

ON TROTSKYISM AND THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

TWO ESSAYS BY PHIL HEARSE:

"ON THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL"

"BIG FLAME ON TROTSKYISM"

30p

INTRODUCTION

1978 is the tenth anniversary of the May-June uprising in France, the Tet offensive in Vietnam and the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The ten years since these historic events have been ten years of turmoil and crisis for international capitalism. In Vietnam the revolution has been victorious, in Portugal a pre-revolutionary situation developed, and in Chile a revolution on the march was drowned in blood. But these ten years have also seen both the massive growth, and the turmoil and crisis of the revolutionary left. Amongst the movements and currents which emerged from the events of '68, the Trotskyist movement has been only a minority – in some countries a strong minority, in others much weaker. All the events since 1968, the victories and the defeats, each in their own way demonstrated the validity of the Trotskyist programme. The illusions of 1968, the illusions of spontaneism, libertarianism, Maoism and crude workerism, have been dashed against the continued strength of reformism and the massive reserves of both adaptability and repression of the capitalist system itself.

Ten years after 1968 it is possible to speak of a crisis of the revolutionary left, a crisis which cannot be overcome except by answering crucial political questions. No amount of 'revolutionary' bravado, no organisational manoeuvres, can replace political answers.

In this pamphlet we have taken up a number of themes which we believe are vital if the revolutionary left is going to be able to consolidate itself, overcome its fragmentation and ground its fight against the reformist mis-leaders of the working class on a sure programmatic basis. In the first essay we attempt to answer many of the misconceptions about international revolutionary organisation and the Fourth International. In particular we have been concerned to reply to the distortions characteristic of the current of opinion represented by the copious writings of Duncan Hallas on this question, and also certain points made by the variety of groupings who embrace the struggle against what they regard as 'pabloism'.

In the second part we have attempted a first reply to the long pamphlet on Trotskyism by the comrades of Big Flame. We believe that their ideas on this question represent a whole series of misconceptions common in the European far left, particularly common in the crisis-ridden and disintegrating Italian organisations – Lotta Continua, Avanguardia Operaia and 11 Manifesto.

Phil Hearse April 1978.

1. The need for a revolutionary international

The Fourth International asserts that in the epoch of imperialism, in the struggle for socialist victory, an international organisation of the revolutionary vanguard remains a *permanent necessity* – whether it consists of mass parties or small groups, Why?

The advent of the epoch of imperialism, the spread of the capitalist mode of production over the face of the earth, created a unified *world* economy and with it the epoch of *world* politics. This unity of the world economy is not a 'simple' unity, but a contradictory unity characterised by an international division of labour – between the imperialist countries and the colonial and semi-colonial countries, and between the imperialist countries themselves. Developments in international capitalism after the second world war – the spread of multi-national corporations and the consequent 'internationalisation' of huge amounts of capital – have strengthened these basic trends in imperialism. Socialism, a society characterised by the abolition of the state and money, and the suppression of commodity production, can thus only exist as an international system. While proletarian revolutions are victorious only in one or several countries, and international imperialism is far from defeated, the abolition of the state is impossible – 'armed bodies of men' are most definitely still needed. Moreover, the suppression of commodity production requires the progressive abolition of scarcity, since scarcity necessarily implies the continuation of money, the commodity form, wage labour and the market. But the abolition of scarcity, especially in poor and backwards countries which have seen the victory of proletarian revolutions (Cuba, China, Vietnam) is inconceivable without a gradual overcoming of the international division of labour. Without the defeat of imperialism in the advanced Western economies, socialism in more backward countries is a utopian pipe-dream.



The Maoist and Stalinist myths of 'national self-reliance' and socialism in one country are not just incorrect because they abandon a perspective of international revolution, but vitally because they are based on the illusion that the resources of a single country can overcome the problems of industrialisation and scarcity. Lenin and Trotsky conceived of the Bolshevik revolution as the first step in the European revolution, not as the opening of the building of socialism in Russia alone: the victory of revolution in advanced Europe, and especially in Germany, would alone open up the possibility of socialism in Russia. The victory of no proletarian revolution is 'final' or 'secure' until the whole imperialist system is overthrown; it would be absolutely illusory to imagine that imperialism has reconciled itself to the permanent 'loss' of huge areas of what were previously part of the world permanent 'loss' of huge areas of what were previously part of the world capitalist market. None of this implies that it is impossible to *begin* the process of constructing socialism in one, or several countries, but only the liberation of the productive forces on a world scale, only world planning, can begin to defeat scarcity. Socialism is, therefore, by definition a world system. Socialist revolution is an international revolution. The struggle for socialism takes place between two huge classes on an international scale — the world bourgeoisie and the world working class.

These general propositions, the international nature of socialism and the socialist revolution, are readily agreed to by most revolutionary socialists in Britain. But they are frequently qualified with the proposition that although the socialist revolution is an international revolution, the form it takes is that of national class struggles, in national boundaries, between fundamentally national classes. Thus the nation state is the fundamental terrain of the class struggle, requiring national revolutionary organisations built within one country.

There is an important grain of truth in these arguments, but they are partial and incomplete because they see only one side of the question. Although the world class struggle is indeed structured into 'national' segments, nevertheless there is no such thing as a 'purely national' class struggle. In any particular country, neither the stakes or the consequences of the struggle are purely national, nor are the social and political forces involved. They are all, at least in part, a function of the international situation and the strength and organisation of social forces on a world scale. In practice, this means that the imperialist bourgeoisie although structured into national units, increasingly 'internationalises' its waging of the class struggle. For example, was United States imperialism prepared to meekly allow the class struggle to simply proceed along 'national' lines, in Chile and in Vietnam? Or is the struggle of the Palestinians against Zionism a purely 'national' struggle? The ruling class in every imperialist country realises that 'international' or 'foreign' events affect its vital interests just as do 'national' events. Thus international imperialism consciously organises and marshals its forces internationally in order to prevent defeats at a national level, to modify the relationship of forces in its favour in every particular nation. At a formal level this international intervention by imperialism is crystallised into a series of counter-revolutionary military alliances (NATO, CENTO, SEATO). At an informal level it consists of a whole network of co-operation between diplomatic services, security forces, government agencies of every kind, multinational companies and so forth. The consequence is that every national struggle for socialism, sooner or later and generally sooner, will come up against the whole weight of international imperialism. Even if this intervention doesn't take the form of military aggression, imperialism has many other strings to its bow. A fascinating

example is the way in which the workers onslaught in Portugal was checked. Here the workers struggle wasn't drowned in blood, but sent reeling under the anti-communist, 'democratic' counter-revolution led by the Socialist Party of Mario Soares. But this wasn't a purely 'national' event. Soares was supported financially, politically and diplomatically by the whole of Western European social democracy — from Mitterand and Rocard in France, to Schmidt in Germany and Callaghan in Britain. And this intervention was sanctioned by all the leading imperialist powers, without exception.

Once again, the example of Vietnam is even more revealing. The struggle fought out there could hardly have been more 'international'. Not only were the combatants on the imperialist side international, but the struggle was won, not only by the heroism of the Vietnamese peasants and workers but also by the material aid from the workers states (however paltry) but by the intervention of tens of thousands of militants the world over to isolate US imperialism politically.

The international consequences of national struggles have to be consciously prepared for. Every victorious revolution has eventually had to face the armed might of imperialism — the counter-revolutionary invasion of Russia by numerous powers, the attempted invasions of Cuba by American-backed exiles, the struggle between the US and China in Korea. It would be foolish to believe that these things will not happen again. Only international intervention can ensure the isolation and defeat of such counter-revolutionary attempts.

As we have seen, the results of every 'national struggle' affect the relationship of forces and the vital interests of the contending classes everywhere. It is quite bizarre to consider any particular struggle the 'property' of the working class in that country. All the European bourgeoisies have been concerned about the revolutionary dynamic which could have been unleashed by the Portuguese struggle or a victory of the Union of the Left in France. That's why they combined to defeat these developments. But since each struggle affects the vital interests of the working class everywhere, revolutionaries cannot be content to passively 'support' other struggles, without a critical opinion of their development, the steps which should be taken, the political tasks involved. For revolutionaries it's a question of using every resource, every scrap of political weight internationally to modify the results on a national basis. International organisation is inseparable from this task.

How to build a revolutionary international?

