I.L.C. Secretariat within the confines of a single national section and its leadership structures, and the functioning of T.I.L.C. to the present as effectively an international federation. Rather than looking for ways of improving that structure we should see the solution to these organisational problems as relating directly to the transformation of these needs which will flow from the transformation of T.I.L.C. into a democratic centralist tendency.

At that point, there will of necessity have to be a separation between the functions of international political leadership and of international organisation and co-ordination (servicing). The Secretariat could no longer carry that dual function but would have to be replaced by an International Executive (the political leadership) and an International Secretariat (responsible to the IEC for the functioning of the International Tendency). Neither of these bodies could - or should - be comprised of the members of the leading committee of a single section. Obviously, the IEC, if it was to be a real international leadership, would draw from all, or at least several, sections. The move to expand, the T.I.L.C. Secretariat this December was obviously a valuable step in this direction. In contrast the Secretariat could probably be drawn from only one section. But to accept that the T.I.L.C. Secretariat after democratic centralism could be synonymous with either the W.S.L. O.C., the R.W.L. P.C. (or for that matter the L.O.R. Secretariat) would be in practice to deny the real independent international existence of the tendency since its existence would be vested in the leading body of a national section and it would constantly have to vie for the attention of comrades whose national commitments preclude their consistent functioning as a Secretariat whose priority is international NOT national work. As with the International Executive where the question is training and developing an effective international political leadership, so with the Secretariat the question is, therefore, one of training comrades to new tasks. The Secretariat should, therefore, in my view, be comprised of comrades who do not have full time responsibilities to a national section and who are, equally, not burdened by national political leadership responsibilities which place major, consistent, demands on them in the development of the national section. The work of the Secretariat should be the major responsibility of the comrades appointed to do it, standing above any demands of national work.

I would hasten to add that I am not proposing that we establish a Secretariat comprised of candidate members of inexperienced members. To function to tendency Secretariat is clearly both a political and organisational task. It will require comrades who have a detailed familiarity with the international Trotskyist movement, and who, hopefully, have some knowledge of other languages (certainly sufficient would be required to both read material in other languages and communicate with our international comrades). I am inclined to think that within the N.C. we have comrades who could carry such work yet who are not, as say are Smith, Jones, and our full time party workers, very much central to and fully committed in leadership roles in W.S.L. and with the functioning of W.S.L. work. Clearly it is in the international political leadership (I.E.C.) rather than in the apparatus of the International Tendency that we should expect the leadership of W.S.L. to be actively involved.



The allocation of two or three comrades to work under the direction of the Tendency Executive - the International Tendency being, after all, a distinct body from the W.S.L. itself - in the functioning of the Tendency would, I think, create the conditions both for resolving the present organisational problems and for developing the necessary apparatus for the International Tendency. Such comrades would, of course, have to have the support and assistance of other comrades, firstly and foremost politically at O.C. and E.C. level, but also in the task of obtaining accurate translations etc. in and from a variety of languages. But I think that such a framework could create the basis for an effective functioning Tendency with a real political life of its own.

Such an organisational structure would be far better equipped to prepare for the meetings of the International Executive, and the periodic international conferences under the direction of the I.E.C. It would also, because of its central commitment to the development of international work, be able to act as a counter in all national sections to any "insular tendency" to sink their sights into purely national questions. By regular contact and circulation of material to all of the sections it would ensure the familiarity of all leadership comrades with the work of the Tendency and their involvement at national level in the discussions on the development and tasks of the tendency. Finally, such a body would be in a far better position to consistently pursue contacts, such as with the POR de PIE. I do not doubt, of course, that the allocation of comrades to the work of the new secretariat would represent a loss to the national organisation. I would hope, however, that comrades would view this as a worthwhile sacrifice - an investment rather than frittering away of scarce resources.

#### 4, THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS

On the political problems I am inclined, like Cunliff, to think that these can be resolved by a process of patient discussion. But I would argue that the ideal structure for carrying this out is precisely international democratic centralism. The T.I.L.C., as the documents produced by Cunliff demonstrated, already has a considerable body of political material representing agreed positions behind it. The present differences are not, in my view, any wider than those existing within individual national sections, or for that matter existing between W.S.L. and I.C.L. pre-fusion. We still do not, for example, have agreement in W.S.L. in the T.I.L.C. founding documents.

Where differences have emerged in T.I.L.C. I think they 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 ourselves as a tendency. We should not, I think, take the somewhat sectarian stance of those like Workers Power who would demand agreement on every factual dot and comma before accepting there is a basis of principled agreement. The whole post-war history of the Trotskyist movement indicates violently against such an approach. It is precisely because we have some conception of the crisis of the world Trotskyist movement that we have always rejected such a method in the past. It is, after all, worth remembering that international democratic centralism is not the application of some alien centralism on an international plane artificially imposing homogeneity. Certainly it involves centralism, but it also, just as



importantly, means an extension of democracy on an international level. Those who see international democratic centralism as some kind of political straight jacket should refer to Traven's discussion document where he makes the point,

"...It is crucial to avoid the dangers of counterposing international disciplin to the task of building healthy national revolutionary groupings capable of extending and applying general programmatic and political positions to specific concrete conditions."

