THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

Its roots, historical mission, and an outline of its history

(Background material from Workers' Fight's 1972-3 discussion on the Fourth International)

1973 Introduction — page 1
Communist Internationalism — page 2
The Internationals — page 4
Trotskyism — page 7
The Communist International and the FI — page 8
The Epoch, the Programme & the Forces — page 10
1923-30 — page 13
1930-33 — page 16
1933-38 — page 18
1938: The Founding Conference — page 21
"The Strongest Section of the FI" — page 24
War — page 25
Vietnam — page 27
Defeat and Crisis, 1943-48 — page 29
1948-51 — page 31
The Second Founding Congress: 1951 — page 33
The FI after 1951: outline — page 35
The FI in Britain — page 37
Why WF discusses the FI — page 41
COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALISM

Internationalism is inseparable from communism. The proletariat, the class which will create communism, is a world class; and capitalism, the system which it will replace, is a world system which, especially in its “imperialist phase, has drawn the world together, intermeshing it so that no single part is understandable without reference to the whole. "...In the modern world internationalism is not an outside influence at all. The whole is not foreign to the parts". (J P Cannon).

Socialism presupposes advance beyond the highest point reached by the world system of capitalism; it will be built on the foundations laid by world capitalism, seized and transformed by the proletariat. The proletariat is a world revolutionary class or it is impotent; the communist programme is an international programme or it is a utopian absurdity cut adrift from the scientific dialectical materialist conception of socialism and the objective material basis of communism. "The international character of the socialist revolution flows from the present state of economy and the social structure of humanity. Internationalism is no abstract principle but a theoretical and political reflection of the character of world economy, of the world development of productive forces and the world scale of the class struggle. The socialist revolution begins on national foundations — but it cannot be completed within these foundations" (Permanent Revolution, p. 9)

"In our epoch, which is the epoch of imperialism, i.e., of world economy and world politics under the hegemony of finance capital, not a single communist party can establish its programme by proceeding solely or mainly from conditions and tendencies of developments in its own country. This also holds entirely for the party that wields the state power within the boundaries of the USSR. On August 4, 1914, the death knell sounded for national programmes for all time.

"The revolutionary party of the proletariat can base itself only upon an international programme corresponding to the character of the present epoch, the epoch of the highest development and collapse of capitalism. An international communist programme is in no case the sum total of national programmes or an amalgam of their common features. The international programme must proceed directly from an analysis of the conditions and tendencies of world economy and of the world political system taken as a whole in all its connections and contradictions, that is, with the mutually antagonistic interdependence of its separate parts.

"In the present epoch, to a much larger extent than in the past, the national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation, and not vice versa. Herein lies the basic and primary difference between communist internationalism and all varieties of national socialism" (Trotsky, Third International After Lenin, p. 4).

Politically, communist internationalism is an assertion of the solidarity of the proletarian and working masses and a programme of struggle for real working class equality going beyond the empty legalism of the cosmopolitan "egalitarianism" of the bourgeoisie at its most progressive. The slogan of the Communist Manifesto - Workers of the World Unite - is a call for mutual proletarian solidarity and aid and for recognition, at the dawn of the modern socialist movement, of the necessity of international unity of the working class. Communist internationalism is a negation both of bourgeois nationalism and of bourgeois cosmopolitanism.

And communist internationalism does not rest on imposing a universal schema on the struggle in
each national arena. In particular, it is absolutely opposed to the imposition of a Western European model on the rest of the world. "If we take Britain and India as polarised varieties of the capitalist type, then we are obliged to say that the internationalism of the British and Indian proletariats does not at all rest on an identity of conditions, tasks and methods, but on their indivisible interdependence. Successes for the liberation movement in India presuppose a revolutionary movement in Britain and vice versa. Neither in India, nor in England, is it possible to build an independent socialist society. Both of them will have to enter as parts into a higher whole. Upon this and only this rests the unshakeable foundation of Marxist internationalism." (Permanent Revolution, introduction to German edition, p. 26)

Thus communist internationalism does not counterpose itself to the struggles of oppressed nations for national rights of self-determination and independence - any more than the communist programme is counterposed to the fight to preserve democratic rights. The programme of communist internationalism subsumes the struggles for national liberation, including national separation; it absorbs the progressive elements in the nationalism of oppressed nations, the elements of struggle for freedom from oppression and of assertion of the right to national identity into its own programme, and fights for these (and against the bourgeois and chauvinist versions of such demands) from the position of the working class and of the communist international programme of the working class. It recognises that the road to the real world wide unity of the working people will not be over the protesting backs of the oppressed nations and peoples of the world, on tracks already laid down by brutal capitalism - but that it runs through a whole period of reconciliation, including freedom of separation, leading to a voluntary world federation of workers' states, and thence to the stateless United Communist world system.

THE INTERNATIONALS

The Communist League, for which Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto, was an international political tendency. It was disbanded following the defeats of 1848. Thereafter there have been four attempts to create a workers' international organisation - 1st International, 1864/72; 2nd, 1889/1914; 3rd, 1919/33; the FI, founded in 1938. The First International was initiated as a mutual aid association of British and French trade unionists, and transformed politically by the activity within its leadership of Karl Marx. In the struggle to forge a scientific ideological basis for the developing working class movement, that organisation was torn apart in a conflict between Bakuninists and Marxists.

The Second International spanned the period of organic growth of the labour movement within the ripening capitalist system. Formally Marxist and dominated by the great centre of "orthodox Marxism", the "heir to the mantle of Marx and Engels", the German Social Democracy, it was in fact, certainly after 1900, organically tied, by its practice, by its routine, and by its conceptions, to capitalist legalism, and ultimately to capitalism itself. Its de facto accommodation to capitalism, common to both the outspoken revisers of Marxism and the "orthodox" - the former intellectually more rigorous than their more prominent opponents like Karl Kautsky, in that they did at least try to square their political practice with their theory - revealed itself in a series of struggles, coming to a climax in 1914, when the capitalist powers went to war and the parties of the 2nd International backed their own capitalists, shattering the workers' international into mercenary fragments at the service of the different national bourgeoisies.

The slow evolutionary peaceful growth of the labour movement generated not only an accommodationist practice but also a vulgar evolutionist set of conceptions which militated against a revolutionary reorientation to meet the demands of the period of sharp conflicts and breaks - the period in which capitalism had ended its steady organic growth, and entered the heights of its imperialist phase of crisis and world war, when the need of the working class movement was, above all, for revolutionary action to overthrow capitalism. In the event both the vulgar Marxist concepts and the accommodationist 2nd International practice of the labour movement had to be
revolutionised.

On 4th August 1914, the major parties of the 2nd International betrayed socialism. From then until March 1919 when the 3rd International was proclaimed in Moscow, the communist internationalists, like Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht, and Trotsky, worked to gather the forces for the new International, and to settle ideological as well as organisational accounts with the "stinking corpse" of the 2nd. When the new International was proclaimed in 1919, with the declared goal of being the general staff of the revolution, it was on the blueprint of an international combat party, like the Bolshevik party, and based on the programme of world revolution and war on capitalism and its agents and collaborators in the working class movement.

The 2nd International had been a diffuse structure united by no strategic,programmatic conception of the working class struggle. The "political" (Parliamentary) "struggle" was separated from the "trade union" struggles and both were routinised. The 3rd International set out to weld the various fronts of the class struggle together according to the needs of a revolutionary strategy.

The dominant idea of socialist consciousness of most 2nd Internationalists had been one of a gradual ripening in line with the ripening of capitalism The idea that the class struggle takes place on the ideological as well as on the economic and political fronts had little influence except among the Bolsheviks. Strict ideological clarification and self-demarcation, and an active struggle for communist consciousness, was to be the mark of the Communist International.

The Second International had divided the minimum programme (reforms) from the "maximum" programme (socialism); the Communist International, organising itself fundamentally at the point of production, proposed a transitional programme to link up the daily struggles of the working class with the struggle to conquer power. The Second International's internationalism had been confined mainly to the parties of the "white" and advanced parts of the globe; in its attitude to the colonies and oppressed peoples it was nearer to bourgeois cosmopolitanism or even what would be called in a later period, liberal imperialism, than to genuine proletarian internationalism. The 3rd International reasserted the internationalism of Marx, as an outspoken champion of the national rights, including the right to national struggle, of the peoples and nations oppressed by imperialism.

"The nationalism of the oppressed is not the same as the nationalism of the oppressors", they proclaimed, concerned that the principles of communism should not be bowdlerised as they had been by the Europe-centred 2nd International. "What characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude toward oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognising their "right" to self-determination and to parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of this right. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in capitalist countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus, or Arabs in the art of insurrection and it assumes full responsibility for this work in the face of civilised executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over this boundary remains centrism" (Trotsky, What Next ?, in The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany, p. 203) The effects of this mighty assault on white metropolitan chauvinism were felt even by the US blacks.

The new International was launched while the big majority of the organised socialists were not yet ready to accept its principles, with revolutionary Russia as its main base of support. It was in fact attempting to organise itself as a whole series of working class revolts erupted, provoked by war and the convulsions of capitalism. A process began within the French, Italian, and German Social Democracies which was to lead to the majorities of these parties accepting the programme of the Communist International: majorities which included bureaucrats and corrupt elements like Marcel Cachin, a patriot in the war, who would have gone wherever the majority went.
This delay in the reorganisation of the socialist movement in the CI led to the defeat of the workers upsurge after the war. A series of defeats followed - Germany, Hungary, Italy - leaving the one victorious workers’ state isolated in the primitive backwardness of Russia. A privileged bureaucracy developed within Russia, and thus in the leading party of the new International. In 1924, after the death of Lenin, the bureaucracy swamped the revolutionary party of Lenin by recruiting tens of thousands of careerists and opportunists to the party, freeing the now bureaucratic party machine from the control of the revolutionaries in its ranks.

This Stalinist bureaucracy extended its control from the leading party to the whole Communist International, imposing an increasingly bureaucratic regime, and utilising both the careerist elements carried over from the old labour movement and the inescapable weaknesses of the new international, which was still in the process of constructing itself and clarifying itself. A series of gross blunders by the parties of the International, covered up in bureaucratic self-protection by the dominant faction, perpetuated the isolation of the Russian workers' state. Ultimately the bureaucratic bunglings were to shade off into conscious betrayals by the leadership of the Third International and to destroy it as a revolutionary organisation.

The basis of the Communist International (and of the fight to reconstruct its essence, the Fourth International) was, as Thesis a established, a communist internationalist programme. There is tremendous value in international collaboration in guiding a given national group in its own work, and making available to it through the transmitted experience of co-thinkers knowledge of the whole world reality which determines, in the final analysis, its own local conditions. Lack of such collaboration can lead, and has led, to serious and avoidable mistakes in groups like the SLL. But the theoretical significance of this side of internationalism can be falsified. The theory according to which the fundamental basis of communist internationalism is an "epistemological centralisation" is such a falsification. It asserts that communism requires a rounded international theory, and that such theory can be derived only through rounded international intervention, i.e. through the practice of a centralised international organisation.