In face of the developments in international capitalism outlined above, including the internationalisation of its counter-revolutionary and repressive functions, the international co-ordination of workers struggles and the intervention of the vanguard is an urgent task. Such co-ordination cannot be improvised on a piece-meal basis. The crying need is for a mass revolutionary international, with sections deeply implanted in the working class. Starting with the existing revolutionary forces, how can we begin this task? For some comrades the answer is 'link up workers struggles, discuss, but above all wait'. This is how Duncan Hallas puts it:

"There cannot be purely national socialist organisation. It is one of the merits of the various Trotskyist organisations to have emphasised this fundamental truth. Yet the conclusion is often drawn from it: 'one must start with the International' is another example of the distorting influence of the over concentration on 'leadership'..... To develop a real current on internationalism — and without such a current all talk of an International is self-deception — it is necessary to start by linking the struggles of workers in one country with those of others. This means starting where workers actually exist, namely in the various countries. It means putting aside grandiose ideas like 'International leadership', 'World Congresses' and the like in favour of humdrum tasks of propaganda and agitation in one's own country together with developing meaningful international links, which however limited at first are meaningful to workers outside the sectarian milieu.....meetings and discussions between socialist grouplets in various countries are essential....."(1)

Let us note straight away that this approach abandons all attempts to build an international political tendency in favour of 'humdrum tasks' and 'meetings and discussions'. In this respect, such an argument abandons the revolutionary left in each particular country to its own spontaneous development, a ridiculous approach which we discuss below. Further, in 1978 the notion that there does not exist 'a real current of internationalism' in the workers movement in many countries is decidedly antiquated. But the real objection to Hallas' approach is its abandonment of the possibility of the Marxist vanguard in each country co-ordinating its activity and developing a common analysis of the world situation and political tasks. These possibilities exist even when revolutionary groups are very small; but they cannot be realised without a common framework for discussion, a permanent organisational structure and at least a limited division of labour, and a commonly-accepted way of making decisions and agreeing on political analysis.

If some comrades find the names actually given to these essential mechanisms (International leadership, world congress, international executive committee etc) 'grandiose' then that is a very secondary objection which can easily be dealt with. The real problem is whether an internationally agreed analysis is possible, agreement on internationally co-ordinated intervention is possible or whether these things are merely 'fictions' and 'self-deception'. For example, was it 'self-deception' when the Fourth International orientated its sections at the 1965 world congress to building mass campaigns on Vietnam? Or did it find some concrete result in the central role of the SWP in the US anti-war movement, the central role of the IMG in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign or the central role of the JCR in building the Comité Vietnam in France? Was it 'a fiction' when the French and Swiss sections set about jointly linking up the struggle of French and Swiss workers during the strike at the Lip watch factory — a decision which led to some concrete, not just verbal, linking up of workers struggles internationally in the form of joint demonstrations attended by workers in watch factories in both France and Switzerland. Or again, was it simply a fiction when the whole weight of the Fourth International was used to win over a substantial section of the Basque nationalist movement to Trotskyism. Without the intervention of the International, and especially the influence of the French section on the ETA-6 comrades, Trotskyism would be in an incomparably weaker state than it is today in Spain. Is it pure fiction that Trotskyist organisations have been built in several East European countries, under repression and in the most difficult circumstances, an accomplishment which would have been literally impossible without the permanent work of militants from many countries in Western Europe? We could add

endlessly to this list of examples. They all testify, against the international passivity of Hallas, to the possibility of meaningful international work by revolutionaries. Such things are not possible, however, if contact between the marxist vanguard is limited to "meetings and discussions between grouplets in various countries". Permanent joint action requires an agreed programme and a joint organisational framework; if everything has to be discussed from scratch in "meetings and discussions", then nothing practically gets done. The many conferences held by the French organisation "Lutte Ouvriere", several times attended by British IS(SWP), demonstrate that conferences without programmatic agreement or organisational framework modify nothing. For comrade Hallas, as for all of us, existence determines consciousness. His polemic represents the rationalisation of a nationally-based group, albeit a large one, which finds itself at sea on the international terrain.

The emergence of mass parties and the existing revolutionary left

Mass revolutionary parties do not suddenly emerge full blown. They have to be consciously and systematically built. In many countries of course there exist organisations which claim to be dedicated to this objective. However, revolutionary marxists cannot be content to leave things at that. The groups which claim to be dedicated to building revolutionary parties are extremely diverse in ideology and organisational methods. In some countries they hardly exist. It is impossible to rest content with the existing movement without having an opinion about the respective roles and merits of the different organisations. Some of the Maoist organisations, for example, practice an extreme ultra-left and sectarian ultimatism: others support alliances with their own bourgeoisie. Other groups — like the II Manifesto current in Italy — tail along behind their respective Communist parties as 'critical' but ultimately *subordinate*, oppositions. Such forces are not simply and without qualification the core of future revolutionary parties; often, as in the case of the sectarian Maoist formations, they are an obstacle to the emergence of such parties, discrediting revolutionary politics in the eyes of many workers. This contradictory state of the international revolutionary left has been nicely stated in the following way:

"we are faced, for a number of years, with a situation in which formations that are not fully Marxist dominate the revolutionary left in most countries where the struggle is most developed (e.g. the Maoist and semi-Maoist formations dominate in Argentina, Chile compete with the Maoists in Portugal)".

(SWP Central Committee document on international work Sept. '76).

We can argue a bit with the geography and generalisation of this statement, but the sentiment which it expresses is fully justified. It would have been more relevant to point to the situation in Italy and West Germany. The origins of this problem are not hard to find. The near-destruction of the revolutionary marxist tradition by Stalinism has led to a situation where the re-building of revolutionary organisations and the re-appropriation of revolutionary marxist politics — especially after 1969 by broad broad new forces, has taken place in a complex and contradictory fashion. New forces won towards revolutionary positions emerging in many cases from the left of existing Communist parties have not completely broken with the theoretical problematic of Stalinism. This is classically



Rossana Rossanda and Lucio Magri of PDUP

demonstrated by the case of Il Manifesto in Italy. Its core was expelled from the Italian Communist Party (PCI) at the end of the 1960s for 'leftism'. But its leading group, around Rossanda and Magri, never fully broke from Stalinist positions (for example on internal party organisation and 'national independence'), combining neo-Stalinist positions with revolutionary marxist criticisms of the PCI in an eclectic mish-mash. Failing to develop an homogenous politics or cadre, the organisation has been through numerous internal crises, and has ended up going back on one of its central concerns — the key role of workers councils in the seizure of power. Now it sees its central role as left pressure on the PCI, in Rossanda's words "making the 3½ million legs of the PCI march to the tune of Il Manifesto". The logic of such a position is not difficult to unravel — and the PCI's new overtures to Magri and Rossanda are not difficult to work out either; the PCI is preparing for some new members on its left. Crucial in this whole development has been the absence of a firmly-rooted revolutionary marxist organisation capable of intervening to win these centrist forces to fully revolutionary marxist positions. Il Manifesto's experience has been **repeated** in slightly different ways by the other two major organisations of the Italian far left. This represents a major tragedy for the European revolutionary movement as a whole. These huge organisations, numbering nearly 50,000 militants at one time, each with daily papers are being frittered away because of their inability to answer central questions of orientation which are ABC to marxists.

No modification in the state of the existing revolutionary left internationally without a co-ordinated struggle by revolutionary marxists. Any national revolutionary organisation which takes its own ideas seriously, must attempt an international intervention; and this immediately poses the question of international organisation. Any other approach simply leads to constructing alliances with the most diverse trends, a practice totally incapable of contributing anything to changing the face of the revolutionary left. Thus for example the British SWP collaborated for years with Lutte Ouvriere in France and Avanguardia Operaia in Italy, without changing anything or influencing anyone. This

failure was intimately linked to its opposition to 'artificial' and 'fictional' international organisation. An international organisation on the basis of revolutionary marxism is the decisive tool for recomposing the far left and defeating the centrist currents. An important recognition of at least part of this truth is the following interesting passage:—

"...one particular form that weariness with attempts at *political* intervention internationally takes is.... 'rank and fileism at the international level' — the belief that our job at the moment is to build rank-and-file links between workers internationally, especially within the multinationals. This is to substitute a trade unionist approach for the political intervention that alone can help build the revolutionary parties that are needed; what is more, it is a utopian project given the relationship of forces vis-a-vis the revolutionary left in all countries at the moment, e.g., our comrades in British Leyland cannot even establish viable links between Birmingham and Oxford, let alone between Birmingham and Milan".

(SWP Central Committee Document Sept. '76 — their emphasis).

This constitutes an important recognition of the political nature of international tasks. It goes without saying that we think the SWP comrades fail to fully draw out the logic of their position. We deal with this problem below.

World Revolution and the Crisis of Leadership

"Crisis of leadership" is a short-hand term easily parodied or mis-represented. In the 1950s and early '60s it was easy to point out that the prospects for socialist revolution were not just hampered by the 'betrayals' of the reformist leaderships, but more fundamentally by the decline in the general level of class consciousness and combativity of the working class, itself a product of the long imperialist boom. Critics of Trotskyism could easily point out that the term "crisis of leadership" seemed to imply that if the leadership were changed, everything would be OK. Thus Trotskyists who constantly referred to the "crisis of leadership" seemed to be (and occasionally were) guilty of having an extremely voluntaristic view of how to move forward. All the bon mots and wise-cracks about 'parachuting leaderships' and 'self-appointed vanguards' have their origin in this critique. What the critics themselves forgot is that the consciousness of the working class is at least partially a function of the politics of its leadership. Historically, the problem of established leaderships of the working class far ahead of the consciousness of the masses has not been exactly huge. But the reverse *is* true. Time and again the working class has reached out to challenge capitalism, only to be thrown back by conservative leaderships. With the general change in the level of class militancy and consciousness after 1968 the full import and meaning of the crisis of leadership has become abundantly clear. Since 1968 revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situations have developed in a number of countries — France, Bolivia, Chile, Portugal. Each time the revolutionary process has lacked nothing in terms of working class participation, enthusiasm and ingenuity, but has foundered on the betrayals of the Stalinist and Social Democratic leaders — and also in the latter two cases on the confusion and dispersal of the revolutionary left.

