

What is the TILC?

Notes for the information of NC members in preparation for the October 9-10 discussion.

Brief history

The old WSL from its formation sought actively to promote international discussions, initially with groupings which had been, like us expelled from the Healy International Committee, but increasingly on a wider scale. We took initiatives aimed at opening up a polemical dialogue with the USFI, and we followed up other groupings with whom we came into contact through this work and through also the contacts and international trips of cde Traven in that period.

The TILC as an organisation had its origins among such contacts. It was formed in December 1979 at a meeting in Oxford. The founding organisations were the Workers Socialist League, the Trotskyist Workers League (TAF) of Denmark, the Socialist League (Democratic Centralist) of the USA - restricted by US legislation to the status of sympathising section; the Bolshevik Leninist Group (GBL) of Italy; a group of Middle Eastern Trotskyists (later to form the Hackney Group); the Chilean Bolshevik Workers League (LOB); and a cde from France who had been working with the GBL.

Though it spanned seven countries and three continents, the total membership of the TILC sections was almost certainly not more than 200, and four "sections" had less than ten members each. It was plainly not the Fourth International reconstructed, nor did it dream of proclaiming itself as such.

Instead, the TILC set itself the task of establishing joint work on an international level, and pursuing political discussion on issues of disagreement with a view to laying the basis for the adoption of a centralist discipline for a common tendency. The objective of such a tendency was to intervene in the most effective way possible in the discussions and possibly even in some of the groupings of the crisis-ridden world Trotskyist movement, putting forward a principled programmatic basis for the reconstruction of the FI, and fighting on that basis to unite and regroup the most principled forces in a struggle against the entrenched and sectarian leaderships of the existing international tendencies.

Since that time the crisis facing the major tendencies has worsened. The USFI, which had split prior to - and remained sharply divided during - its XIth Congress in 1979 has continued to suffer the growing antagonism between the American SWP and the European leadership. And the Parity Committee/Fourth International (International Committee) which was in the process of formation when the TILC was founded, went on - to complete its merger, and then even more rapidly to split back into its previous and present day component parts - the Morenist LIT (International Workers' League), and the Lambertist FICIR (FI - International Centre of Reconstruction.)

TILC has not been exempt from the pressures generated by this crisis of the world movement. The Chilean section, the LOB (which we subsequently discovered had been in the throes of a major political crisis even at the time of its affiliation to TILC) went on to lose the large majority of its European membership-in-exile, while the Chilean "interior" leadership succumbed to a proposal of fusion by the Morenist group Izquierda Socialista and was sucked in this way into the FIIC. Having never really consolidated any relationship with the LOB cdes who declared adherence to the TILC, we suffered a setback before we even knew it.

Yet in the same period of time other TILC sections have been able to develop and take advantage of the emergence of principled forces independent of the larger tendencies looking for a way forward

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in the fight for the FI. In Britain, Italy and the USA there have been substantial fusions which have expanded and transformed the sections, drawing together comrades from very different traditions in the fight for a common disciplined organisation. The British fusion also brought us into contact with the Australian cdes of Socialist Fight who had previously worked with the old ICL, and who have now affiliated to TILC. In Denmark too, there has been important growth, resulting from patient work by our small group of comrades.

At present the TILC stands approximately as follows:

Britain: WSL, 230 members

USA: RWL, 50-60 members.

Italy: LOR, 25-30 members

Denmark: TAF, 12 members

Australia: SF, 5 members

Hackney Gp: 4 members

France: 1 member.

In addition, we have a sympathising group in Spain with observer status at TILC (5 cdes approx) and 2 Chilean cdes, formerly of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, have declared their intention to affiliate to TILC at the December meeting.

Major Statements The key period for the organisational development of the TILC was 1981 - the "year of fusions". During that year attention of most of the sections was devoted more than before to the successful completion of their fusions at home rather than the elaboration or discussion of new resolutions or documents of the TILC. Accordingly the bulk of documents expressing the positions of TILC date back to 1979-80, or have been completed in the last 10 months or so, since the WSL has been able to increase the amount of resources put into TILC work.