A) It is a pragmatism, a vulgar, reflective materialism, which asserts that knowledge of the world is only possible as a crude and direct experience.

B) Given the actual size, scope, and the terrible limitations of the Fourth International, not only now but for all its history, if it is a correct position then it is ten times more powerful as an argument against any small International; or small revolutionary organisation, than it is an argument for the Fourth International.

C) It thus deprives the attempt to construct an International round the Trotskyist programme of any rational basis, implicitly condemning any world organisation of the FI's size as inevitably, structurally, and organically incapable of being politically correct.

D) With any rational basis for adhering to the Fourth International cut away, adherence to it becomes a purely subjective exercise.

E) A subjective adherence to the Fourth International, coupled with the epistemological centralisation conception, contains the seeds of its own inversion, being governed by moods and feelings. A romantic fetish can cease to fascinate, and when it does the door is wide open to rejecting the entire Trotskyist conception of a programmatic International. It is only one stop down the line from the concept of an International based on "epistemological centralisation" before we reach Tony Cliff.

"TROTSKYISM"

In 1924 the ruling troika in the CPSU cut its links with the communist programme of world
revolution with a very blunt tool - the theory of socialism in one country. In 1923 it had begun a process which ultimately inverted the world outlook of the early CI by first creating a myth of "Trotskyism", whose fundamental trait was adherence to the theory of permanent revolution. Ultimately, and with increasing deliberateness, all the fundamentals of communism were undercut and discredited in the course of their "Leninist" war on "Trotskyism". By this process, the defence of communism became "Trotskyism", as Trotsky organised the left opposition to fight for the proletarian world revolution. The bureaucratic myth of "Trotskyism" as a quasi-Menshevik, non-revolutionary doctrine was the banner under which the bureaucracy abandoned communism, leaving the faction designated "Trotskyist" as the sole defender of Leninism and of the programme of the Communist International.

Initially the dividing line was unclear, blurred, and this aided the Stalinist bureaucracy in overthrowing the revolutionary programme, without alienating the masses of revolutionary proletarians organised in the CI, and isolating the genuine Marxists. The unfalsified programme, method and experience of Bolshevism - this passed under the name of "Trotskyism". To it were added the lessons of the defence and development of Bolshevism by the struggles of the Left Opposition against the political counter-revolution of the bureaucrats in the Soviet Union itself, and later against its gross betrayals of the international working class.

The word "Trotskyism" came to signify the basic Marxist programme of the conquest of power by the international working class, and reliance on the self-controlling activity and the creative revolutionary energy of the working class. It is the programme of the proletarian revolution, organically linked with the practical struggle to aid its development. Not only a programme, but the struggle to build a revolutionary party to fight within the working class for that programme. Its fundamental traditions are those of the Bolsheviks and the Left Opposition - workers' democracy; unremitting struggle for theoretical clarity as the indispensable compass for revolutionary action; revolutionary determination against capitalism and the labour bureaucrats.

Its rules are those codified by Trotsky: "To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's programme on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives - these are the rules of the Fourth International".

THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL AND THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

We must grasp the relationship of the Trotskyist movement to the Communist International if we are to understand both its strengths and its weaknesses, and understand some of the peculiarities of the movement. The Trotskyist movement has been characterised by possessing a tremendous political richness at the same time as being organisationally weak, incapable, underdeveloped to the point of feebleness, and starved of mature and stable cadres, such as other organisations immensely less well endowed politically and ideologically have developed and possessed. The contradiction arose because of the peculiar origin of Trotskyism within the CI.

The early CI - the first four Congresses - attained the highest peak of Marxism as the "science of revolutionary practice" ever reached, either before or since. There was a massive development and accumulation of advanced ideas and analyses; there was also a mass mobilisation of a world wide revolutionary communist army, with the Soviet Union as its fortress. Then, with world capitalism still unstable, still in an impasse, and with the prospect of mass revolutionary upheavals, the speedy rise and seizure of control of the Soviet Union and of the Communist International by the bureaucracy led to a dramatic reversal for the forces of revolution.

This was quite unlike the transformation of the 2nd International, which had proceeded over years of slow accommodation; gradual ideological erosion; the consolidation of a relatively privileged

The Fourth International page 5
layer of workers, the so-called labour aristocracy, and of the party and trade union bureaucracies; the transformation of the "historical period" from one of organic capitalist growth to one of revolutionary breaks and conflicts demanding new tactics, analyses, and re-sharpened conception.

The revolutionary armies mobilised by world war and the Russian revolution, subjectively eager to respond to the crisis of capitalism by destroying it, were suddenly and unknowingly under the control of a general staff which adopted as its goal the short-sighted defence of the Soviet Union, as conceived by the conservative ruling bureaucrats, a "defence" which was increasingly at the expense of the world revolution. Under the control of the bureaucracy and its agents, selected in a series of purges and eliminations, the CI's communist ideas and programme were increasingly bowdlerised.

Trotskyism arose within the CI as a tendency which very early achieved an acute consciousness of the transformations taking place in the Soviet Union and the CI and which, after 1923, set out to fight for the communist internationalist programme. Trotskyism arose first and foremost as a defence of this programme. Its initial ideological contributions - its criticism of the bureaucratisation of the Russian party and the CI; its attack on the illiterate formula which was utilised by the bureaucracy to draw the line between itself and the programme of world revolution (Socialism in One Country); its exposure of the first essay by the bureaucrats in substituting diplomacy and bureaucratic deals for the independent revolutionary struggle of the Communist Parties, the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee; its last-minute alarm at the CI's course in China and its conscientious analysis of the experience after the catastrophic defeat of 1927; its campaign against the adventurist bureaucratic lunacy of the "Third Period" which smoothed Hitler's path to power in Germany - all these immense ideological contributions were, fundamentally, a defence of the programme of the CI of the heroic first period. But the forces of Trotskyism were minimal, and the tiny revolutionary minority found itself organisationally, factionally, counterposed to the revolutionary army of the CI, gravitating around the banner of the October revolution and the workers' state, unaware of the political transformations that had taken place, and would culminate in the collapse of the CI before the Nazis in 1933 without even a token resistance.

The major independent ideological contributions of Trotskyism were the analysis of Stalinism in its unfolding phases and the analysis of Fascism. (The theory of permanent revolution in its essentials had been embodied in the decisions of the early CI). Working class politics was dominated by this tragic dichotomy between the programme and the theoretical conquests of Bolshevism, held to by infinitesimal forces, and the massed armies of the revolution, now the dupes of Stalin.

Trotskyism, as a distinct organised tendency, was basically moulded by having inherited from the CI its fundamental programme and ideas "ready made". They remained valid and potentially applicable to the world it operated in - except that the mass communist movements, whose goals were unrealisable without the "Trotskyist" programme, were misled into activity on an implicitly different programme, antagonistic to their own drives and to the needs of the working class throughout the whole period.

The function of "Trotskyism" in the 1920s and 30s was to defend these ideas and - vainly - attempt to apply them. That was both its strength, the source of its historical significance - and also the roots of the crisis which came upon Trotskyism in the '40s and after, when reality threw up problems and phenomena not already analysed and assimilated to Marxist theory by the great period of communist renaissance covered by the first four Congresses of the CI.

The assessment of the Fourth International must be an assessment of an ideological current, primarily. Nor can such an assessment be obscured by the undoubted fact that it is an international ideological current. We need an international: but that cannot lead to indifference to the political content of such an international, especially an ideological, propagandist International, any more than the existence of a "party", and the consciousness of the need for one, can lead to indifference to its programme, practice, record.
The FI of 1938 must be the starting point for us: it was undoubtedly the high point of post-Lenin communism. What happened to it is crucial for an understanding of communism; the process of understanding is an inescapable part of starting again, even if we conclude it to have been a failure.

Because we assess the FI as an ideological current, not as a mass revolutionary force, we judge it by standards different from those which the FI itself applied to the CI. Without the heroic rearguard action of Trotskyism the effects of Stalinism would have been truly and totally annihilating for communism. But we must be concerned with a cold assessment of the reality of the FI, in all its aspects.

THE EPOCH, THE PROGRAMME, THE FORCES

The Trotskyists inherited not only the general "programme" of the CI, but also the major analyses, which remained valid, as a guide to practice for the mobilised revolutionary forces: the contradiction was in the separation of the Trotskyists from the mass revolutionary forces.

Deutscher's image of Trotsky as the solo survivor of Atlantis - the vanished legions of Bolshevism, annihilated by Stalinism in the late '30s - actually sums up the whole Trotskyist movement. The possessor of a revolutionary programme and analysis of the world and of revolutionary perspectives corresponding to real possibilities of a titanic scope, it was itself always organisationally puny. But its conception of a revolutionary perspective was never a Menshevik-platonic one of speculation; it was a Bolshevik conception of a guide to deeds, action by revolutionary forces. It spent the '20s and '30s watching helplessly the mass struggles, and the successive defeats of the revolutionary working class seeing what was happening with all the clarity of the continuators of Lenin's CI, yet isolated and powerless to affect developments. In The Third International After Lenin, Trotsky had expressed the connection of the nature of the period its potentialities, and the activity of Communists, looking: back over a series of defeats, and fighting to prevent new ones:

"The revolutionary character of the epoch does not lie in that it permits of the accomplishment of the revolution that is, the seizure of power at any given moment. Its revolutionary character consists in profound and sharp fluctuations and abrupt and frequent transitions from an immediately revolutionary situation; in other words, such as enables the communist party to strive for power, to . victory of the Fascist or semi-Fascist counter-revolution, and from the latter to a provisional regime of the golden mean (the 'Left Bloc', the inclusion of the social democracy into the coalition, the passage of power to the party of MacDonald, and so forth), immediately thereafter to force the antagonisms to a head again and acutely raise the question of power...

"This is the sole source from which flows the full significance of revolutionary strategy in contradistinction to tactics. Thence also flows the new significance of the party and the party leadership.

"The draft [Bukharin's Draft Programme of the Communist International] confines itself to purely formal definitions of the party (vanguard, theory of Marxism, embodiment of experiences, and so forth) which might not have sounded badly in a program of the Left social democracy prior to the war. Today it is utterly inadequate.

"In a period of growing capitalism even the best party leadership could do no more than only accelerate the formation of a workers' party. Inversely, mistakes of the leadership could retard this process. The objective prerequisites of a proletarian revolution matured but slowly, and the work of the party retained a preparatory character.
"Today, on the contrary, every new sharp change in the political situation to the Left places the decision in the hands of the revolutionary party. Should it miss the critical situation, the latter veers around to its opposite.

"Under these circumstances the role of the party leadership acquires exceptional importance. The words of Lenin to the effect that two or three days can decide the fate of the international revolution would have been almost incomprehensible in the epoch of the Second International. In our epoch, on the contrary, these words have only too often been confirmed and, with the exception of the October, always from the negative side. Only out of these general conditions does that exceptional position become understandable which the Comintern and its leadership occupy with respect to the whole mechanics of the present historical epoch.