These defeats, partial in France and Portugal, but massive and crushing in the case of Chile, have demonstrated that it is not enough to have a massive mobilisation of the working class, or a very high level of class consciousness to ensure victory. For example,

the Chilean working class during the early 1970s displayed not only prodigious feats of practical militancy and self-organisation, but also a fantastically high level of class consciousness and political understanding, which in many ways bring to mind the Spanish working class before the revolution was betrayed and liquidated. But it was also in Chile that the defeat was most crushing and devastating. Spontaneous militancy and class consciousness are not enough to ensure victory. For that, it is both necessary to defeat the reformist tendencies in the workers movement and to give the militancy and consciousness of the working class an organised expression — in the form of a revolutionary party — capable of not only of dealing with the reformists, but also of outmanoeuvring the right, promoting the self-organisation of the masses and defining a line of march towards insurrection.



It goes without saying that in both Chile and Portugal the influence of the reformists did not go uncontested: in Chile the Unidad Popular was challenged on its left by the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left), and in Portugal the CP and SP had to contend with a multiplicity of 'revolutionary' groups. But in neither case was an *adequate* instrument for challenging the reformists established. In Chile the MIR combined opportunism with outbursts of sectarianism towards the militants at the base of the reformist parties. Miguel Enriquez, leader of the MIR, frequently suggested that the Allende government could be pressurised in completing the transition to workers power. On the other hand, the MIR's unilateral establishment of 'dual power' organisations as fiefs and front organisations for the MIR itself expressed its sectarian face towards the militants and mass support for the reformist parties. Now, we don't raise the wrong policy of the MIR to suggest, as do certain foolish sectarians, that the defeat in Chile was the primary responsibility of the MIR. It is possible — but unprovable one way or the other — that given the short period of time between the coming to power of Allende and the counter-revolutionary coup it was objectively impossible to break the masses from their reformist leaderships. In any case, the first responsibility lies with the Social Democratic and Stalinist mis-leaders themselves. But what the example of the Chilean MIR does demonstrate is that the mere existence of groups which aspire to the title 'revolutionary' is not enough even to *begin* to solve the problem of working class leadership. But we can go even further. The examples of Chile and Portugal, and in a different way of Italy, show that even the existence of a widespread 'revolutionary' consciousness inside the working

class — tens of thousands of workers who hate the bourgeois state, who believe in the arming of the working class and insurrection, even this is not enough *if that revolutionary minority is not armed with the strategy and tactics, and the organisational means, to win its policy in the heart of the workers movement.* It is entirely improbable that such 'organisational means' will be spontaneously created during a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary crisis. Revolutionary strategy cannot be improvised from first principles in the heat of battle: it requires an organisation which has assimilated the decisive lessons of the long history of workers struggles.

We can now return to the Trotskyist conception of the crisis of leadership. All the examples we have referred to — Portugal, Chile, Italy — show that against voluntarist conceptions, revolutionary parties or big organisations of the revolutionary vanguard, are indeed the product of spontaneous upsurges of the working class itself. No Trotskyist seriously believes that the creation of a revolutionary leadership is possible outside of time or circumstances. But the creation of a programmatically adequate revolutionary instrument is not the automatic or inevitable outcome of working class upsurges: that requires the *fusion* of working class upsurge and the revolutionary marxist programme. But programmes of a revolutionary character don't exist outside of their 'bearers': they have no meaning in a workers movements which lacks the militants to fight for them. We can express this by saying that the creation of a Marxist party which has assimilated the decisive elements of revolutionary strategy and tactics is extremely unlikely to occur outside of prolonged preparation, over many years, outside of the pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation itself. That preparation, the prolonged ideological and political battle for Marxism, is the fruit of permanent work.

Three currents in the world workers movement

Trotsky once remarked, in a famous passage (2) that the situation in any country was an uneven crystallisation of the elements of the world process. The Marxist conception of the 'lawfulness' of revolutionary developments, their susceptibility to analysis using the categories of Marxism, derives from the fact that if any particular revolutionary struggle is indeed unique, its uniqueness stems not from the fact that everything about it is completely different from every other struggle — as the advocates of 'national roads to socialism' believe — but from the fact that the factors it has in common are combined in an original fashion. Using this method, it is easy to see that the different organisations of the workers movement represent currents present internationally. The overwhelmingly most powerful are of course the Stalinist and Social Democratic currents. Both these currents represent definite social forces and are the products of world-historic defeats of the working class. Social democracy represents the product of the co-option of the Second International, and its historic betrayal of the international working class in 1914. Stalinism is the product of the degeneration of the Soviet state and the Bolshevik party — and with it the Third International. These currents represent respectively the social weight of the international bourgeoisie and the stalinist-bureaucracy *inside* the workers movement. Naturally, we think that the third fundamental current in the workers movement — unhappily somewhat weaker — is the revolutionary marxist current. Not all the organisations of this current are inside the Fourth International, and the precise reasons for this are discussed in the next section. The fight to recompose the workers movement, and to defeat the reformist tendencies is therefore profoundly an

international struggle. The maxim of using all possible strength available internationally to modify the results in a revolutionary direction, is precisely what justifies the need for international organisation. The results achieved by the Fourth International so far in building revolutionary marxist organisations are par excellence the results of international work. In the evolution of virtually every section of the Fourth International, and especially the stronger ones, the intervention and assistance — material and political — of the International has been decisively important. Those who oppose international organisation are guilty of 'sponteneism on the international terrain'. For revolutionaries to abandon international organisation would amount to a foolish self-denial of the possibilities of using revolutionary resources in the most efficient way.



Organisation and Cadres on an international basis

It is quite possible for a purely national organisation to develop an analysis of the development of the world situation and the tasks of revolutionaries. Indeed every national revolutionary organisation attempts to do this to a greater or lesser extent. However, there are great problems for national organisations in doing so effectively. From a Marxist point of view, the major problem for a nationally-based group is the absence of the possibility for verification of their analysis by practice: the link between theory and practice is broken. The immense advantage of an international organisation is that the experiences and views of cadres and organisations in many countries can be used to verify and enrich the analysis of the world situation. In that sense, it is really only possible for an *international* organisation to begin to approximate to a rounded view of world developments which can be tested in practice.

But the problem goes beyond this. Because we live in the era of world politics and world economy, an analysis of each 'national' situation is impossible without a firm view of its links with the international situation. Purely national organisations inevitably tend to develop one-sided views on the basis of their partial nationally-based experience. This goes beyond broad ranging analyses of the international and national situations right down to small-scale tactical conceptions.

A revolutionary programme is by definition an international programme: it is enriched by international application. The Fourth International attempts to build organisations and cadres on the basis of the experiences and practice of all its sections. By continually subjecting the practice of each section to the scrutiny and debate of cadres on a world-wide basis it is much easier to check the development of nationally-based deviations and errors. Trotsky once expressed this in the following way:

"It is possible for a national group to maintain a constant revolutionary course only if it firmly connected in one organisation with co-thinkers throughout the world and maintains a constant theoretical and political collaboration with them"
(3)

The Foundation of the Fourth International

Few militants within the ambit of the British revolutionary left doubt the value of Trotsky's opposition to Stalinism, his relentless exposure of the criminal role of the Stalinised Comintern in China and Germany and his campaign against the frame-up of the Moscow trials and the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union. But the actual foundation of the Fourth International is not so universally applauded. On this question, we are frequently met with two types of argument. First, the position of Isaac Deutscher, who together with the other Polish Left Oppositionists opposed the foundation of the FI in 1938. (In his 'Prophet Outcast' Deutscher polemicalises at length in defence of the arguments of the Poles at the founding congress, as if making a posterior 'objective' judgement. Later he modestly concedes in a footnote; 'I was the author of this argument'). Deutscher is scathing about the foundation of the FI, to which he refers as 'Trotsky's fiasco with the Fourth International'. According to Deutscher, Trotsky erred in founding a new international without support from the masses: the objective

conditions were overwhelmingly unfavourable, the founding of a new International would be an 'empty gesture'. At this point in time, of course, the argument of Deutscher and the Poles was an argument from within the camp of the International Left Opposition about how best to bring a new International into existence. Subsequently Deutscher's argument became more complex. In his postscript to Trotsky's biography (*'Victory in Defeat'*) he postulates the possibility of the victory of Trotsky's political ideas and revolutionary optimism *despite* the defeat or irrelevance of Trotskyist (in the broadest sense) organisations. He bases this hypothesis – which is tentative to be sure – on two phenomena a) de-Stalinisation in the Soviet Union and b) the emergence of 'new' revolutionary forces, such as Maoism, outside the framework of Trotskyism and Stalinism – especially in the 'third world'. Deutscher's optimism about the possibility of peaceful development and 'de-Stalinisation' in the Soviet Union now seems decidedly antiquated. Even though his argument was written in the early 60s, and Deutscher himself never lived to see such things as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, he *did* witness such events as the invasion of Hungary. Let us not forget that Deutscher could not bring himself to support the Hungarian workers uprising in 1956. Despite his tentative uncertainty about peaceful development in Russia, *in practice* he did not support moves towards political revolution. In looking for 'objective' forces that would carry out Trotsky's political project in Russia, Deutscher adapted to Stalinism. Moreover, his appreciation of Maoism and other 'new' revolutionary forces Deutscher seems decidedly uncritical. His later judgements about the Fourth International have to be viewed against the background of these political accommodations.