This means that though the material was made available to the leadership of the old ICL prior to the fusion in Britain, it is quite possible that many ex-ICL cdes have not seen some of the basic documents of TILC. A brief list of these will give an idea of the ground covered.

December 1979: The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle. This was the main programmatic document submitted to the conference by the WSL, and amended at conference. It is the only document of its kind, attempting to build systematically on the 1938 programme in the light of post-war experience. Still available, price 60p from the Centre.

Declaration of Intent: Adopted in December, with new additional introduction added in Spring 1980. Shortly to be reprinted for IB.

Spring 1980: Resolution on Nicaraguan Revolution.

Statement on Afghanistan (as per policy of old WSL)

December 1980 (Paris meeting): Basic Programmatic Principles ("9 Points). Copies of this are available, 10p, from the Centre.

Iran/Iraq war: (Common WSL/ICL position)

Turkey coup

Poland

El Salvador

Resolution on relations with FIT

Easter 1981: Resolution on the politics of the groups of the Parity Committee. Copies available 30p from the Centre.

December 1981 (London meeting): TILC Internal Bulletin (copies available)

Resolutions on Italy, South Africa,

France, Poland, Central America, FIIC split (mostly reprinted in WSR No 2)

April 1982: Resolutions on El Salvador, Malvinas; discussion on Anti-Imperialist United Front.

July 1982: For resolutions and proceedings see full report in IB 13.

The TILC has thus been able to adopt positions and hold discussions on a large number of current issues of world politics. Its meetings have gained in weight with the added preparations we have been able to undertake since fusion and the contribution brought in by the cdes of the ex-ICL. TILC discussions remain a unique opportunity for us to look seriously at world issues beyond our day-to-day work in Britain.

Historical questions: Incorporated - particularly in some of the earlier material - are a number of positions on historical and some theoretical questions which are almost certainly controversial within the expanded sections of TILC, and particularly so in Britain, where the differences of political tradition are extremely wide. Such points may however be regarded in many cases as simply superfluous to the main line of the documents concerned; sooner than conduct lengthy and destructive debates on relatively insignificant issues of detail, it may be more sensible to look for constructive deletions from the text concerned.

Comrades will hopefully be aware from IB13 that the discussion on the founding documents of TILC has been reopened in all of the sections as part of the political preparation for the establishment of democratic centralist structure. NOW is therefore the time to look towards constructive amendments or deletions to ensure that these documents can be made ready for further use by the WSL as well as TILC as a whole.

Preparations for December: We have also, by unanimous decision of our Executive, committed ourselves, as administrators of the TILC Secretariat, to completing the political preparation of the December conference along the lines laid down by the resolution of July 1982 (See IB 13), while we have said clearly that we see major political and organisational problems in the WSL entering any commitment to a democratic centralist structure from December.

This means that we have an obligation to draft two new texts in the next few weeks for the December conference: one, containing established and agreed material on the current crisis of the FI; the other a brief "These" document on the current world political situation and our tasks.

TILC Contacts

Meanwhile it might be of benefit to cde denied any reports on this work at the NC to list briefly the organisations with whom TILC is presently in contact.

Italy: It is probably best to begin with the situation in Italy, where the LOR has for several months been conducting discussions both with the Morenist grouping the LSR (which has now split from the Morenists) and with the USFI grouping the LCR. The talks with the LSR ended abruptly this summer on the initiative of our comrades, who assessed that there was insufficient common ground or worthwhile cadre in the LSR to merit the discussions. But with the Mandeliste grouping the LCR, the discussions have become surprisingly fruitful. The LCR in Italy apparently has a substantial foothold in the unions and some seasoned cadres who have been moving to the left in the recent period. Our comrades have argued for some time that it would be important to reach those forces. They announced at the July TILC meeting that they had proposed fusion with the LCR, on the basis that the LOR retain its full freedom to function as a faction attached to the TILC. Apparently a majority on both the PC and the Executive of the LCR has accepted this, and expect that it will be ratified by their full NC. Pending is a precise clarification as to whether the LOR cdes will have rights in the USFI as well as their right of affiliation to TILC. Assuming this is resolved, it would give TILC its first substantial input into the discussions and ferment within the USFI as a whole, and transform the possibilities for our small Italian group. It will also raise a lot of new problems!