"One must understand clearly that the initial and basic cause - the so-called stabilisation - lies in the contradiction between the general disorganisation of the economic and social position of capitalist Europe and the colonial East on the one hand, and the weaknesses, unpreparedness, irresolution of the communist parties and the vicious errors of their leadership on the other.

"It is not the so-called stabilisation, arriving from nowhere, that checked the development of the revolutionary situation of 1918-1919, or of the recent years, but on the contrary the unutilised revolutionary situation was transformed into its opposite and thus guaranteed to the bourgeoisie the opportunity to fight with relative success for stabilisation. The sharpening contradictions of this struggle for 'stabilisation' or rather of the struggle for the further existence and development of capitalism prepare at each new stage the prerequisites for new international and class upheavals, that is, for new revolutionary situations, the development of which depends entirely upon the proletarian party.

"The role of the subjective factor in a period of organic development can remain quite a subordinate one. Then diverse proverbs of gradualism arise, as 'slow but sure', and 'one must not kick against the pricks', and so forth, which epitomise all the tactical wisdom of an organic epoch that abhorred leaping over stages. But as soon as the objective prerequisites have matured, the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is, the importance of the party and of revolutionary leadership. All this was fully disclosed during the discussions on the lessons of the German October, on the Anglo-Russian Committee, and on the Chinese revolution. In all these cases, as well as in others of lesser importance, the opportunistic tendency evinced itself in the adoption of a course that relied solely upon the 'masses' and therefore completely scorned the question of the 'tops' of the revolutionary leadership. Such an attitude, which is false in general, operates with positively fatal effect in the imperialist epoch." (Our emphasis: p. 81-84).

***

Following the rise of Stalin, Trotskyism has been dogged by a real contradiction. An essential part of its "perspectives", of its "concept of the epoch", has been "the exceptional position which the Comintern and its leadership occupy with respect to the whole mechanics of the present historical epoch". Yet the Trotskyists, the defenders of the revolutionary programme, have been isolated from the mass revolutionary forces.

Already at the end of the 1920s the contrast between its size and the scope of its ambitions and aspirations, between what it wanted and believed needed doing and what it itself was able to do, rent the then Russian-based Trotskyist movement into three segments: Those who saw only what the industrialisation turn in Russia was doing and ignored how it was done and by whom it was done - Preobrazhensky, Pliatkov, and the administrators; those who placed themselves entirely on the semi-syndicalist grounds of the effect on the working class, that is concerning themselves exclusively the new industrialisation turn was carried out and what the effect on the lives and rights of the Russian people was - neglecting and dismissing what was done, and its relationship to the
Trotskyist programme - the State Capitalists; and those, like Trotsky, who resisted the decomposition, the mutually repellent one-sidedness, ignoring neither "what" nor "whom" nor "how". The pattern was a recurring one.

The conflict has generated constant pressure towards one-sided ideological developments. Some write out the "exceptional position" of the revolutionary leadership in "the mechanics" of the epoch. The perspectives and the concept of the epoch thus become an "objective" schema, with "objective", moreover, understood in a vulgar economic-determinist sense. The role of leadership comes in as an external factor, motivated only by dogma.

Some reside totally speculative hopes in the established mass organisations and their leaderships, or construct hopeful scenarios for the rapid ascent of Trotskyism to the leadership of those organisations. Such is the Trotskyist who "denies the sharp tasks of today in the name of dreams about soft tasks of the futures... Theoretically, it means to fail to base oneself on the developments now going on in real life, to detach oneself from them in the name of dreams" (Lenin, introduction to Bukharin's Imperialism & World Economy, p. 13-14)

1923-30

The Moscow Opposition of 1923 sounded the alarm against the bureaucratisation of the Russian party, and thus began a campaign against bureaucracy that was to climax in 1935 with the call for a political revolution to overthrow that bureaucracy, which had become a distinct social stratum oppressing the working class. Lenin, too, paralysed and at the point of death "moved into opposition", writing the document known as his "testament" which denounced the bureaucratisation of the workers' state and attacked the first reassertion of the old Russian Chauvinist tradition of oppressing the non-Russian nations. (Stalin's policy in George). Lenin's death removed a factor of potentially colossal weight from the scene: as if to translate this negative quantity for the revolutionary forces into the "plus" for the emboldened bureaucracy which it was, a raw and by no means "idealistic" mass of tens of thousands of new recruits entered the party as a Lenin levy which helped destroy Leninism.

Trotsky's Lessons of October (1924) analysed the Russian October of 1917 and the "October" of 1923 in Germany, when the Communist Party was needlessly routed. He established with extreme clarity and sharpness the role, significance, and irreplaceable necessity of a combat party in the proletarian revolution.

The Bolshevik-Leninists ("Trotskyists") campaigned against the failure of the party leadership to adopt a vigorous policy of industrialisation and against the growing danger to the workers' state from the bourgeois elements given new life by the forced retreat of the New Economic Policy and the kulaks, whose strength grew in proportion to the feebleness of the pursuit of a planned economy. In the CI the rightward drift inside Russia and the implications of Socialism in One Country found their first pronouncedly anti-communist expression in a turn by the CI towards trade union bureaucrats in Britain.

In return for empty promises of support for the USSR against interventions from imperialist powers, the bureaucrats were given a left coloration by association with the Communist International. The local communists were disorientated - with results of great seriousness during the General Strike of
1926, which was betrayed by the trade union leaders, the Moscow-licensed "foreign policy lefists" among them. They failed to separate themselves from the traitors, and disarmed independent criticism by raising the slogan "All Power to the General Council". This was the first expression of a new Russian government approach of pressuring foreign governments and utilising every force possible to do so, as a substitute for revolutionary politics in those countries. It was the first fruit of the changing role of the CI; the beginning of a process of hiding part of the programme in the hope of attracting much broader forces for a given, short-term course, and as such was analysed by the Trotskyists. It would end in complete political emasculation for the Communist Parties.

In China, the proletariat had shown fantastic combative throughout the 1920s, as the national democratic revolution unfolded. The young Chinese CP pursued the policy of building a fighting anti-imperialist united front. This united front was laid down at the 4th Congress of the CI as the policy for the "Eastern" countries. It was to include revolutionary nationalist bourgeois and petty bourgeois forces where such existed, if and to the degree that they were revolutionary — and the emphasis was to be on proletarian independence even within the alliance: "Strike together, march separately". But on the instructions of the CI the Chinese CP entered the bourgeoisie nationalist party, the Kuo Min Tang, under its discipline: the Kuo Min Tang became a member of the Communist International with a consultative voice, with Chiang Kai Shek as an honorary member of the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the CI! This went against the will of the Chinese CP leadership, who carried through the CI policy as an act of discipline. On the eve of the massacres of May 1927 Trotsky attacked the policy of subordination to the Kuo Min Tang: he advocated a strategy based on permanent revolution and on the theses of the 2nd Congress of the CI on the rational and colonial question, as against the Menshevik-type "two stage revolution" strategy of the Stalin leadership (first stage democratic revolution, the proletariat in alliance with the democratic bourgeoisie; second stage, independent proletarian revolution).

Between the first massacre of My 1927, carried through by Chiang Kai Shek, and the second (including the heroic adventure of the Canton commune uprising of December 1927) carried through by Wang Chin Yei's Left Wing of the Kuo Min Tang, the opposition fought ferociously for a CI policy of independence for the Chinese proletariat,

In all these cases, they were correct — but their correctness was established in the eyes of a small number of responsible cadres by bloody working-class defeats, which undermined their position within the CI by undermining the prospects for audacious revolutionary action and confidence in the workers' revolution of which they were the advocates. And the defeats strengthened the bureaucrats, with the inertia of confusion and defeat spreading in the CI. The opposition remained essentially a Russian organisation, with odd international sympathisers.

The opposition was increasingly isolated and, in 1927, ten years after October, the Left Opposition leaders were expelled from the Party. Trotsky appealed to the 6th Congress of the CI in 1928, for which he wrote a critique of Bukharin's Draft Programme. It was a foregone conclusion that he would appeal in vain, so bureaucratised already was the CI. Trotsky and the Opposition were isolated in Siberian exile.

In 1926 the turn of the "Centrist" Stalinist bureaucracy towards a forced march towards industrialisation and the left turn of the CI undermined the opposition, lending to the defection and capitulation of its most prominent leaders other than Rakovsky and Trotsky. Stalin seemed to be carrying through the programme of the Left Opposition. Trotsky posed to the capitulators the major question of the period: it is not only what is done, but who does it, and how. At the beginning of 1929 he was expelled from the Soviet Union; and before that year was out the first Stalinist execution of a Trotskyist representative of proletarian democracy was registered: Blumkin.

1930-33

The Fourth International page 10
In April 1930 in Paris the first International Conference of Bolshevik-Leninists (International Communist League) was held. This was the beginning of the process of the creation of an organised international tendency which culminated eight years later in the declaration of the Fourth International.

A hundred or so communists had been organised by Cannon (of the American Communist Party) and Spector (of the Canadian CP), who had gone over to Trotsky's position at the 6th World Congress of the CI in 1928. A number of small groups existed in France. There were Trotskyists in Germany. In China, Chen Tu Hsiu and Peng Shu Tse, former leaders of the CP, now used by the CI as scapegoats for the policy they had opposed privately, became Trotskyists. Nin, a leader of Spanish Communism, had come over to the Left Opposition. There was also support in Indochina, Indonesia, Ceylon, Belgium, Mexico...

Trotsky set out to distill and fuse into a principled Leninist tendency sections of the varied opposition groups which the CI's zigzags in the 1920s had placed outside the CI. The recognition of the USSR as a workers' state and commitment to its defence; understanding of the criminal liquidationism of the CI in China and in Britain - these were the issues he saw as crucial, separating the Bolshevik-Leninists from both the Right and ultra-left groups.

The Rightists (Bukharinites) were a major oppositionist communist tendency, vastly more numerous than the Left Opposition, especially in Germany (Brandler) and the USA (Lovestone). This tendency - thrown off by Stalin's "left turn" - had no overall appreciation of the Stalinist phenomenon. They tended to think that Stalin's policy in the USSR was correct, and they criticised Stalinism only for ultra-leftism and bureaucratism (the "third period") in its international policy. They gravitated to the right, towards opportunism, and were organically incapable of understanding the lessons of China and of Britain. Thus they were necessarily outside the process of communist re-demarcation and re-clarification which was the main task of the Trotskyists. None of their organisations showed any lasting power.

To the "left", a state-capitalist communist group (distinguished from the state-capitalism of the social-democrats) existed round Urbahns in Germany. They rejected the policy of defence of the Soviet Union. The Trotskyists insisted on a separation of Stalinism from the social gains of the October revolution, on which it was a parasite. "For the defence of the Soviet Union, always! For the defence of Stalinism, never!" They asserted that the only real revolutionary defence of the Soviet Union was to spread the world revolution.

***

The Stalinist faction - called by Trotsky "bureaucratic centrist" — had veered sharply left in 1929. From right opportunists they became ultra-left adventurists. Capitalism, having since the war experienced first revolutionary ferment, then relative stabilisation, had now entered its "Third Period", the final crisis. The entire bourgeoisie was now designated as fascist; the bourgeois labour parties were therefore "social fascist". The masses were already radicalised, needing only to be organisationally "conquered" by the Communists; therefore no united front with the social-democratic leaders because of their social-fascist nature and because of the radicalisation of the masses.