The argument of Duncan Hallas (*Against the Stream*, IS 53), while borrowing much from Deutscher, has an essentially different focus. According to Hallas, the foundation of the FI was promised on a definite *political perspective* — Trotsky's view that the Second World War would lead to a defeat of Stalinism and a new revolutionary upsurge. To meet this upsurge it was necessary to proclaim a new revolutionary banner, a 'spotless' and untarnished revolutionary banner which would rally millions 'within ten years'. The logic of Hallas's argument is that because the perspective was wrong (however realistic it seemed at the time), the political project represented by the FI — its perspective — was dogmatic and utopian and inevitably led to crisis and degeneration (ultimately, according to Hallas leading to 'Pabloism').

At one level Hallas's argument is merely footling and trivial. He argues (IS 53, p.37) that the proclamation of the Fourth International merely meant the re-naming of the International Left Opposition. Trotsky many times answered this trivial argument by saying, in effect (4), our opponents already refer to our international tendency as 'The Fourth International' we regard ourselves as the central ideological pre-cursor of the future Fourth International, so let's call ourselves by the right name. Provided no one actually believed that the proclamation of the Fourth International meant the establishment of the mass FI, the name was of secondary consequence.

But Hallas' argument was to have an important kernel of truth. Undoubtedly *part* of Trotsky's rationale for the foundation of the FI, was his belief in the impending revolutionary wave which would be generated by the World War. Although Trotsky got many elements of that development right, his central view of the coming defeat of Stalinism was wrong. Nevertheless, his view that the second world war would involve big upheavals, that opportunities would be opening up to more firmly establish the revolutionary movement, was absolutely right. Seen from the perspective of 1938, the notion of clearly establishing a revolutionary current, which would be more than just a submerged tendency in the workers movement, was not unreasonable. The whole chain of Hallas's reasoning depends on accepting his conclusion — that the establishment of the FI on the perspective of a mass revolutionary development paralysed the FI after the war, and led to its 'pabloite' degeneration. Since we don't accept that conclusion (see below), there seems no reason to accept its premises.

Over and against all these arguments, the view expressed on behalf of the leadership of the International Left Opposition at the founding congress by Pierre Naville are extremely convincing. Naville argued that it was necessary to put an end to the ambiguous situation that existed of numerous groups sympathetic to the 'idea' of the Fourth International, to organise a properly defined international tendency of those who were prepared to work systematically for the creation of a mass FI, with a commonly accepted programme and a properly functioning international leadership. This was the best way to prepare for the future, and establish continuity of programme and cadres. The name 'Fourth International' emphasised the central role, the necessity, of this international tendency in bringing into existence the future mass Fourth International.

We said that the perspective of a mass revolutionary upsurge was just part of Trotsky's rationale for establishing the FI. It is impossible not to be struck by the fact that Trotsky argued (unsuccessfully) for the establishment of the FI *before* he had adopted the per-

spective of the impending revolutionary upsurge. That seems to us to be decisive evidence that Trotsky had in mind the essential preparatory role of a firmly established international organisation, irrespective of this or that perspective. And when all is said and done, comrade Hallas cannot bring himself to unambiguously say that the founding of the Fourth International was wrong – merely that the perspective which he believes led to its founding had some unfortunate consequences. But if the founding of the FI had a rationale other than the perspective, the perspective wasn't devised just to greet the founding of the FI! Without the founding of the FI, it would have presented just the same problems of re-orientation for the International left opposition, except that the Trotskyist movement would have probably been in even worse an organisational state to deal with the problems.

The Political Evolution of the FI: the myth of 'Pabloism'

Even amongst those who accept the correctness of Trotsky's founding of the Fourth International, there is a very common argument, found in organisations as diverse as the British SWP and the International Spartacist tendency. This argument says that the failure (partial or complete, depending on the protagonists) of Trotsky's perspectives to develop after the Second World War – with the victory of the revolution in Yugoslavia and China under the leadership of Stalinist forces, together with the expansion of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, and the stabilisation and boom in capitalism, threw the FI into a massive crisis. The result of this crisis was the organisational fragmentation and political collapse of the FI, which reached its nadir in the development of 'Pabloism'. This disease 'pabloism' took over the Fourth International, and ever since it has been characterised by 'adaptationism', liquidation to Stalinism/Social Democracy/petty-bourgeois nationalism/studentism etc., etc., or as Michael Kidron once put it:

"...unique fugitive accent – the easy shift from urban workers to 'third world' peasants, to students as the revolutionary focus; the rapid transition from reforms to structural reforms to direct action as the current tactic; the indiscriminate loving up to the.....dissident and not so dissident bureaucracies of both Stalinism and Social Democracy". (5).

These arguments are the result of a double confusion about the discussions which took place in the Fourth International after World War II and the subsequent theories and tactics of the FI. In the first place, it is of course true that a long discussion took place about the "buffer zone" in Eastern Europe, a discussion marked by a great deal of tentativeness and confusion – but this was only to be expected. Faced with completely new and unexpected phenomena, not only in the 'buffer zone' but also in Yugoslavia and China, it was entirely predictable that a prolonged and difficult discussion should be needed to analyse these developments. As far as the prognosis of crisis in Western capitalism was concerned, this was indeed an incorrect perspective, but hardly anyone of any political tendency analysed this development correctly. What is decisive in the argumentation about the 'pabloist' course of the FI is the famous theses of the Third World Congress (the famous 'war-revolution' theses) and the assessment of the FI of the course of the colonial revolution. The sense of the theses of the Third Congress was that in a situation of increasing capitalist crisis, there was an increasing polarisation into two 'world camps'. There was a grave danger of a third world war, which would take the form of a 'war-revolution'. Under the pressure of the 'coming war' sections of the reformist

parties, in particular the Communist parties, would move to the left. In order to influence these developments it was necessary for revolutionary marxists to enter the mass parties to win these left-moving currents and rapidly build marxist parties.

It is easy to see now that this whole perspective was catastrophist. Nonetheless, it was formulated at a time when the Korean War was in full swing, when there had been a military confrontation over East Berlin (the Berlin blockade), when McCarthyism was rampant in the USA, and when many of the Communist Parties were moving sharply to the left. 'The Coming War' didn't sound so ridiculous against the backdrop of these developments. Between 1950 and 1952, the French Communist party took a violent lurch to the left, indeed many of its tactics (violent street actions which led to the deaths of many workers – seven PCF militants were killed by the police in one day in Paris) were *ultra-left*. In this kind of atmosphere, the notion of a swing to the left by sections of the CPs was not incredible.

The sleight of hand used by the 'anti-pabloites' is the argument that Pablo and the FI argued against the need to build independent revolutionary parties and believed that the existing Stalinist parties could substitute 'under the pressure of the masses'. This argument is a violation of both the spirit and the letter of Pablo's argument. 'Entrism sui generis', an entry to influence the leftward-moving currents was specifically and explicitly aimed at building such parties. Let the much-maligned comrade Pablo speak for himself:

"We are entering....banking on the great possibility which exists of seeing these parties, placed under new conditions, develop centrist tendencies which will lead a whole stage of radicalisation of the masses and of the objective revolutionary processes in their respective countries. We wish in reality from the inside of these tendencies to amplify and accelerate their left-centrist ripening and contest even with the centrist leaders for the entire leadership of these tendencies.....Does this mean that the reformist parties will become revolutionary parties and that we are entering not to destroy but to strengthen them? No, the reformist parties such as they are will never be transformed into revolutionary parties, but under exceptional pressure of the masses they can be transformed into centrist parties either in their entirety or in part.....We are not entering with the illusion of transforming them into revolutionary parties but to help in the development of their centrist tendencies and to give it leadership". (6).