Unlike the Lambertists, Healy, Robertson et al we do not wish to construct a bleak orbit of international satellites around a single, dominant national organisation. But at the same time we must reject the sort of international federation structure, in practice a bloc between different national Trotskyist groups, which characterised the Healy/Lambert period of the I.C. and the more recent Lambert/Morano F.I.(I.C.) which in practice resolved itself into two mutually exclusive poles. Equally, and I am sure that none of this is contentious, we must reject the present, undoubtedly "democratic" structure of the USEC which leaves sections to pursue their own individual courses without any serious political accounting, and amounts to a total abandonment of democratic centralism in the interests of maintaining a formal unity of groups of massive political and programmatic diversity. We have polemicised against each of these in the past. We are correct to do so. If the Trotskyist F.I. is to be reconstructed then it will not be on the basis of such spurious apologies for internationalism. But polemics, however accurate are not enough. We need to pose a real material opposite. That can only take the form of a democratic centralist international tendency.

#### 5 WHAT WOULD DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM MEAN

Traven's discussion document of 1979 remains, the best and most detailed statement of what democratic centralism in the international tendency would mean. In practice only such a method of organisation enables us to make a definitive step away from the political graveyard of national Trotskyism. As the 1979 W.S.L. E.C. resolution stated, "only such a method of organisation allows all sections to participate in the internal life and struggles of other sections, with each section accepting mutual international disciplin and control." This is the lifeblood of internationalism. To reject such a form of organisation on the grounds that it might, in the event of disagreements, interfere with or curtail the political freedom of the national groupings is to me the hallmark of national Trotskyism. Differences will always emerge. That was the history of the C.I. and the F.I... There will never be an end to differences for so long as the contradictory development of the international class struggle presents us with new problems of analysis. How could there be, except in the bureaucratic vacuum of a Healy.

But I would again remind comrades that in accepting the legitimate authority of international disciplin I am by no means advocating the functioning solely of international centralism. As internationalists we also recognise the importance of healthy national groupings capable of applying our general programmatic and political positions to the concrete situations which arise in their respective countries. That too is the lifeblood of a healthy international revolutionary movement. Thus, differences which emerge which are not of a principled character will inevitably be a subject for discussion, mutual explanation and persuasion rather than for international disciplin. Where more serious differences emerge then, like those within a national section, following a period of discussion, they may imply the option of using factional rights within the whole of the international tendency. But we should not recoil at such a thought. It is inconceivable that we will be able to carry through the struggle



for the reconstruction of the F.I. without such things happening. In practice it is precisely through such a process that we will develop a real, living international movement and an international leadership which can carry authority by having earned and won that authority in the movement.

In many cases, I do not see such differences as being resolved by editor instruction from the I.E.C. to an international section at least until all democratic procedures, including a full international conference, had been completed. Only under such conditions, having completed an exhaustive examination of the character and roots of a difference could the international leadership demonstrably have the authority of the tendency to pronounce on the work of a national section. Thus, those who fear that the T.I.L.C. might end up wagging the W.S.L. dog, apart from having an inverted conception of the relationship of national and international bodies, have in my view failed to understand the working of international democratic centralism.

#### 6 FOR DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

T.I.L.C. has now existed for 3 years. During that period there have been massive changes in the international class struggle. Military coups in Turkey and Bolivia; the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union; the emergence of Solidarnosc in Poland; the war in the South Atlantic; the Israeli invasion of Lebanon; the growth of militant black unions in South Africa. All posing tremendous tasks for revolutionaries. During that period there have also been massive changes in the Trotskyist movement. As proletarian internationalists we recognise the need to intervene in all of these developments. But in order to do that we have to equip ourselves for that task. If we are to effectively intervene in the crisis of the world Trotskyist movement, in the present crisis of the USEC, amongst the Moranoits following the catastrophe of the F.I.(I.C.), with the FIT who show in several of their sections a real, if occasionally somewhat fragile, commitment to consistent Trotskyism, then we can only do so in a real, living way as an international tendency. We cannot forever defer this as merely a perspective. As the T.I.L.C. 9 points states,

"Trotskyism sees democratic centralism as the structural basis of revolutionary political organisation..... it must be in force at both national and international levels, within the regenerated F.I. as well as in the different stages of the organisation of consistent Trotskyism during the struggle against revisionism."

We should also bear in mind that in adopting the 9 points we also concluded,

"It (orthodox Trotskyism) rejects the view accepting democratic centralism only for the future reconstructed international, but not for the transitional forms of organisation in the process of achieving that goal."

There are amongst the programmatic principles which we have taken into the crisis of the world Trotskyist movement, these are amongst the weapons we use in the struggle to win other forces to the struggle we have mapped out for the reconstruction of the F.I..

In my view we cannot continue to express this in words whilst continually deferring it in practice. To stay as we are now, as the International Liaison Committee (whose sole role was to prepare the formation of a democratic centralist tendency.) three years after its inception is not just to stand still, but to move inexorably backwards. To abandon in practice the goals we set ourselves then replacing them with other, more limited and qualitatively different goals. I believe this is a wrong course.



The W.S.L. at its annual conference should commit itself to the establishment of an international tendency operating on the basis of democratic centralism at the autumn T.I.L.C. conference. We should use the intervening period to prepare the necessary organisational structures for such a tendency with collaboration from the other T.I.L.C. sections. Not least we should make the necessary organisational arrangements for a national pre-conference to discuss the final documents and elect delegates to the founding conference of the tendency. I think this last point is particularly important in ensuring a clear separation between national and international, and in ensuring that the international conference is a real conference. The International Tendency must have a real, independent existence rather than simply being the sum total of national sections. We need an international conference where delegates vote according to their response to discussion, not sectional bloc votes.

Trotskyism has been dogged for too long by the narrow boarders of national perspectives and national self-interest and concern for the prestige of particular groupings. The W.S.L. should have courage, replace fear and doubts with determination and decisively break from the rotten traditions of the post-war F.I... towards the qualitatively massive step forward of a consistent Trotskyist International Tendency. That way lies the struggle for the reconstruction of the Fourth International.