Social democracy and fascism were designated as twins, thus, through a grand historical generalisation which correctly saw both as a political weapon of the bourgeoisie, obscuring their sequential relationship. In fact, the fascist "twin" could prevail only by eliminating the social-democratic "twin", as well as all the organisations of the working class,

The Trotskyists mounted a major campaign against the "third period" policies, and for the workers' united front against fascism. Trotsky wrote precise, detailed, analyses of the unfolding class struggle in Germany between 1930: and 1933, where the Communist Party, although a mass party
attracting up to six million votes, was still the minority working class party. The accuracy of his warnings and the analyses testify to the terrible shift within the CI - even the "revolutionary" phases of the bureaucratic centrist regime were a caricature and a counterfeit. In this period the German CP united with the Nazis against the social-democrats - even in the work of strike-breaking against social-democratic workers in Berlin.

But simultaneously, even in the depths of ultra-left madness, the Stalinists organised conferences, in Paris and Amsterdam, against fascism, in which they united with pacifists and liberals, and thus anticipated the later Popular Front alliances.

On 30 January 1933 the bourgeoisie called the Nazis to power... and the German CP allowed Hitler to come to power, peacefully, thus preparing a catastrophe for the German working class and themselves. Stalin allowed the peaceful advent of Nazism because he believed that Hitler would keen the Western capitalist powers "busy" while the USSR got on "peacefully" with the business of building its own island of socialism.

Throughout this period the Bolshevik Leninists had considered themselves an expelled faction of the CI, fighting to regenerate it. They firmly refused to declare the CI dead, and to support the call for a Fourth International.

Pierre Frank outlines some of the considerations which made the Trotskyists reluctant to write an epitaph of the CI:

"Our attitude towards working class organisations could not be dictated by subjective considerations, such as our expulsions, nor even solely by the leadership of these organisations. The birth and continued existence of revolutionary parties and of a revolutionary International correspond to a historic situation, to given objective conditions, which cannot arbitrarily be dismissed with a few strokes of the pen. The CI and its sections had at their command the historic capital running out of their origin, their connection with the Russian revolution, their years of struggle within working class movements. Their organisations had deep roots in the masses. Stalinism was squandering the historic capital of the Third International, but only great historical events could show whether it was definitively finished, doomed from a revolutionary point of view, despite our efforts to regenerate it" (our emphasis throughout).

The Trotskyists considered that if the CI were to be seen as dead then the implications for the victory of the proletarian revolution were extremely pessimistic, even that there would be a shift in the possibilities of the epoch. Trotsky had written:

"... there will be no more lacking revolutionary situations in the next decade than in the past decade. That is why it is of utmost importance to understand correctly the mainsprings of development so that we may not be caught unawares by their action. If in the past decade the main source of revolutionary situation lay in the direct consequences of the imperialist war, in the second post-war decade the most important source of revolutionary upheavals will be the interrelation of Europe and America... The entire question hinges upon the International party of the proletariat, the maturity and fighting ability of the Comintern, and the correctness of its strategical position and tactical methods" (p. 10, Third International After Lenin, our emphasis).

For that reason, seeing clearly the possible implications for the proletarian revolution if the CI were indeed dead as a revolutionary force, right up to 1933 the Trotskyists oriented themselves towards the Comintern in the belief that it was possible to rectify the "subjective" factor on which so much depended, and reclaim it for the genuine programme of communism. The emphasis continued to be on reconstructing, reconquering an adequate leadership for the labour movement. In 1933 it was obvious that they had failed.
After the CP's surrender to Hitler, Trotsky declared it unreformable and affirmed the need for a new German party. Still reluctant, the Trotskyists waited until the CI Executive endorsed the policy and record of the German CP before facing the inescapable. They called for a new International in the summer of 1933.

Immediately they reoriented themselves to the task of building new revolutionary parties. But whereas up to 1933 the emphasis was on reclaiming the "subjective factor" for the revolution, now, alongside the attempt to build new parties with the Trotskyists' own forces and through alignments with left moving centrist groups, the emphasis shifted markedly towards the objective aspect of the situation - of capitalist impasse, of forthcoming working class upsurge, of this as a tremendous wind in the sails of the Trotskyist movement.

The perspective was not one of declaring the Fourth International, but one of regroupment and accumulation of the forces for the new International, conceived as necessarily being a mass International. The Trotskyists were not ready to accent their own confinement to the role of a propaganda international tendency. They became the "movement for the Fourth International". Trotsky greeted, in 1934, the publication of a US journal as follows: "Its name, the New International, is the programme of an entire epoch" (my emphasis). the US and Belgian Trotskyists had begun to build some base in the working class. Elsewhere Trotskyists weren't just divorced "from the masses" by small numbers but from the entire working class by a very heavily petty bourgeois composition.

In 1933 the International Communist League participated in an international conference (called by the ILP, which had recently disaffiliated from the Labour Party in Britain) of groups outside both the 3rd and 2nd Internationals. The conference declared ("in principle") for a new International. Throughout the 1930s the Trotskyists would have relations - usually of conflict - with centrist groups shaken loose from either the Social Democracy or the Stalinised CI, rarely with a positive outcome. The realisation that the CI was dead for the purposes of revolution led the Trotskyists to look afresh at the new left trends that had reappeared in some social democratic parties in face of the crisis of capitalism and the record over the years of the Comintern.

In 1934 in France the wave of working class struggles radicalised whole sections of the French Socialist Party, which had regained the position of being the mass working class party which it lost to the CI at the Congress of Tours in 1920. Trotsky proposed entry to the SFIO, as a short term tactic to accumulate forces. The struggle within the Trotskyist organisations which erupted over the "French turn" scattered splinters in various directions from the sections of the ICL. In Spain Andres Nin - his position reflecting a certain sectarian passivity, at bottom centrist - split on that question, only to unite very soon with the rightist ex-CI faction round Gorkin and Maurin to form the POUM, which would play a centrist role in the Spanish revolution.

The CI's right turn after 1934, towards the policy of alliances not only with the social democrats (yesterday's "social fascists") but also with liberals, on a programme acceptable to the liberals — the Popular Front - deprived the principal Trotskyist slogan of the previous period, the workers' united front, of its effectiveness in posing the issues of self-defence to the workers. The momentary realisation of the workers' united front, as the bureaucratic leaders moved towards the popular front, isolated its principled advocates. Now, with the CPs moving towards rightwing alliances, and into open and cynical treachery against the working class, a new wave of revolutionary upsurges erupted: France 1934-6; the Spanish Civil War. They ended in either defeat (Spain) or hollow victory which answered none of the burning questions for the working class (France).

In 1935 the French CP pioneered a new stage in the degeneration of the CI, opting for the "patriotic" defence of the Fatherland, provided only that it allied with the other, "socialist",
Fatherland. In Spain the CI openly organised the counter-revolution, attempting to assure the bourgeois that fascism was henceforth unnecessary.

In 1935 the Trotskyists declared that the road to reform was blocked within the USSR; from now on, the Russian working class could free itself only by organising a political revolution against the usurping bureaucrats; a deep-going revolutionary cleansing of Soviet society of bureaucratic parasitism, a supplementary revolution to restore in full the democratic proletarian revolution of 1917. The veiled civil war of the bureaucracy against the working class broke to the surface with the Moscow trials which publicly paraded the founders of the Soviet Union and the Communist International to confess to absurdities of "counter-revolutionary activity". The Trotskyists were branded before the subjectively revolutionary workers of the CPs as mercenaries of fascism in the labour movements the deluge of slander buried the tiny forces of unfalsified communism in the eyes of the revolutionary workers.

In 1936, the year of the French general strike and the initial victories of the Spanish workers in repulsing Spanish fascists, a proposal in Trotsky's name was put to an international conference of the movement for the Fourth International, that it should there and then declare itself the Fourth International. It refused. Certainly there was a shift in perspectives from 1933/34. The process of accumulating the forces for the International had proved tremendously slow, organisationally unrewarding. The growth of the movement had been marginal. Trotsky was acutely aware of the meaning of the successive defeats of the working class as a factor against a mass revolutionary regroupment. But simultaneously he saw the inexorable pressure which capitalism placed on the working class and the inevitability of world war, which would magnify the pressure.

He saw the successive waves of working class revolt which broke out again and again, in country after country, and from that drew the conclusion that the bureaucratic apparatuses could not continue indefinitely to constrain the drive of the masses. Trotsky's proposal for the Fourth International was in part a result of the defeats and disappointments between 1933 and 1936 — and especially the apparent impunity with which the Stalinists betrayed the revolution. Simultaneously it was an affirmation of belief in the possibility of breaking through the bureaucratic apparatus. He saw the need to prepare fully, to preserve and strengthen the limited body of cadres of the Fourth International, to give as complete an organisational expression as possible.

He aimed to give a demarcational character to the organisation of the Fourth International, whose programme was its most important attribute, to minimise the destructive effects on the delays in mass regroupment on the cadres of the FI and on the perspective of a new International, especially during the coming war. Perhaps he recalled the painful regrouping and the theoretical gropings after 1914. Thus he wanted the movement for the Fourth International to register an intermediary stage in its own development, by declaring itself as the Fourth International - necessarily initially a propaganda International — thus also separating itself off from vacillating groups (the centrists) who were also "for the Fourth International". but preferred to travel endlessly rather than ever "arriving", especially if "arrival" meant commitment to the communist programme and all that flowed from it.

"Sceptics ask: but has the moment for the creation of the Fourth International yet arrived? It is impossible, they say, to create an international artificially; it can arise only out of great events... The Fourth International has already risen out of great events: the greatest defeats of the proletariat in history. The cause for these defeats is to be found in the degeneration and perfidy of the old leadership. The class struggle does not tolerate an interruption... the Fourth International... has no need of being 'proclaimed'. It exists and it fights..." (The Transitional Programme, 1938).

1938 - THE FOUNDING CONFERENCE

The International Conference which met in the same week as the Munich crisis in September 1938

The Fourth International page 14
decided it was indeed time to declare the FI. War loomed, the working class was not advancing, defeat in Spain was imminent and the working class had already been quelled - even in the "Republican" areas. The forces of Trotskyism were extremely weak. 30 delegates attended a conference whose deliberations took up a single day.

The only groups with any significant base were the Belgian and US sections (the latter with about 1000 members). Max Shachtman, who little over a year later was to lead half the forces of the American SWP out of the FI, was chairman. The "USSR section" (already, unknown to the FI, more or less physically eliminated by the GPU) was "represented" by a Stalinist agent. Italian, German, Belgian, Dutch, French and Greek sections were represented. The British representative was the RSL. The Polish delegates opposed the declaration of the Fourth International. Several sections couldn't send delegates.