This perspective was outlined against a whole conception of the development of revolutionary crisis throwing the grip of the Soviet bureaucracy on all the Stalinist parties into crisis. Pablo reasoned that it was idealist to imagine that under the pressure of working class upsurge the Communist Parties would remain simply and unconditionally expressions of the will of the Soviet bureaucracy. This notion of a *crisis of Stalinism* was exactly in line with Trotsky's view that revolutionary upsurge would create immense difficulties for international Stalinism and eventually destroy it. In the event, although the war-revolution thesis turned out to be incorrect, its organisational consequence, entrism, proved to be entirely justified. During the 1950s and early '60s the major differentiations within the workers movement took the form of centrist and social-democratic currents within the mass parties. Entrism was only significantly applied by the FI in two Communist Parties – the French and Italian: many more sections

orientated towards the social democratic parties without any illusion that they could become centrist or revolutionary parties. The perspective of building independent revolutionary parties was *never given up*. Even during the period of the 'war-revolution' perspective, Pablo's view was that:

"...the task of revolutionary marxists is to work in the interior of these movements to finally accelerate the maturing of the real left tendencies from which will come the essential forces of the revolutionary parties of tomorrow". (7).

The second element of the political development of the FI which is pointed to by the myth-makers of 'anti-pabloism' was its conception of the development of the colonial revolution. These myths go under the headings of 'capitulation to petty-bourgeois nationalism' and 'abandonment of the central role of the working class'. In reality the International was concerned to show, that with the temporary stabilisation of Western capitalism, the colonial and semi-colonial countries had become the focus of revolutionary developments in the world. This hardly involved 'abandonment of the central role of the working class', if the central role of the working class is conceived as being the ultimately decisive question in the world revolution. It isn't necessary to be a genius to work out that in a period of temporary capitalist stabilisation, economic strikes amongst western workers don't quite have the same meaning as the seizure of power in China, the revolutionary struggle in Indochina, the defeat of imperialism in Cuba, the long war of liberation in Algeria and so forth. Whatever the precise analysis of the outcome of these struggles, the profoundly revolutionary potential which they contained should have been obvious to all. The sleight-of-hand of the anti-pabloite myth-makers in this case is the identification of the perspective of the FI with the positions of the various 'third-worldists' of the Lin Piao/Baran-Sweezy variety who theorised this whole development into the view that revolution would *first* conquer all the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the 'countryside' would surround the 'cities' on an international scale. This type of outlook has always been combatted by the Fourth International.

The key theoretical failing of the 'anti-pabloite' critics of the Fourth International has always been a sectarian incomprehension of the new forms of development of the world revolutionary process. Jealously guarding the programmatic acquisitions of Trotskyism — and in particular the revolutionary role of the working class and its political independence — the anti-pabloites have failed to understand the unevenness of revolutionary developments and their original combinations. Thus all the things that the FI has got decisively *right* — the crisis of Stalinism (which is still working itself out in the form of 'Euro-communism' and the contradictions between the soviet bureaucracy and the national stalinist parties), the upsurge of the colonial revolution, the conjunctural role of the student movement in the late '60s, were in general misunderstood. Kidron's notion of the "unique fugitive accent" of the Fourth International is at bottom a vulgar psychological argument: in this view the FI is characterised by 'the urge to capitulate', but in an indiscriminate fashion (hence 'third world peasants', students, social democracy, stalinism all fit the bill). Much more coherent, but equally incorrect, is the version by which the FI's "pabloism" is typically a capitulation to *stalinism*. The error in this version is its mythical-demonic view of the Communist parties of the world as an 'expressive totality': all equally stalinised, all equally representing the interests of the stalinist bureaucratic caste, all with the same relationship to the masses, all equally

monolithic. An incomprehension of the crisis of stalinism automatically follows: what also follows is a total absence of any tactical appreciation of how to intervene in stalinism's crisis. Seen in this light, the response of the Fourth International to the complex developments in the European Communist parties, virtually the only organisation of the far left able to intervene in the debates around 'Eurocommunism' and to appreciate the inevitable emergence of centrist currents within this development, is a direct and logical continuation of the elaboration begun in the early 1950s.

There is a final irony to all the accusations of 'pabloism', namely that after 25 years of 'liquidation' and 'capitulation to stalinism', the Fourth International by some curious quirk has not actually succeeded in liquidating itself into anything, but in actually considerably building its organisations. Doubtless this is a clever plot to prepare some more spectacular liquidation at a future stage!

The Programmatic Basis of the Fourth International and the international marxist vanguard.

Revolutionary organisations are based on programmatic agreement, not on total agreement of a theoretical character. Of course, theoretical disagreements can ultimately lead to programmatic differences, but only in the last analysis. This was the sense of Trotsky's position on the differences in the American SWP over the class nature of Russia. Trotsky asked: what does this or that analysis change in our programme, in the practical tasks which we advocate? The long period of isolation of the Trotskyist movement after the second world war gave rise to numerous splits which had no justifiable programmatic basis: in small and isolated organisations it was all too easy to split over every and any difference. Today, the task which faces us is to overcome the remaining significant results of that fragmentation. Total agreement over history (especially over the history of the Trotskyist movement itself), and total theoretical agreement are impossible to achieve. Indeed, not only is it impossible, but total theoretical agreement would imply the building of monolithic organisations, not organisations open to all who accept the revolutionary marxist programme, irrespective of tactical or secondary differences. That is why the Fourth International is today embarked on a project of attempting to regroup all those who adhere to the basics of the marxist programme into a single international organisation. Within that process, of course, the militants of the Fourth International will fight for their own political and theoretical positions.

The basics of the revolutionary marxist programme are very simple. First, it involves as far as the advanced capitalist countries are concerned, an insistence on the central role of the working class and its political independence, the revolutionary character of the transition to socialism, and the goal of soviets as the means and embodiment of workers power. Within that, it involves the commitment to work in the mass organisations and consequently the united front. Even this very simple definition immediately draws a line between revolutionaries and the 'Euro-centrist' currents and tendencies of the Poulantzas/Miliband/II Manifesto variety who want to combine parliament and soviets, who believe in a strategy of 'pressurising' left governments. It also draws a line against currents of the 'Militant' variety, who with their theory of an 'enabling act' put the revolutionary character of the transition into question.

As far as the so-called 'Communist' countries are concerned, the basis of the Marxist programme is the fight for socialist democracy, the revolutionary overthrow of the existing state apparatuses and the establishment of workers councils. The question of the class nature of these regimes is *not* the decisive question. Already there exist within the framework of the FI both 'state capitalist' and 'bureaucratic collectivist' minorities. The fundamental line of divide here is against all the Deutscherite and apologetic tendencies who postulate the possibility of the 'self-reform' of the bureaucracies.

In the colonial and semi-colonial countries the decisive programmatic question is the fight for the alliance between the working class and the poor peasants under the political leadership of the working class. The line of divide which remains fundamental is against those who advocate a 'stages' strategy, of alliances with the 'national bourgeoisie'.

Of course what we have outlined here are just the basics of the revolutionary marxist programme. But even these few points serve immediately to differentiate those who are fundamentally in the revolutionary camp and those who are not. For example, virtually every major European centrist organisation (e.g. the major Italian organisations and the French PSU) are excluded by these criteria. In concrete cases there can be numerous secondary programmatic or other obstacles to the unification of the organisations who accept these basic programmatic planks. Ultimately, the actual policy of an organisation in practice is the decisive criterion. What is important is the recognition of the necessity to work towards the unification of all the revolutionary forces, nationally and internationally. This approach involves an acceptance by the Fourth International that there remain important *revolutionary* forces outside its own ranks, and that this disunity serves only to weaken the revolutionary marxist vanguard against the reformists and centrists of all kinds. The preconditions for beginning the process of unification of the revolutionary forces include an acceptance of the need for workers democracy, including the right to tendencies and factions inside the revolutionary organisations and the acceptance of the need for joint work amongst revolutionaries as the precondition for the verification of the possibility of unity.

The Reality of the Fourth International Today

A standard ploy amongst opponents of the Fourth International for many years was the 'which Fourth International are you talking about' argument. This was based on the existence of several groupings claiming to be the 'Fourth International'. After the re-unification of the two major components of world Trotskyism in 1963, basically three groupings claimed the title Fourth International — Posadas' grouping in Latin America, the Healy-Lambert 'International Committee' and USFI. Today, no one seriously disputes that the USFI *is* the Fourth International. Die-hards like Duncan Hallas may refer to the IMG as 'the British section of the largest grouping claiming to be the Fourth International', but his intransigence is not shared by those who edit the British SWP's international bulletin. Both the Posadas and Healy-Lambert groupings have decayed and split into very little (although Lambert's organisation still has significance in France). But today the overwhelming majority of those claiming allegiance to Trotskyism support the USFI. What role does the Fourth International play today?