Fourth Internationalist Tendency: The biggest grouping with which we have formal exchanges is the FIT, a self-styled "democratic centralist" tendency comprising forces formerly in Pierre Lambert's OCRFI who broke away following Lambertist allegations that the Argentine and Chilean groups were "guard dogs of fascism". The largest group in the FIT is the POR(Lora) of Bolivia - with anything up to 1,500-2,000 members and a tradition in the Bolivian workers' movement going back to the 1930s. But Lora has increasingly adopted a "national Trotskyist" deviation, in which Bolivia is seen as the exclusive centre of world revolutionary politics, and the POR alone is seen as the guardian of "the programme" and the flame of Trotskyism. This has meant that the POR has played little or no constructive part in the political development of the FIT, and makes nonsense of the FIT's claim to be democratic centralist.

Our main difference with the FIT has centred on their extremely sectarian attitude towards the other tendencies of the world movement, which has made it difficult if not impossible to imagine how we could work jointly with them on initiatives towards the reconstruction of the FI.

There are quite substantial differences within FIT itself between the POR and the next senior FIT group, Politica Obrera of Argentina, with a membership of around 200. These differences focus on strategy and tactics in Latin America, among others. PO has repeatedly expressed interest in discussions with WSL/TILC, but the Paris-based European secretariat of the FIT which is responsible for such discussions, has shown no such enthusiasm. In addition, the FIT has forces in a number of Latin American countries as well as Chilean and other cdes in exile.

Most promising of the FIT forces from our standpoint is the Palestinian Workers League, whose comrades look very much to our weekly press and our organisation for discussion and guidance on international issues - in the absence of any such direction from the FIT. They now contribute frequently to SX.

Bolivia: In addition to the POR(Lora) we have also been in touch with another Bolivian group, a split from Lora, the POR de Pie. Based in the miners' union, the POR de Pie lacks any developed political positions outside the Bolivian and Latin American context, but has responded favourably to TILC positions.

Chile: From Chile we have also had discussions with cdes of the Liga Comunista, a group which split from the USFI at its XIth World Congress making numerous criticisms which overlap with points we have raised. The LC had cautiously agreed to discuss, but this process has been cramped by the weakness of the leading cadre in Britain, and acute difficulties of communication with the cdes "inside".

Sri Lanka: From Sri Lanka we have been in touch with the Revolutionary Workers Party (RWP) of Edmond Samarakoddy. This has a membership estimated at 20-25, but with a disproportionately large weight - including full time positions - in the trade unions and a very long history of struggle in the Sri Lanka labour movement. They have declared general agreement with TILC's programmatic positions, and offered a document on the history of the FI which might - if linked to a determination to resolve the crisis it describes - be a basis of agreement. The RWP however has extremely sectarian background, and nearly fused with the Sparts a few years ago.

Also in Sri Lanka we have received letters from a small group of cdes who broke some time ago from the Healy group there and are now active within the Militant sister party.

Belgium: This year's Summer School brought contact with a comrade who once worked as a full-time organiser for the Lambertists, and who now has a small group of co-thinkers in Belgium. While he plainly retains a large number of Lambertist positions, he has declared a wish to discuss further with the TILC, should the others agree.

In addition to these groupings there are further individual contacts of various degrees of promise in the USA, Greece and a few other countries.

The Morenists: While the previously-named groups fit a general category of organisations with whom we might expect under certain conditions to fuse, the relations we have had with the Morenists are rather different. Following the split in the FIIC, we wrote as the TILC to Moreno, proposing that his organisation jointly sponsor with us an Open Conference on the crisis of world Trotskyism.

The response from Moreno was to send an envoy from Venezuela, who spent two days explaining why they did not favour an Open Conference, and why instead the TILC should simply join the LIT with full and allegedly copper-bottomed tendency rights. He suggested that we could advance discussions by TILC sending a representative to the LIT's Executive meeting in Bogota in June, and by conducting a public exchange in the pages of the LIT's international journal - in which we would be free to voice our criticisms of and suggest amendments to the Moreno/Lambert "Theses on the FI".