The Conference adopted a document called "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the. Tasks of the Fourth International" (the Transitional Programme), an action programme based fundamentally on the documents of the CI. Trotsky admitted the need for new analyses of changes in the world in the previous decade — and implicitly the Transitional Program could at best be a codification of the theoretical conquests of the past, related to the most pressing problems of the workers' movement. But that alone justified the Fourth International. The new analyses would be made.

In fact, the ideas of Trotskyism were still adequate as the best and most accurate codification of the experience of the working class and therefore as a general guide to action. The perspectives of Trotskyism now, while continuing to conceive of the reconstitution of mass communist working class parties as the central goal of their activities, stressed the element of mass spontaneous working class upsurge, bringing a new vanguard, rather than the reorientation of the given vanguard. If the stress of the Trotskyists up to 1933 had been on the "1902" side of Leninism, the need for inner-party rectification, now it was the "1905" side, the need for responsiveness to and the justification for confidence in the "spontaneously socialist" upsurge of the masses. The Transitional Programme would be the link between the revolutionary cadres and the mass action in prospect in capitalism's death agony. The perspective was of the revolutionaries being able to put themselves at the head of a mass revolt that would break through the bureaucratic crust, and lead the overthrow of capitalism.

These were in fact fundamentally correct perspectives - as perspectives, as a guide to action, though not as crystal-ball prediction. The programme and analyses of Trotskyism were still fundamentally adequate to the world the Trotskyists operated in - except for the limited forces at the disposal of the Trotskyists, in 1938 as in the preceding 15 years.

In retrospect what has happened seems to have been necessary given all the conditions which in fact made for it. And the Trotskyist perspectives "failed". It might seen, then, nonsense to say that a perspective that failed to take full and accurate account of the specific weight of certain factors that were later to render it inoperable was nevertheless a correct perspective for those who fought for it. It is a matter of the historical time scale, and of what a Marxist perspective is. If one says that the perspectives of the movement (of the CI and of the FI) were wrong, because they failed, we are judging them platonically, after the event, for their efficiency as prediction. This is a) to misunderstand what their "perspectives" meant to the comrades in the movement at that time and what the concept must moan to us - and b) to misconceive what the thing means in Marxist, revolutionary activist terms anyway.

"'Too much' (therefore superficial and mechanical) political realism often leads to the assertion that a statesman should only work within the limits of effective reality'; that he should not interest himself in what 'ought to be', but only in 'what is'. This would mean that he should not look further than the end of his own nose." (Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, p. 171)

"In reality one can 'scientifically' foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of the
struggle, which cannot but be the result of opposing forces in continuous movement, which are never reducible to fixed quantities, since within them quantity is continually becoming quality. In reality one can 'foresee' to the extent that one acts, to the extent that one applies a voluntary effort and therefore contributes concretely to creating the result 'foreseen'. Prediction reveals itself thus not as a scientific act of knowledge, but as the abstract expression of the effort made, the practical way of creating a collective will." (ibid. p. 438)

It is possible to fault a perspective of this sort for simply missing the major elements in the situation, misunderstanding the underlying trends, misestimating the direction, scope, force of the algebraic factors (eruption of mass working class activity, etc.) in the overall situation; and to show how this vitiated the activity of those who held and fought for a certain perspective. Which of these faults was the Fourth International guilty of?

Misestimating its own resources in the fashion made notorious by the SLL ? I don't believe so, nor will anyone who knows Trotsky's writings believe so. Misjudging the possibility of mass proletarian revolts ? Were there no such revolts? In fact Trotsky very clearly understood the meaning of the collapse of the CI and puny size of the FI in terms of the prospects for revolutionary action. His perspectives, and the activity of the FI, were based on the continuing impasse of capitalism, the resulting explosive revolts of the masses, and contradiction between the labour bureaucracies (Stalinists and social democrats) and the necessary drives and aims of the masses. He continued to believe that the underlying crisis of capitalism continued. Wrong?

It took world war 2, the destruction of most of Europe, and massive defeats for the proletariat before capitalism began to expand again. He continued to believe in not only the drive of the working class, but also the revolutionary drive of the revolutionary armies, mobilised under the banner of October and now under the control of the CI. Was he wrong? At which point did the CP memberships cease to represent such a potentially revolutionary mobilisation? Have they all even today, even given the massive ideological erosion and transformation, ceased entirely to have any element of such a mobilisation against capitalism? Even in France, despite the Popular Front, despite the "patriotism" and "French anti-Nazi" campaign in which Thorez talked even of uniting against Germany with "patriotic fascists", the real nature of the hard core of the French CP as a perverted anti-capitalist mobilisation showed itself.

What, after all, was Trotsky on about with the conception of the crisis of leadership ? A) "The concept of the epoch" - not the much looser, much slower, "world scope" conception that is the only rational variant that can be defended in 1973 - but a tighter, much more immediate concept, with the revolutionary focal points in the metropolitan countries. B) Pressure on the masses, actions, eruptions. C) The mass subjectively revolutionary mobilisations.

The Transitional Programme might seem odd as the possession of an organisation with the FI's forces. But the relationship of forces was not seen as static. A cornerstone assumption was that the programme represented the rational expression of the unconscious (potential) logic of the class struggle, and that therefore there was a possibility of the programme "fusing" with the mass movement. Not in the sense that the spontaneous movement could somehow reconstruct all the theoretical effort and lessons of experience that had gone into the programme; but that the vanguard elements could, step by step, come to recognise the validity of that programme, defended though it was by tiny forces, to forward their instinctive, unsystematised class drive.

Now, and for a long time vast, the sight of vulgar evolutionist "Trotskyists" stationed at various positions like so many hitch-hikers on a motorway, waiting for "history", the "mass movement", and so on, to give them a lift to power, often militates against an understanding of the entirely rational faith of Trotsky in the prospects for the forces armed with the FI's programme in the coming struggle. But it must be understood. The alternative, logically, is a rationalistic, didactic conception of, how there will be a fusion of the programme of communism and the masses of workers. Applied to questions like the general strike slogan in July 1972, it leans in the direction of a "don't act until
the revolutionary party is ready" conception.

The Trotskyists did predict accurately the mass working class upsurge. They could not predict their own defeat in the struggle for "the conquest" of the revolutionary masses except at the cost of simply eliminating themselves as a factor in the situation. In fact, at no point at least up to the middle or late 1940s was it possible for revolutionaries to have a perspective of capitalist and stalinist re-consolidation without submitting to a premature admission of defeat. The logic of such an admission would have been that the Trotskyists should have given up as soon as they decided the CI was dead for revolutionary purposes.

Perhaps there was misestimation in the perspectives of the Trotskyists regarding the stability of the Stalinist bureaucracy - whose survival ensured that the CPs played the role they did. If that was an analytical mistake, then what we need is a new analysis of Stalinism as a society, and the responsibility of those who challenge the perspectives is to produce that new analysis.

"THE STRONGEST SECTION OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL" (USSR) AND ITS FATE

In the late 30s Trotsky used to refer to "the strongest section of the FI". Throughout the '30s Trotskyists existed within the Soviet Union. Writers like Serge and Ciliga present many pictures of small groups of undefeatable Bolsheviks maintaining their position at the beginning of the 1930s. After the Kirov assassination in 1934 the terror increased enormously. "Capitulators" like Zinoviev and Kamenev, demoralised and with little or no moral authority left were arrested, made to confess, yet again, this time to moral and political responsibility for the assassination, and jailed.

In the purges not only Trotskyists, but Bukharinites (Right Oppositionists) and ultimately very large numbers of the Stalin faction fell victim. If it can be plausibly argued against state-capitalist theories that in 1928, in actual fact, the wave of capitulations from the Left Opposition reinforced: the character of the party as a bureaucratic centrist party, in this period the apparatus raised itself high above all factions, cut itself adrift from all traditions (though not from the social conquests) of the revolution. In reality the survival and consolidation of the Caesarist system built round Stalin demanded the elimination of all political thought, initiative, and even private consciousness from the environs of the ruling apparatus of the USSR, and the final petrification of the remains of the Bolshevik party.

The labour camps and the places of exile in Siberia became once again - as under Czarism - the "universities" of the fighters against a repressive system. The hard-core genuine Trotskyists found a mass »f confused deportees receptive to their explanation »f the nature of the Stalinist bureaucratic system. It was indeed the strongest section of the Fourth International, shackled and corralled though it was. To it Trotsky looked to seize the time of crisis and disintegration which war would surely evoke in the USSR, and re-establish Soviet democracy.

Stalin, himself a "graduate" of the Siberian "university", also understood this potential. A series of mass struggles in the camps, hunger strikes and passive disobedience, asserted the unbroken spirit of the Bolshevik-Leninists and their commitment to the programme of proletarian democracy. Finally, in 1938, the Stalinist centre embarked on a policy of systematic physical extermination of the oppositionists, Vorkhuta camp being a symbol of the annihilation of real communism in the Soviet Union. By 1939 little was left. The Stalinist ice age was established. And Trotsky's programme had lost its protagonists. The conscious Trotskyist faction no longer existed in the Soviet Union.

WAR

The imminence of world war was understood by the Trotskyists from 1933 on. War, wrote Lenin,
burns away all that is rotten, exposes what is corrupt. Such, the Trotskyists expected, would be its
effect on the labour movement and the Soviet Union. It would expose the leaderships to the test of
the most traumatic expression of capitalist crisis and impasse. When it came, in 1939, it throw the
Trotskyist organisations into crisis.

In the USA almost 50% of the SWP, led by Shachtman, Abern and Burnham, questioned the FI's
position on the defence of the Soviet Union, now, since August 1939, the ally of Hitler. A majority of
the International Executive Committee were Shachtmanites. Trotsky, diagnosing the Shachtmanite
faction as moving primarily under pressure of petty bourgeois public opinion, and away from the
programmatic commitments and communist firmness of the FI, judged this phenomenon to be "the
first social-patriotic sinfall of the Fourth International". In 1940 an Emergency Conference issued a
declaration, written by Trotsky, against the war. The International Secretariat moved to the USA.

As the Nazis overran Europe the Fourth International was atomised, reduced essentially to national
sections. The only effective "International" links were between the groups in the "Allied" countries.
The European Executive Committee of the Fourth International, dominated by the French section,
issued a declaration in resistance to the Nazis which leaned heavily towards social-patriotic
"defencism" for the smitten imperialist countries. There was an ideological collapse in the French
movement, in two directions, towards social-patriotism, and towards a sectarian approach to the
genuine class feelings manifested in the resistance to Hitler.

The official section, the Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste, wrote: "We must make the maximum of
effort to lead the bourgeois fraction to constitute with our party a national resistance movement"
(La Vérité, November 1940). The CCI (ex-PCI) fell into the ultra-left inversion of the POIts inability
to understand the impermissibility of forgetting the imperialist nature of the French bourgeoisie,
even in defeat by a stronger imperialism. Their slogan was "Down with bourgeois democracy:
down with Hitler" - thus cutting themselves off from the possibility of relating to the elemental class
feeling reflected in anti-Nazism. In Belgium the leadership of the section collapsed and deserted
revolutionary politics.