The only internationally organised revolutionary current

After the upheavals of the late 1960s, the 'revolutionary' left was split into a number of competing tendencies. Three of these tendencies had significance on an international scale – the Trotskyist, Maoist and pro-Cuban (the 'OLAAS current'). Today both the Maoist and pro-Cuban currents have gone into an acute crisis. As far as the pro-Chinese currents are concerned, they were always hampered by the refusal of the Chinese to organise internationally. This refusal was justified by the Chinese by the theory of 'national self-reliance' – a souped-up version of 'socialism in one country' and 'National roads to socialism'. More fundamentally, these currents are experiencing a crisis in part because of the more or less openly counter-revolutionary nature of Chinese foreign policy, but also because of the contrast between the hopes aroused by the 'cultural revolution' and the transparently undemocratic practices of the Chinese party and state apparatus. Hardest hit, naturally, have been the orthodox Stalino-Maoist organisations. Other organisations with a Maoist inspiration, but with enough theoretical flexibility to be able to swivel their Maoist themes – organisations like the KB in West Germany and the three large Italian far left organisations – have been able to weather the storm more easily. But they have been able to do this only at the price of progressively distancing themselves from the positions of the Chinese leadership. For example, even *Il Manifesto* in Italy, slavish worshippers of Mao, have been forced to admit the possibility that the Chinese bureaucracy employs political repression against its opponents. In Scandinavia, the decline of the Maoist organisations has been dramatic, and this example demonstrates the importance of revolutionary marxist organisations being able to give the Maoists crisis a helping hand.

In 1966 the Cuban leadership established the Organisation of Latin American Solidarity to co-ordinate the revolutionary struggles on a continental basis. This 'OLAS current', which never had real organisational structure, is today as good as dead. Two factors combined to kill it; the manifest bankruptcy of the tactical prescriptions of the Cubans, and the sharp right-wing shift of the Cuban leadership. Numerous defeats have shattered the illusions of a decade ago. Starting with the defeat of Guevara's group in Bolivia, one by one the guerilla groups have been defeated, even when they turned to urban guerilla warfare. The Cuban leadership itself, instead of assessing these defeats and precisng a revolutionary strategy, has progressively accommodated itself to the Soviet bureaucracy and re-built its bridges to the 'orthodox' pro-Moscow Communist parties in Latin America. Thus Castro's essential role in relation to the Chilean events was to sanction the Popular Unity project, with only the mildest and most tentative critical noises. Of course the evolution of the Cuban leadership springs out of the failure to extend the revolution in Latin America. The reflux of revolutionary advance was always bound to have an ideological reflection in a leadership that was never fully Marxist. In any event, in terms of precisng a strategy on even a continental basis, the Cuban leadership hardly provided anything more concrete than the demand for guerilla warfare. It never aspired to any type of global political intervention.

The decline of the Maoist and pro-Cuban has considerably modified the position of the Fourth International: Trotskyism today is the only organised revolutionary tendency on an international scale. If it is possible to say today that the Fourth International has activities and cadres in 60 countries, way beyond the strength of the Fourth International

at its founding, it is also possible to say something more significant, namely that for the first time the most important Trotskyist organisations have developed a long way beyond being small propaganda groups. The largest and most influential sections of the Fourth International — as in France and Spain — are nationally known organisations, which more and more take on the aspect of being 'small parties' rather than tiny vanguard groups. While the main strength of the Fourth International since 1968 has tended to be predominantly European, this situation is being modified by the re-composition of the Latin American vanguard, with the beginnings of powerful Trotskyist organisations in particular in Mexico and Columbia. In North America the Trotskyist organisations are quasi-hegemonic on the far left; the upsurge of labour militancy, for example in the American steel and mining industries, has created the basis for an important turn towards proletarianising these organisations. In all the countries where the forces of Trotskyism have been split (for example Canada, Portugal, Australia, etc) the supporters of the Fourth International have already, or are in the process, of regrouping into a single organisation. This is a reflection of the fact that although the Fourth International has since 1969 been through a prolonged internal debate, including the formation of two international tendencies, the political differences have been overcome without recourse to splitting the international or by expulsions. Without making the slightest concession to bluff or triumphalism, the reality of the Fourth International today is that while it is a long way off creating mass revolutionary parties, its organisations have never been stronger or more implanted in mass movements and the working class. It is the only force which can be seriously said to be building a 'world party of socialist revolution'.

NOTES

- (1) *Duncan Hallas: 'Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Policy' in Party + Class, Pluto Press, 1969.*
- (2) *Preface to the German edition of Permanent Revolution.*
- (3) *'On the Unification of the British Section' in Documents of the Fourth International.*
- (4) *'For the Fourth International? No! The Fourth International!' in International vol. 1 no. 4*
- (5) *M. Kidoon: Maginot Marxism in International Socialism April/May 1969.*
- (6) *M. Pablo: 'Entrism of a Special Tyre'*
- (7) *M. Pablo: 'The Coming War'*

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BIG FLAME ON TROTSKYISM

Recently there has been much practical co-operation between the militants of Big Flame and the IMG, especially in the Socialist Unity election campaigns. All the more reason then, because of the respect we have acquired for these comrades, to start to seriously answer their critique of Trotskyism, presented in the pamphlet by Paul Thompson and Guy Lewis (1). In the framework of this article we can only begin the task; Big Flame's text is extremely lengthy and we don't intend here to answer it point by point. Hopefully, however, this short piece will serve to prompt a rejoinder from Big Flame and a continuation of the discussion.

The 'methodological errors' of Trotskyism

Big Flame start with the accusation, repeated from the Mao-Stalinist Mavrakis that Trotskyism is hampered by certain methodological errors — 'principled dogmatism' which doesn't allow new experiences to be reflected at the level of the development of theory, and inability to analyse a conjuncture in its specificity, an inability to differentiate between different 'levels' of the contradictions between classes and social forces. This 'static and unchanging concern to impose abstract principles on almost any situation' has been a key weakness of Trotskyism. This accusation is coupled an attack on a passage by John Robens to the effect that new experiences in the class struggle must be re-integrated within the theoretical framework of Trotskyism:

"We think that Trotskyism has much to learn from the Chinese, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions just as it had from the unsuccessful revolutions of Spain 1936, France 1968, Bolivia 1971 etc. The point is however that it is total theory that defines the parts..... the contributions of Guevara and others are of great value if re-defined in terms of Trotskyism". (2)

This passage by Robens confirms the views of Thompson and Lewis on the desire of Trotskyists to subordinate everything to certain abstract and timeless dogmas. In truth, these accusations against Trotskyism are not new, but have been repeated many times. As we stated above, Trotskyism starts from a conception of world economics and world politics. It doesn't seek to impose 'abstract principles' on the analysis of new situations, but to analyse each concrete conjuncture with the aid of certain abstractions, i.e., certain theoretical concepts worked up from the history of the international class struggle. It seeks to locate concrete events within an overall conception of the development of the international class struggle. Two points should be made here. First, this method of approach is absolutely in conformity with the Marxist method in general — it is impossible to analyse *anything* without the use of certain abstractions. But secondly, it is an absolute mis-reading of the history of Trotskyism to repeat, as cdes Thompson and Lewis do, the absurdities of Regis Debray, who alleges that the conceptions of Trotskyism are unchanging. New syntheses and abstractions are constantly worked up from the intervention of the Trotskyist movement, which we hope enable us to understand new phenomena *both* in terms of their specificity *and* their continuity. To give a concrete example: the 'abstraction' — 'Stalinism'. If it were really the case that the Trotskyist movement had a dogmatic and abstract conception of all those movements and parties which have their origin in the Stalinised Comintern, then surely we should

expect the Fourth International to merely repeat that Stalinism is Stalinism, it has certain timeless features etc., etc. But when we come to actually look at the analyses made by the Trotskyist movement of developments amongst those parties, then we see an over-riding concern to analyse these phenomena in their specificity. The Sino-Soviet dispute, the role of the Vietnamese communist party, the development of 'Euro-Communism' have all been met by the Trotskyist movement with an attempt to define the 'laws of motion' of these developments which give us an inkling of their 'specificity'. To put it another way, what would be the situation if every new development, every new 'conjuncture' was totally original, totally specific, totally new? It would mean that the whole corpus of Marxist theory was totally useless. Completely new theoretical tools would have to be developed for each new situation. The methodological key to this problem is the famous proposition of Marx's that 'the concrete is concrete because it is the unity of many abstractions'. To oppose 'conjunctures in their specificity' to 'abstract principles' is to collapse Marxist epistemology into the empiricist opposition between the 'general' and the 'particular'; and in that case the particular can conform to the general in any way you like. In other words, Marxist theory gets ditched, rather than developed, in face of the new or the unexpected. In this respect, the attempt of the Big Flame comrades to oppose 'maintaining doctrinal purity' to 'flexibility in adapting to new conditions' is particularly unconvincing. Flexibility to adapting to new conditions, without this flexibility being guided by a concrete understanding of the meaning and dynamic of these new conditions (which can only be developed from certain abstractions) has an unfortunate history in the marxist movement.