We wrote back accepting these suggestions - only to find that the Morenists wanted as a precondition to demand that we pronounce the LIT and its document a "principled Trotskyist" organisation.

Meanwhile the issue of the Malvinas war intervened, and the initiatives therefore hang in mid-air. The LIT is apparently preparing a world conference for the end of the year.

It seems unlikely that in view of the political obligations we already have within the TILC, and the pressing tasks facing the WSL cdes of the Secretariat in the next few months that it is seriously practicable for us to conduct any major new international initiative. But the December conference should at least consider how the TILC is to relate to the current situation developing outside its own ranks.

IN SUMMARY: The TILC has functioned for nearly 3 years, at varying levels of political development. It embodies a good deal of political investment by the old WSL, and by the new WSL since fusion, when we allocated a good deal of the time of an OC full-timer (myself) to the work of the Secretariat. Though political differences have necessarily arisen - particularly since the "year of fusions" - they have in general served to stimulate further discussion. The obligations we have to TILC have - at least every four months - served to jolt WSL leading committees out of any insular tendency to sink our sights to purely British questions. If there is a weakness in this regard it is the way this work has been largely conducted without involving the NC, and without being taken in a living way into the ranks of the WSL. We have much to do in raising the level of internationalist feeling, awareness and knowledge among our comrades and contacts.

The weaknesses of TILC are plain enough for all to see. Numerically its forces are pathetically small, and thus the organisations with whom we are allied suffer - like us - the distorting pressures of isolation both from the broader currents of the Trotskyist movement and the far left, but also from the workers' movement of their own countries. Small numbers mean also small resources; and small resources with groups in each case actively committed to interventionist politics in their own countries, means in turn even smaller resources allocated to international work. TILC thus functions as a body only really at its 4-monthly meetings and hardly at all between meetings. There are agonising delays in producing documents - often directly related to chronic problems in the WSL - and there is inadequate internal discussion between sections between full meetings.

The sudden expansion of the American group from a local Detroit-based organisation to a group with a nation-wide spread of contacts and intervention has also highlighted substantial problems in their internal regime, certain differences with us on trade union work and the importance of a newspaper, and also, particularly since the British fusion, political differences between the RWL and the WSL over our MP work, which they have still plainly not yet understood.

Such differences have emerged at the centre of the stage since the December 1981 TILC meeting and, because the RWL is the second largest group relating to TILC they have weighed heavily in our assessment of the possibilities of establishing a fully democratic centralist TILC. Ironically it appears that while arguing that d/c in TILC is their prime objective, the RWL's tactics in pressing its case have further fuelled the reservations of those previously sceptical about such a commitment, and antagonised some of those previously most sympathetic to the RWL.

In weighing up the question of our future commitment to a d/c structure, we must also bear in mind that all of the other sections regard the issue not simply as an organisational chore but as a real test of the level of commitment of the fused WSL to its international work and its international comrades. And it is fair to say that a large number of cdes inside the WSL also see the matter in the same way. To a certain degree problems unresolved in our own fusion discussions are now having to be confronted at a time when unfortunately all too few comrades know anything of TILC or what it stands for. We must recognise this problem as a very real one.

In my view the combination of material and political problems which we face in the establishment of more than the most formal of d/c structures are substantial. And, from my own bitter experience of attempting to run the Secretariat work on a shoe-string, with insufficient time and resources, I would regard the material problems as far more serious than the political differences - which in my view can be resolved by a process of patient discussion.

In this respect too, then, it appears that TILC is doomed to carry the burden of the political and material weaknesses of the WSL, and to accept that these problems cannot be tackled before December.

But it would be catastrophic were comrades to conclude from this that the WSL should in any way renege on its undertakings to carry through the political preparation of the December conference, or in any way distance itself from TILC, and relapse into some form of far-from-splendid isolationism.

The political and organisational difficulties can and must be confronted. There is no way we can allow the political effort invested and the gains already made to go to waste.

Cunliffe. 7/10/82.