The movement had to be reorganised, and throughout the war Trotskyist groups, fighting for the
full revolutionary programme, continued to exist in isolation until 1943/44 when contacts were re-
established. They upheld the need for both workers' Revolution and internationalism, resisting
patriotism and resisting the anti German racism which appeared in sections of the resistance
movement (especially those influenced by the CP) after 1941. They actually published a
clandestine German language paper for the proletarian soldiers of Hitler's occupying army, Arbeiter
und Soldat, edited by Paul Widelin, who was to lose his life in this work, as did many other
Trotskyists. In August 1940 Leon Trotsky was murdered by Stalinist agents. In July 1943 65
French and German Trotskyists were shot. In 1942 dissident Communist revolutionaries in
Holland, ex-Flists, were publicly executed, including Sneevliet and others of the RSAP. And in the
USA, Britain and Ceylon Trotskyists were tried and imprisoned.

By 1944 contact was reestablished in Europe. In February of that year a European conference was
held, which formally criticised the 1940 deviations in France. In June 1945 the newly elected
European Exec. Comm. met to prepare a conference. In 1946 an International Conference was
held which elected a new international leadership and began to prepare a Second World
Conference. The movement had survived.

The collapses were manifestations of the organisational weakness and the consequent
predominant weight of key individuals (such as Walter Dauge in Belgium) rather than an internal
moral and political collapse such as in 1914 or 1933.

The pre-war perspectives of a collapse of Stalinism in Russia underestimated the stabilising effect
of Nazi treatment of occupied areas of Russia. The perspectives for revolutionary upsurge in
Europe, however, were totally vindicated. But the contradiction between objective possibilities
(including the subjective drive of the working class masses and the perspective of revolution) and
the labour bureaucracies, especially the Stalinists, remained unresolved. Isolated, persecuted,
assassinated, impotent - Trotskyists saw the CPs re-consolidate capitalism and the "Red" Army
snuff out the revolutionary upsurge in Eastern Europe after the war. East Europe was Stalinised.
Capitalism was consolidated and stabilised.

And in Yugoslavia, and China, and later Vietnam, stalinist formations cut off from the proletariat,
overthrew capitalism.

VIETNAM

Beginning in the 1930s, Trotskyism became quite a force in Vietnam. (Of the three colonial and
semi-colonial countries - Bolivia, Vietnam, and Ceylon - where Trotskyism became something of a
force, in two it degenerated; in Vietnam it was physically annihilated). As in Ceylon Stalinists and
Trotskyists remained remarkably undifferentiated and even capable of collaboration until the early
mid-1930s.

The Comintern policy of the Popular Front decreed that the communists in the colonies of the
"democracies" stop fighting imperialism. In French Indochina the Comintern found itself partly
outflanked by a group of Trotskyists who vigorously advocated the struggle for national liberation
on a strategy of permanent revolution. Serious and widespread support for Trotskyism was built up
in the towns, mainly in the South of present-day Vietnam.

With the end of the "peak" period of the Popular Front the Stalinists regained some ground and as
part of the nationalist forces (Vietminh) which organised resistance to the Japanese invasion after
1941, became a major force. By 1945 the Stalinists, led by Ho and Giap, were politically
indistinguishable from bourgeois democracy, modelling an attempted declaration of independence
on Benjamin Franklin's text of... 1776.

Im August 1945, with the Japanese surrender, the Vietminh took over the whole country and set up
the DRV, without much struggle. But the Stalinist view of the "democracies" and their unqualified
support for such wartime allies as capitalist Britain, (together with the bourgeois character of their
coalition partners) meant that though independent the DRV was completely naive about
imperialism. British troops (allies in the World War) were straight away welcomed into Saigon.
Within a month they had scraped together all the old French colonialist soldiers and administrators
they could find (they had no qualms about Vichy French who had ruled for Japan) and made a
coup to reinstate the French in Saigon. Despite this lesson, the Vietminh government in Hanoi
made an Accord with the French in March 1946 (only 6 months later), which allowed French troops
into Hanoi. Growing clashes between the French troops and the Vietminh culminated in the
unrestrained shelling of Haiphong by the French, and in December 1946 they took Hanoi and
forced the Vietminh back into the country side as a guerrilla force; it was not until 1954, after Dien
Bien Phu, that the North was regained for the DRV. The rest is well known...

The Trotskyists vigorously opposed any imperialist presence, and campaigned against the British,
French, and their local collaborators including the Stalinists. Their opposition to the British
provoked the first assassinations of Trotskyists. In the autumn of 1945, Ta Thu Thau, the main
Trotskyist leader, was murdered by Stalinists in retaliation for his vigorous opposition to British
control.

The Trotskyists were at the time the only determined anti-imperialists. But they were at a
disadvantage, trapped between the Stalinist-led Vietminh coalition and imperialism. Then in 1946,
when they opposed the Accord with the French, the Trotskyist forces were finally decimated by a
Stalinist onslaught, reportedly under the direction of Giap. Thereafter they ceased to be a serious
force in Vietnamese politics.

The Fourth International page 19
A major determining factor in the way the Vietnamese revolution has developed was the political defeat and eclipse of Trotskyism, which embodied in Vietnam as elsewhere the programme of the proletarian revolution, and workers' state based on democratic workers' councils. That the Stalinists have led the most heroic and magnificent struggle against imperialism since the forties does not in the least invalidate the Trotskyist programme, nor consign the record of the Vietnamese Trotskyists to the status of historical marginalia. Those in the USFI who tend to do so, in spite of their correct support for the Vietnamese CPs and the NLF against US imperialism, overlook the fact that, had the Trotskyist programme prevailed in 1945/46, that struggle could have taken a very different road. In the light of this history, and without in any way mitigating our support for and appreciation of the titanic struggle against US imperialism, it is necessary to affirm that the Trotskyist proletarian programme is still to be fought for — for its entirety in the unliberated areas, and for its completion in a political revolution in North Vietnam.

1943/45

The crisis of Trotskyism began essentially in 1943/44 - as a result of its inability to realise its revolutionary perspectives and the subsequent evolution on the basis of a) proletarian defeat and East and West Europe; b) the independent revolutionary processes, giving rise to social/political mutations, eventually called by the FI deformed workers' states.

Beginning with the revolt of the Italian workers in 1943 and the fall of Mussolini the workers' upsurge in Europe gave the struggle for national emancipation an almost entirely proletarian character. It reached tremendous heights. In Italy and France real power, though it was not consolidated, was in the hands of the working class, which was armed. The bourgeoisie was helpless and discredited The CPs were the key to the situation, and Moscow's line the determinant of their behaviour. They were able to frustrate the movement of the masses which they headed, and to keep the revolutionaries isolated during the extreme crisis, until such time as the post war boom generated by wartime destruction had created a new floor under the bourgeoisie and the capitalist system and states, which the workers' leaders had played the major role in restoring.

Throughout Europe from France to Poland regimes corresponding to the relationship between Russia and the west were established - "New Democracies", without class pedigree, ruled by coalition governments which included the CPs. The Cold War would decide the class realities in each one: against capitalism in the East where real power was in the hands of the Red Army (which had crushed the independence of the working class) and the CPs; and for capitalism in the west where the bourgeois state had meanwhile been restored and the working class disarmed.

The root of the crisis of Trotskyism was not just the defeat of the Trotskyist attempt to win the masses and the defeat of the mass upsurge. In itself such defeat and isolation cannot be a criterion of the ideological and political adequacy or otherwise of a movement - as the whole history of Marxism and the previous history of Trotskyism (e.g. on Germany) proves. The crisis arose primarily because of the growth of forces outside of Trotskyism which carried through a part of its programme; and the role played by Stalinism (both the Russ: bureaucracy and independent forces within the Stalinist movement and adhering to the Stalinist ideology) in carrying through revolutions which after long ponderings and discussion, the Trotskyists recognised as deformed workers' states. In these developments as much had been achieved as the Trotskyists recognised as surviving of the October Revolution in Russia needing only a subsidiary workers' political revolution to restore political power to the proletariat.

To treat what had been accomplished, therefore, as minor, secondary or of little importance could only lead to a more or less explicit reversal of the assessment of the Soviet Union throughout the whole period since the political triumph of Stalinism.
Up to 1943 and with increasing doubt until the end of the decade, the FI could regard itself as a movement based on a given "Marxism", which guided practice and interpreted reality in the present and clearly indicated alternatives for the future. The "philosophers" had interpreted history and proletarian experience. But from the mid-'40s and after 1948 it became a matter of an increasingly desperate effort to catch up with events in reality which had not been expected and at first sight, appeared to contradict the expectations and also to invalidate the connection between the programme and the proletariat as Marxists had understood it.

The FI had to attempt to assess the changing reality in the light of the programme. It had to reassess the question of the nature of the epoch in the light of expanding Stalinism (and later of expanding capitalism). It had to face tendencies analogous to those at the end of the 1920s, to lapse into sectarianism (the future IC-OCRFI) and into tailism (the future Pablo tendency) and to fight for an understanding that the method of Marxism generates the Programme, which must be permanently reviewed, even renovated. It had to fight to relate the basic programatic and class norms of Trotskyism to the unfolded reality; and to fight to preserve those norms, without relapsing into primitive dogmatism essentially without roots in, or links with reality.

In fact that crisis was never satisfactorily resolved, the experience never satisfactorily integrated into the doctrine of Trotskyism - as for example the resent USFI division on Vietnam (basically a programmatic division) demonstrates.

1948 - 1951

The 1946 Conference gathered together 12 sections and elected a new IEC and International Secretariat. It launched the slogan for the transformation of the Trotskyist groups from propaganda organisations to parties of mass working class struggle. The 1948 Congress, consisting of 22 organisations in 19 countries (50 delegates) was to do the same - in a period when capitalism had become re-stabilised. However, this was still not obvious; and since they were not simple speculators but revolutionaries engaged in the continuing struggle to prevent capitalist re-stabilisation, we have no right to criticise them for being less than eager to accept that this was so.

As late as 1947 a mass strike wave of the working class in France hurled back the attempted advance of De Gaulle's then quasi-fascist movement.

This problem was to be a major question which in the form of entrism sui generis had massive implications for the FI in the period after 1951/52. The 1948 Congress reasserted the basic ideas of a decade earlier, against a world reality that was soon to force changes. There is no doubt that it represented at that stage the continuity of the Trotskyist movement, and therefore a vindication of the declaration of the FI. It was after that point that the question of continuity became a matter of the assessment of the decisions, analyses and codifications of the reorganised FI.

The result of the Stalinist statification in East Europe was summed up as state capitalist and reactionary: Trotskyists were supposed to join the social democratic parties where the workers, alienated by the Quisling activities of the CPs vis a vis the Red Army, would express their political drives; from that vantage point they should fight the Stalinists. Defence of the USSR was now explicitly defence of "what was left of the October Revolution". A distinction was coined between reactionary bureaucratic collectivists (McDonald, Burnham) and revolutionary bureaucratic collectivists (Shachtman and the US Workers Party). The Congress affirmed solidarity with the Vietnamese Trotskyists. A major task was defined as the proletarian struggle to prevent war. The discussion of the expansion of Stalinism was still continuing. The general implications of the Congress's positions, especially the description of the East European transformation as reactionary, was that the transition to socialism seemed to be halted.