It is generally referred to by such names as 'opportunism' or 'tail-ending'. It leads to the 'undogmatic' POUM joining the Spanish Popular Front, the undogmatic PSU defending French 'national independence' and so on. In their introduction, the Big Flame comrades take issue with Robens' assertion that Marxist theory can "...give an analysis of the inner mechanism of entire processes — from the causes of the Cuban, Chinese and Bolivian revolutions to the internal crisis of the workers states, to the revolutionary events of May '68". They argue that: "Unfortunately, no single analysis is possible, precisely because there is no 'inner mechanism' that motivates such widely differing processes". (3) If what the comrades are arguing is that the 'inner mechanism' of each of these processes is not identical, then of course they are right. But at a more fundamental level, each of these struggles is a constituent part of the world class struggle, between the *world* proletariat and the *world* bourgeoisie, which has an independent existence, and its own laws of motion. If the comrades deny this basic Leninist notion, then for them internationalism cannot be based on the international consequences of national struggles — in other words is not *essential* — but merely on moral solidarity.

Finally, the comrades don't develop the allegation of Trotskyism's 'inability to distinguish between various levels of contradictions between classes and social forces (economic, legal-political, ideological etc)', but this seems like a rather obvious reference to Trotskyist analyses of Russia — where this 'inability' is alleged by the followers of the Bettelheim school of 'state capitalism'. Without answering this allegation in detail, we would assert that the Trotskyist analysis of the Soviet Union is precisely an example of the *ability* to distinguish these levels, in their unity and contradiction. A simple 'determinist' analysis of Russia would hardly come up with so rich, complex and contradictory a formulation as the Trotskyist conception of Russia as a transitional society. The Bettelheim/Poulantzas school, from which Mavrikis and Big Flame have

borrowed in making this criticism is characterised precisely by its scholastic de-structuring of the concept of the 'social relations of production' as the determining level of social reality — which is after all the basis of Marxism. Once you allow, as does Bettelheim, for 'ideological' and 'political' relations of production, then of course you have a theory of 'levels', but unfortunately a theory which abandons socio-economic determinism, and thereby Marxism.

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The institutional power of revolutions

In their review of Trotsky's role as a leader of the early Soviet state, the comrades note that Trotsky was slow and reluctant to draw the conclusion of the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution, unlike the Workers Opposition and others. There is a certain amount of truth in these criticisms, notwithstanding the evident difficulty at the time of comprehending what were very novel phenomena. But this criticism from Big Flame jars a little when it is put in the same pamphlet which criticises Trotskyism for its ultra-left impatience and distrust of the 'institutionalised power of revolutions' — in other words the existing state apparatuses in China, Cuba and such countries as Angola. Decidedly, the comrades of Big Flame don't have the same excuses and objective difficulties that Trotsky had in analysing Russia. When the comrades deal with China, their apologetic tone reaches the level of naivete. First, they repeat the Maoist dogma that the continuing upheavals in China are a continuation of 'class struggle', and quote Mao approvingly in saying that: "there are still remnants of the overthrown landlord and comprador class, there is still a bourgeoisie and the re-moulding of the petty-bourgeoisie has only just started. The class struggle is by no means over...." In saying this Mao was being very modest. This statement comes from 1966, the opening of the Cultural Revolution (the 'Bombard the Headquarters' phase) and was obviously part of his 'theoretical' justification for unleashing the Red Guards against his factional opponents. It is part and parcel of the justification for calling his opponents 'class enemies' (top party people in authority taking the capitalist road). Doubtless, there are still remnants of the former bourgeois and petty bourgeois in existence. But no one in 1966 could possibly believe that they had not been utterly defeated and isolated. There is still 'class struggle' in the sense of a struggle of the working class to establish its direct political power, but not in Mao's sense of a struggle to defeat the bourgeoisie. From this point of view, we can't at all accept the Big Flame view that the outcome of the struggle against the bourgeoisie is not definitely decided. What is missing from Big Flame's account of China is the concept of *bureaucracy*. And it is very easy to see why. Since Big Flame criticise the Trotskyist conception of bureaucracy as 'a mechanical separation of base and superstructure', for them to concede the existence of a bureaucratic caste dominating the party and state apparatus would have an important consequence in terms of the 'base' — i.e. it would be to concede that the revolution has been defeated, proletarian power does not exist, and ('bureaucratic') state collectivism exists as in Russia. Thus while noting the failure to institutionalise organisations of mass democracy, the comrades make a half-hearted attempt to justify the possibility that there is mass participation in planning 'from below', despite its evident absence from central policy decisions. In our opinion, the defeat of the radical tendencies in the Cultural revolution, signified by the establishment in 1967 of the 'three in one committees' under the domination of the army (PLA) signified the destruction of mass participation in decision-making. When the comrades say:

'Workers are involved in planning and decision making through 'workers management teams'. However, real power appears to rest with the 'Revolutionary Committees' which are clearly party-led". (4).

they seem close to admitting that China is bureaucratized from top to bottom. No wonder they take refuge in the notion that class struggle will determine whether the building of socialism continues. We say to the comrades of Big Flame: you are faced with



a choice. Either you go on covering up for China as 'a challenge to the mechanical and fatalistic concepts of Trotskyism' (in which case you will be forced either to deny reality or abandon your own ideas on workers democracy), or you will be forced to take the unpalatable step of characterising China as bureaucratic collectivist. The only way out of the dilemma is to accept the Trotskyist conception of bureaucracy. Naturally, this will involve abandoning your 'mechanical and fatalistic' idea that a 'transitional society' between capitalism and socialism is impossible. Finally, doesn't it seem a little bit odd to criticise Trotskyism for its inability to grasp the contradictions between different 'levels', and at the same time assert that the Trotskyist conception of a bureaucratic caste on the basis of collectivised, non-capitalist relations of production, is 'a mechanical separation of the base and superstructure'?

Incidentally, when we come to look at Angola or Mozambique, it really is not good enough merely to view these governments as 'the institutionalisation of revolutionary power'. In the first place the utterly undemocratic nature of these regimes doesn't need to be demonstrated. Secondly, the class character of these regimes needs to be analysed. There are numerous regimes on the face of the earth that describe themselves as 'socialist' and even 'revolutionary'. If you abandon the 'social relations of production' as the decisive criterion for determining the class nature of a particular society, then theoretical chaos ensues. Petty-bourgeois nationalist regimes get dressed up as the institutionalisation of revolutionary power, whereas workers states run the risk of falling into the category of bureaucratic collectivism.

Permanent Revolution and the Transition to Socialism

In dealing with the historical experience of Russia, Big Flame criticise *both* the conceptions of 'permanent revolution' advocated by Trotsky and Stalinism's 'socialism in one country'. Socialism in one country is criticised because of its abandonment of an internationalist perspective, but 'permanent revolution' is criticised for not providing any concrete answers to the problems of building socialism in a society where the revolution has been victorious — in this case Russia:

"Trotsky fought a lonely battle against Stalinism but his struggle was too often impaired by the abstractness of his ideas. The theory of permanent revolution offered little in the way of concrete ideas to resolve the predicament. In 1926 Trotsky wrote: "It is clear to us that the victory of the proletarian revolution is impossible without the world revolution". What hope then for Russia? Not surprisingly, Trotsky was ousted from power and Stalin was able to characterise Trotsky's theory as "permanent hopelessness". (5).

Here, and in the development of their argument, the comrades are beginning to repeat the essence of Stalinist criticisms of Trotsky, despite their criticism of 'socialism in one country'. This is not because the comrades are themselves Stalinists, far from it, but because they have accepted certain wrong theoretical positions of Stalinism, in particular the Stalinist definitions of socialism and communism. In the first place, it's obviously not the case that Trotsky *merely* advocated 'world revolution' as the solution to all Russia's problems. On the contrary, it was precisely Trotsky and the Left Opposition which took up the need to begin the process of industrialisation, in 1923. Trotsky saw this as part of the process of strengthening the social weight of the working class, and weakening the power of the kulaks who had grown strong during the period of NEP. In 'The New Course' he combined the call for a beginning of industrialisation with the idea of gradually beginning the collectivisation of the peasantry. These proposals were not at all counterposed to the perspective of 'permanent revolution', but part of the same project-doing everything possible to strengthen the power of the working class nationally and internationally. There was nothing in the least bit "utopian" about such a project, as Big Flame assert.

The theoretical error of Big Flame is well demonstrated in the following passage:

"The Trotskyist view is that while the dictatorship of the proletariat can be achieved in one country 'it cannot proceed to the higher stage of socialism' (Robens p. 24).....this can only lead to the fatalistic view that the development of the productive forces will be retarded, leading to a bureaucratisation that cannot be solved internally.....Here economism and fatalism go hand in hand, ignoring the human factor, conscious action and political leadership. This mechanical notion of base and superstructure gives so much weight to the problems of 'scarcity'. Scarcity does not necessarily lead to internal degeneration". (6).

We agree with Big Flame that scarcity does not necessarily lead to internal degeneration, in the sense of a crystallised bureaucratic caste. Trotsky and Trotskyists have never said that this is 'inevitable'. We *do* argue that there are inevitable problems of bureaucracy – in the sense of administrative 'red tape' and social inequality if there is scarcity, but bureaucratic degeneration is not inevitable. Our whole project of 'political revolution' in the workers states, and the demands we put forward in favour of socialist democracy, are evidence of our view that the problem of bureaucratic degeneration *can* be solved internally, precisely by 'the human factor, conscious action and political leadership'. But that is not the end of the matter.