Shortly after this 1948 Congress the Yugoslav CP broke with Stalin. This changed the picture for Trotskyists, who declared a belated understanding that a proletarian revolution had occurred there.
And in April 1949 the IEC decided that after all, the countries where capitalism had been overthrown and which had been "structurally assimilated into the Soviet Union" were deformed workers' states. By contrast to the 1948 position, the implications often drawn after 1949 were that the transition to socialism was moving forward and continuously of its own momentum, not even in the sense of a spontaneous mass revolt carrying through changes, but almost as an evolutionary process. The revolutionary action of either the working class or of revolutionary socialists was eliminated. In its place was the concept of an ongoing world revolution, abstracted from actual revolutions, elevated into a shadowy historical actor, a spectre stalking the earth, "Revolution", of which the actual revolutions were merely the phenomenal expressions. This process was conceived of as moving, striving towards some goal already determined.

The post-war revolutionary wave had subsided: the Cold War was on: the Chinese revolution was reaching victory as a Stalinist-led revolution. As Pierre Frank puts it regarding the events as seen after the 1948 Congress:

"These results were unpredictable, the world was assuming a shape that had never been envisaged or even imagined by even the most perspicuous, the most eminent Marxists... The primary task of the FI was to place the basic teaching of Marxism in juxtaposition with the new world picture, to redefine the situation, to re-evaluate perspectives and tasks". The FI concluded that the period remained one of unstable equilibrium, of convulsions and crises, generating great class struggles.

SECOND FOUNDING CONGRESS: THE NEW ROOT

At the 1951 World Congress Trotskyism reconstituted itself on the basis of analysis of massive changes in the world, analysis made by its own tiny and inexperienced forces, minus Trotsky. Its problem was to reconcile the epochal revolutionary perspectives with the continuing bureaucratic control; its concept of Stalinism with its expansion; its programme of socialism with the bureaucratic forms of the existing states in which capitalism had been overthrown. Its fundamental task, as a primarily ideological current, was to integrate the new experiences with its previous theory - fully, so as to recreate a theory that would be as sure a guide to action as that of Bolshevism up to world war 2, up to the point where the weakness and defeat: of the forces holding those positions allowed unexpected developments. In addition, the struggle of the FI to actually build revolutionary parties, and to elaborate tactics appropriate to the goal in the given situation, created parallel problems, which intermingled with and cut across, and in fact bedevilled the process of ideological self-reconstruction. The FI must be judged by its success in achieving this fundamental task of ideological clarification, which is an essential precondition for building revolutionary parties.

The 1951 Congress was essentially the re~founding of the Fourth International - ideologically and politically. Its continuity or otherwise with what went before is not a given fact, but a genuine question, which may be argued for or against.

In August 1951, delegates from 25 countries drew up the balance sheet, essentially, of the whole previous period, right from the 1920s beginning of the struggle of Trotskyism. Stalinism had expanded and capitalism had survived. The movement had already recognised the galaxy of new states on the USSR model as deformed workers' states - where there had never been workers' revolution in any classical sense; which were workers' states essentially because of had been done, whatever construction and ingenious explanations were put on by whom it was done and why and how. The revolutionary vanguard had dwindled as the capitalist system re-stabilised (temporarily). The objective prospect of war was not offset by an obvious ability of the workers to resist it and overthrow capitalism in time.

Mass revolutionary struggles had developed in the "Third World" on a scale of struggle for state
power previously unexampled, and there was a beginning of imperialist withdrawal from these areas. The traditional workers' parties were stabilised, though the balance between social-democrats and Stalinists had in some cases (e.g. France), changed decisively. The Trotskyist movement, with its perspective from 1948 of becoming parties of mass action, was still tiny and stagnant. It had even less prospect of becoming a mass movement able to act decisively in politics than before, especially with the "left turn" of the CPs in the cold war, and the apparent ability of the CPs in vast areas to overturn capitalism.

The very raison d'etre of the Fourth International was questioned by the overturns. The programme of proletarian revolution began to seem sectarian, a product of attachment to abstract norms and ideals - begin to seem an irrelevance, even to some in and on the fringe of the Fourth International. In addition there was a great loss of cadres through demoralisation and disorientation.

The Congress evaluated the expansion of Stalinism as as the crisis of Stalinism, its disintegration being shown by the Yugoslav-USSR dispute. The reassessment of the expansion of the USSR's social system now led to a new view of the balance of forces in the world in favour of "socialism". War would not be as previously, with world capitalism divided and the Soviet Union able to play one power off against another, but would be a direct clash between the Revolution and Imperialism - an international civil war. The CPs couldn't be seen as classical reformist parties, nor invariably as Kremlin puppets — under exceptional mass pressure and mass mobilisation they could go beyond the Kremlin's wishes and strictly reformist objectives. The decision on entry sui generis - "deep", long-term entry into the mass stalinist and social-democratic parties - was certainly a complementary decision to those of the 3rd Congress, but was taken not at the Congress but a year later, by the International Executive Committee.

Michel Pablo, the then leader of the Fourth International, writing in 1972, described the conclusions of the lending team thus:

"Very quickly, immediately after the second world war, the Revolutionary Marxist Tendency of the Fourth International [the name of Pablo's group since his split with the FI in 1965, which he extends backwards in history to before it existed, to describe the grouping dominated by himself, the continuous element], which progressively took into account new historical factors, turned towards the conception that the Fourth International is only the embryo of the new mass International, and tried to integrate with the real revolutionary class movement and bring about a fusion with the new revolutionary forces... But at the same time, this attitude had a more or less structural ambiguity thanks to the name of the organisation (Fourth International)... The 3rd World Congress marked the decisive turning point of the Fourth International in the period after the war, breaking with schematic traditionalism in its effort to assimilate new historical realities. It inaugurated a new line of the Fourth International in the evaluation of the changing relationship of forces between imperialism and revolution; in the estimation of the nature, the problems, the importance of the colonial revolution and the crisis of Stalinism ...."

The implications of the decisions of the 3rd World Congress and the world reality of which they were a partial reflection were to determine the future of the FI.

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AFTER 1951: OUTLINE

After 1951 and the laying of the new foundations, the FI continued a struggle to relate to the real world. Capitalism entered a phase of massive expansion. This did not mean the character of the epoch had changed decisively because simultaneously the degenerated and deformed workers' states existed and expanded as an element in the world alien to capitalism, antagonistic to capitalism. At the same time as the capitalist expansion (whose continuation led the Fourth International, around 1954/55, to reassess its perspective of a major crisis as imminent), a mass wave of revolutionary struggles occurred in the peripheral countries of capitalism. This gave rise to
the idea of a whole shift in the "epicentre" of the revolution away from the metropolitan countries. In
1953 a series of struggles began in the Stalinist states. Meanwhile the labour movement in Europe
stagnated, and regressed to a lower level than for decades, in an exhausted calm amidst relative
prosperity. The war expected by not only the mainstream of the Fourth International, but many
others, didn't come, though it remained a major threat. The main features of the FI from then on
were:

A) Entry sui generis in the Communist Parties and Social Democratic Parties, depending on which
was the mass party in the given country. This began in 1952 as a general tactic. Implicitly, in
practice, it implied an adherence to an organic/evolutionary perspective for the workers’
movement.

B) The split of 1952/3 between the International Committee - SLL, OCI, SWP and others - and the
International Secretariat of the FI. This took place on the basis of a general common adherence to
the 1951 codification, and indeed it is difficult to isolate any common principled plank for the IC
supporters.

C) The widespread disappearance in many countries of public activity by Trotskyists, as the entry
sui generis tactic became dominant. G Healy, as late as 1957, insisted that it was a principle not to
have open Trotskyist work in Great Britain, going from the experience of the RCP and his struggle
to liquidate it). Therefore the absence of propaganda for the full Trotskyist programme.

D) A tendency for the FI to accept the regimes in Yugoslavia, Vietnam, China (later Cuba) on their
own evaluations in their own spheres (i.e. in internal, as opposed to external, policy; rather like the
Right oppositionists of the 1930s with the USSR). Absence of propaganda for the political
revolution.

E) An orientation towards work with, attempts to create, or even to substitute for left-centrist
currents ("replacement leaderships") within the mass workers parties. These currents were to be
the intermediate stage in the building of a mass Trotskyist tendency.

F) A tendency to look outside the metropolitan countries for the "compensating" revolutions. This
had a debilitating effect on "local" work, even when generating communist-internationalist
solidarity, as on Vietnam and the fine work for the Algerian revolution.

G) The propagation of programmes, such as the idea of structural reforms, or of workers' control
as a general abstraction, designed to link up with the estimated "next" stage of the maturation of
the stagnant European workers' movement - effectively the propagation of reformism. This linked
up with the "mass left centrist currents" perspective.

H) Attempts to relate to and sometimes to take on the coloration of political tendencies such 1s Maoists.

I) From the mid-'60s, especially from 1968, a turn away from the organic involvement with the
workers' movement towards open, increasingly propagandistic, "enlightening" work, usually
directed at peripheral social groups and organisations, and thus also away from the working class.

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL IN BRITAIN

Trotskyism in Britain has a record, despite everything negative in its history, of proclaiming and
defending the fundamentals of communism in war and in peace, and of standing up against
Stalinists and labour bureaucrats’ persecution and against state persecution during world war 2.
But the role of the FI as an organisation, right from 1938 onwards, has rarely been a positive one.
One result of the chain of successive political/organisational abortions and failures in the history of the FI in Britain is a plethora of ex-FI sects, many of them frozen in old and now abandoned FI positions. Another is that the air in Britain is thick with slanders against the FI, by one of its former sections, the SLL, and it is difficult to discuss it rationally.

A number of small groups emerged in the 1930s. As preparation for the Founding Conference of the Fourth International in 1938 an attempt was made to unite them into a section, and a number were fused into the RSL, on a basis of agreement that the one "united" group would have a number of different tactical orientations. A small group, the Workers International League, with about a dozen members, including both Ted Grant and Gerry Healy, refused to join the RSL, saying that such an organisation had no future. The Founding Conference of the FI, September 1938, recognised the RSL as the British section and pronounced upon the WIL as follows:

"It is possible to maintain and develop a revolutionary political grouping of serious importance only on the basis of great principles. The Fourth International alone embodies and represents these principles. It is possible for a national group to maintain a constant revolutionary course only if it is firmly connected in one organisation with co-thinkers throughout the world and maintains a constant political and theoretical collaboration with them. The Fourth International alone is such an organisation. All purely national groupings, all those who reject international organisation, control, and discipline, are in their essence reactionary".

Regardless of this massive overstatement of the case, in fact the WIL remained an internationalist organisation, some of whose leaders were to go to jail for communist activity in world war 2. While the RSL stagnated, the WIL put down working class roots and grew into a group more important than any previous Trotskyist group and arguably than any now existing (including IS) in terms of weight in the working class, though it never had more than about 500 members. In 1944 it fused with the remnant of the RSL and founded the Revolutionary Communist Party. The fusion was largely a formality (since the RSL represented very little) to enable the WIL to become the British section, while allowing the FI leadership (then in the USA) to keep within the letter of the 1938 pronouncement.

We hold no brief for the Haston/Grant leadership of the RCP, whose misleadership and incapacity made the crisis of Trotskyism in Britain in the 1940s five times more debilitating than it need have been. However, beginning in the mid '40s a small faction led by Healy and Lawrence emerged within the RCP, advocating entry into the Labour Party because revolutionary crisis was imminent and there was no time to construct an independent revolutionary party. (The pioneering version of what Healy was later to spend many years denouncing as one of the chief traits of "Pabloism").

Healy had the support of the FI leadership. In 1948 an amicable split was agreed upon, with Healy in the Labour Party. Isolated and battered by the disappointed "perspectives" of its leaders, the "successes" of Labour reformism and the Cold War left turn of the CP, the RCP declined to a point where its leaders wanted only to shed their responsibilities. Soon the ex-leader of the British Trotskyist movement was to desert to reformism (today he is a member of the leadership of the right wing EPTU). The RCP entered the Labour Party and the groups reunited.

Healy's grouping was still a minority - but the FI insisted that since they had pioneered Labour Party entry they must have a majority on the new united National Committee. There followed a reign of terror, organisational intimidation, expulsions and suspensions, as Healy set out to maintain his unexpected "majority". That was the take-off point for the notoriously authoritarian SLL regime. After the 1953 split the minority of Lawrence was the British section until it declined the honour, leaving no section. In 1957, with the ferment caused in left circles, and especially the Communist Party, by the "dethronement" of Stalin and the Hungarian revolution, a new British section was cobbled together, centred round Ted Grant (who had been formally expelled at the 1951 Congress), and dominated by Grant's mechanistic "dialectics" of the late 1940s. Life was hastily breathed into it, and it was presented with the badge, the seal and the franchise of the British Section of the Fourth International. It led a flickering life, the flame more than once almost
going out; without the support, especially the financial support, of the Fourth International, it could not have existed.

The new section was not a "disciplined" one. In a remarkable parallel with the role of the Healy group within the RCP, a group around Pat Jordan grew up in the RSL at the end of the 1950s; an especially loyal group of super Fourth Internationalists, looked upon with favour by the FI leadership. Existing separately after 1961, this group was nurtured by the FI. Its political character - essentially left social democratic — was signalled, for example, by its conduct round the 1967 docks dispute over Devlin. The IMG was cooperating with Jack Jones in the Workers' Control campaign: now the question was posed of whether the IMG was using Jones, or Jones was using the IMG. The IMG proved incapable of more than the vaguest murmurs of criticism of "trade union leaders who fall short in some arenas whatever role they play in others". They did not point the finger at Jones, who was playing an open strike-breaking role. Instead, in the classical centrist style of using generalities to avoid the concrete question, they published an abstract article on workers' control by Tony Topham.

In 1965 the RSL was demoted and the proto-IMG became an officially recognised sympathising section. It became the official section at the 9th Congress in 1969 and is the latest "creation" of the FI.

***

Last year the USFI warned us to join it or be damned to irrelevance and degeneration. In actual fact the organised Fourth International is itself the direct or indirect progenitor of every sect in Britain. It created, as its: instrument during one or other of its phases, both the SLL and RSL - and then lost control of them. Indirectly, through the savagely undemocratic regime of its then section, led by Healy, it generated the IS group as an independent organisation. The role it plays in Britain today is to provide a romantic aura for the quasi-Bordigist sect called the IMG, or, more precisely, to provide an artificial framework which contains a group of incipient sects, permanently at war with each other, quasi-Bordigists dominant (perhaps momentarily). In "return" the IMG, an utter political failure where applying the international communist programme to real problems is concerned, uses the bare idea of the FI as a self-legitimising caste-mark which allows them to accumulate one political absurdity on top of another and still retain in their own eyes (and, they demand, in the eyes of others !) the intrinsic status of being the only real internationalists in Britain.

The dynamic of the IMG for a period from 1968/69 was fundamentally determined by an effort to emulate the Ligue Communiste. This has expressed itself both in various tactical borrowings and in the copying of the strategy of "periphery to centre".

In France, 1968, "... a great debate took place in Paris over what course of action to be taken by the assembled students over the question of police repression and the closure of the Sorbonne. Various Maoist and other groups said that the question must be taken 'to the workers', and that the demonstrators should march to the working class centres of Paris to distribute leaflets. Others, including the comrades of the JCR (fore-runner of the Ligue Communiste), argued that this would be an empty propaganda gesture and not a real development of the maximum potentiality of the struggle. They instead argued that the students must mobilise those they could mobilise, i.e. the mass of students, and that the real way to affect the consciousness of the working class was through launching a struggle and not through leaflets."

On the theoretical level, there is a basic assumption here, in common with the most timid economist and the most rabid "propaganda by example" adventurist, of a semi-spontaneous development of consciousness. It is simply not true that a struggle on the "periphery" will lead automatically to a development of proletarian consciousness. Take the example of a student demonstration on Vietnam. How do the workers learn of such a demonstration? For the most part, they learn of it through the capitalist news media, that is, they learn of the demonstration through The Fourth International page 26
whet amounts to propaganda against the demonstration. Given that, in the absence of revolutionary agitation and propaganda in the working class, it is not at all certain that the demonstration will result in sympathy with the Vietnamese.

In fact, the "periphery to centre" orientation can lead to overemphasis on "establishing oneself" and blurred politics; or to a crude mechanistic interpretation of Kautsky's formula about socialist consciousness being brought from the "outside" to the working class, and thus to an "ultra-political" approach of revolutionaries talking at the working class as it were "from outside".

The precise political consequences of this theoretical error vary according to circumstances. In France, in the specific situation of the Ligue Communiste, with a mass revolutionary student base and with the central sections of the working class almost impermeably dominated by Stalinist leadership, the political conclusions have been not totally irrational. Certainly they have been correct as against L.O. and the Maoists (and the OCI). The students did act as a detonator for the mass strike. In Britain, where the specific conditions of France do not hold, the result was a hilarious impressionistic muddle, a bumble-bee-like chasing round after various "peripheral" sections.

In 1971, a "proletarian orientation" tendency carried the IMG conference, but proved unable to implement its programme. The last year has seen the IMG develop an independent dynamic, as the old Jordan leadership is replaced by the Ross faction, confident in a newly-developed set of ideas. This "new thinking" is a product of an attempt to come to terms with the pre-1972 IMG and with the differences in the FI: it is polemically motivated, directed against the old IMG, the SWP, and the IS. It is an attempt to "render the Ligue Communiste more profound". Its fundamental content is a passive propagandism.

This passive propagandist conception has led to a number of serious political errors; and, what is equally disturbing, the recognition of these errors has not shaken the Ross faction's confidence in their "new thinking". The group has taken on the character of an intellectual clique, rather than a serious interventionist force constantly checking its ideas by the test of the class struggle.

***

The successive political tactics and zigzags of the whole FI, and the general problems of the FI, obviously explain much of this history. There is also the aspect of the international leadership acting as both the legitimiser and the ideological powerhouse for tendencies in Britain which are essentially its own creation and instruments. This is true of both the Healy and the Jordan tendencies, both essentially "shop-keepers" in the political lines put out by the FI, without much concern for the nature of the goods: both experiences have ended "badly". Healy's tendency, indescribably primitive politically, functioned as the "International's" faction in the late '40s and then inherited the wreckage of the movement in 1950, taking the political line as given and finally, on the basis of limited local success, kicking over the traces and generating the present SLL tendency.

The politically primitive Jordan tendency, without even the organisational abilities so markedly a feature of the Healy tendency, was the International's representative until pushed aside by the new recruits, the "brilliant youth" - who proceed to turn the British section into a discussion club for minor intellectuals and reduce it to a shambles just as the class struggle reaches its highest point for half a century. The experience of tendencies in Britain who make their "mark" as the super-loyal representatives of the International is connected with the whole phenomenon of the general weakness of the FI - but also with a certain "Zinovievism", arising from the shadowy nature of an International not based on any solid organisational foundations with roots in the working class, and compelled to seek for, and even artificially create, instruments for its politics.

An international leadership can play a big part in promoting the development of a national grouping. It would be absolutely wrong to draw conclusions of general cynicism from the British
experience. But the precondition for effective international functioning - especially with an organisationally weak international - is that the efforts of the international leadership are devoted to building up a competent cadre of leaders, able to seriously assess their own specific circumstances and tactics. If the influence of the International leads to the garbled copying of tactics from different circumstances, or protects mediocre leaders with its prestige from all criticism, then it is a harmful influence.

WHY WORKERS' FIGHT DISCUSSES THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

"The Fourth International exists and it fights. Is it weak? Yes, its ranks are not numerous because it is still young. They are as yet chiefly cadres. But these cadres are pledges for the future. Outside these cadres there does not exist a single revolutionary current on this planet really meriting the name. If our International is still weak in numbers, it is strong in doctrine, programme, tradition, in the incomparable tempering of its cadres."

Beyond doubt Trotsky, writing thus in 1938, correctly assessed the Fourth Internationalist movement. This was the only healthy tendency to emerge from the CI and to survive its degeneration, analysing that degeneration as it progressed. The fate of that tendency is the fate of the revolutionary communism of our epoch. Its subsequent history is that of the only tendency equipped with the unfalsified ideas of communism in attempting to review, understand, and intervene in the world political events of half a century of major world-wide political upheavals and class struggles. Therefore to relate to the FI is to relate to all the problems revolutionaries face in interpreting and learning from these events, and the attempt to integrate them into our theory. Even if our conclusions regarding the Fourth International were to be entirely negative, to study the FI is to study revolutionary politics for the whole epoch which opened with the October Revolution.

The formation of the Fourth International, and its development as a mass workers' international, was the aspiration of the movement issuing from the CI; we neither reject that goal, nor fetishise and refuse to criticise the results so far. Our assessment must be highly critical, necessarily so. Why? If the raison d'etre of the Fourth International is the preservation and development of the communist theory and programme, then to pass over inadequacies and confusions out of "respect" for "the International" is to negate that very raison d'etre.

Sharp criticism - after the event... - is not an assertion of "superiority". Our attitude to the Fourth Internationalist tradition is one of profound respect. Nothing better has existed, and it is easier to see clearly afterwards than in the maelstrom. The task of constructing a revolutionary movement compels us to submit the history of our movement to a merciless scrutiny and criticism. That is the only basis for a rejuvenation, on the basis of the fundamental ideas of Trotskyism, and for really accomplishing the goals of the Trotskyist militants of the movement's past. Faced with the state of the Trotskyist movement today, internationally, but especially in Britain itself, it is the duty of communists to criticise mercilessly and rigorously, even at the risk of ultra-sharpness.

"... what are we to do when the good old books do not give the needed indications? Try to manage with one's own head". (Trotsky, writings 1934/35, p. 208). And the responsibility lies on our heads - it cannot be shuffled off onto other heads, no matter how venerable.