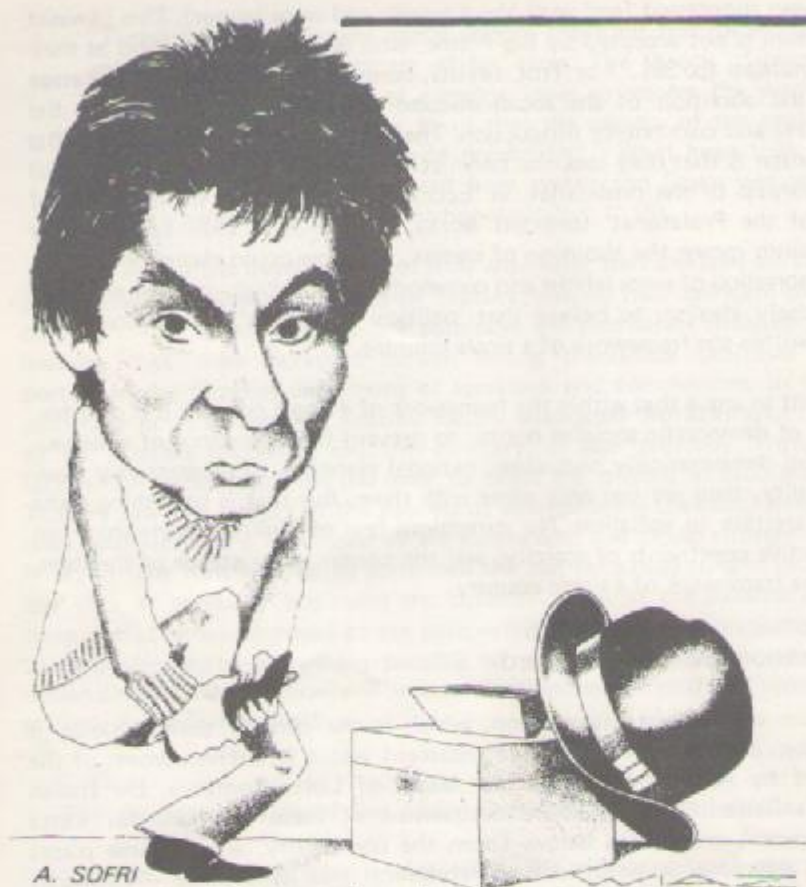
When Robens correctly argues that 'the higher stage of socialism' cannot be achieved in a single country he is referring to a society in which the state and commodity

production have been suppressed (and with them money and wage-labour). This Leninist definition of socialism is not accepted by Big Flame, who repeat this definition as their definition of *communism* (p. 36). For Trotskyists, communism is defined as that stage characterised by the abolition of the *social division of labour*, not implied by the abolition of the state and commodity production. The problem with the positions of Big Flame on this question is that they lack the Leninist-Trotskyist concept of a transitional society, the dictatorship of the proletariat. In 'Economics and Politics in the Epoch of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' (selected works, volume 3, p. 295) Lenin clearly explains that 'socialism means the abolition of classes'. But how could classes be abolished without the suppression of wage labour and commodity production, in other words of *scarcity*. It is precisely idealism to believe that 'political leadership' can overcome this objective problem within the framework of a single country.

If Big Flame want to argue that within the framework of a single country it is possible, by the application of democratic socialist norms, to prevent the emergence of a bureaucratic caste, to have democratically centralised national planning, to progressively overcome social inequality, then we can only agree with them. But that is something quite different to the transition to socialism. No miraculous feat of 'political leadership' can overcome the objective constraints of scarcity, and the continued existence of the state, inevitable within the framework of a single country.

Leninist Organisation and the Vanguard

On the question of Leninist organisation, which is the core of their critique of Trotskyism, the comrades present a complex argument which is a development of the positions theorised by Adriano Soffri, former leader of Lotta Continua, the Italian revolutionary organisation. The precise consequences of these positions for Lotta Continua's development we discuss below. Given the complexity, and in some places vagueness of this argument, it is difficult to reproduce it in its entirety — comrades should read it for themselves. Centrally, Big Flames suggest that the Leninist theory of organisation, as developed by Lenin and taken over wholesale by the Trotskyists, was in part historically specific to the situation in Russia and Europe during the early part of the century. Because of important changes in capitalism since then, the changes in the composition and nature of the working class and changes in the triangular relationship between the working class, capital and the state, much of the Leninist theory is no longer applicable. This doesn't lead to the necessity to dump Leninism, but to re-situate Leninism in a number of crucial ways, which Trotskyists have been incapable of doing. These crucial changes include a) a change in the clear-cut distinction between 'trade union' and 'political' struggles, always over-emphasised by Lenin, and hence the much greater potential today for struggles taking a spontaneously anti-capitalist, socialist direction. This is in part a function of a much increased role of the state, which changes the conditions of struggle both inside the factory and in society in general b) the change in the 'terrain of struggle', due to the change in the composition of the working class, its de-skilling, massification etc., together with other social changes, gives rise to a whole spectrum of new movements and struggles which Trotskyists have been slow to comprehend. Trotskyists have generally remained within a narrow 'workerist' conception of the working class as industrial workers, and have not understood autonomous movements of students, women etc. The 're-situation' of Leninism that arises from these changes acceptance of the need for a revolutionary party as the



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generaliser and political centraliser of struggles, but a *rejection* of the need for a fully-fledged party structure while the party is being built. Instead a more open structure is needed; the party is built 'from the bottom up'. Consequently the programme of the party is not something developed a priori and then fought for, but emerges from the practice and experience of the new vanguards, and their eventual unification in the party.

On the basis of these positions, the following sins and inadequacies of Trotskyism are elaborated a) a failure to understand that consciousness is not simply brought about by the intervention of 'the party' but is potentially present, to a greater or lesser degree, in the 'conditions of emergence' of the struggles. Consciousness is not simply brought from 'the outside'. b) a 'structural/administrative' concept of the need for the party c) a 'permanent danger of an authoritarian and elitist relationship between the Leninist party and the class' d) 'a vulgarised and over-estimated notion of leadership', which leads to the belief that'leadership can be transplanted on top of a struggle; whether or not the struggle has undergone sufficient transformation and maturation'. e) a manipulative attitude towards autonomous movements. This is a weighty series of accusations and arguments: the key to it all lies in a very significant little phrase which the comrades use, that Trotskyists put 'consciousness and ideology at the centre of analysis, as the determining factor in the level of struggles'. Big Flame are absolutely correct to locate the differences here.

Ideological domination of the working class

The argument of Big Flame on this question is not without merit. To paraphrase a well-known formula, it contains a rational shell, concealing a thoroughly mystified kernel. What the comrades are correct about is that the Fourth International has not completely succeeded in re-situating Leninist organisation in terms of late capitalism. The objective roots of this problem are clear. For a whole period the Trotskyist organisations, through no fault of their own, led an existence as small propaganda groups, often within the mass parties. This situation abruptly changed in the late 1960s when many new problems of revolutionary organisation were posed for the first time in a generation. A whole number of questions of dealing with the party-vanguard-masses relationship were posed to organisations which had grown very rapidly in a short space of time. The response of the Trotskyist organisations was a violent re-appropriation of Lenin's arguments — 'ultra-Leninism' was the order of the day. Two points should be made here. First, the composition of the organisations at that time — with a high proportion of students and other intellectuals was conducive to 'ultra-Leninist' organisational fetishisms. Second, the more important, the emergence of large Trotskyist organisations frequently took place in violent political conflict with more-or-less explicitly anti-Leninist forces, in particular the Mao-spontaneists of the Gauche Proletarienne variety, but also economist and workerist tendencies. These tendencies frequently collapsed revolutionary organisation into 'the movement', basing themselves on the 'inherently and spontaneously' revolutionary nature of the masses — populism in the real and not just polemical sense. Trotskyists in response to these currents waged a bitter programmatic battle around the letter of Lenin's texts. Politically the consequence of this was the stress on the relative separation of the party from the vanguard and the vanguard from the masses — the strict selection of cadres on the basis of the most rigorous ideological criteria, guarding ideological orthodoxy and so forth. In our opinion this was a necessary political battle to fight. The strict reiteration of Lenin's organisational theories was a precondition for further progress. However, a gradual transformation of the Trotskyist organisations to a less abstract account of the meaning of Leninist organisation could only be a function of *new experiences of mass work*, which the Fourth International has begun to acquire during the 1970s. This is a process which is still in a very embryonic stage. What is involved is both a number of questions of internal organisation — in particular the precise norms and modes of functioning necessary for an organisation with an increasing number of worker militants — and also some questions of the relationship between the party and various mass movements. We would argue that we have made progress on these questions (for example the considerable elaboration carried out on the question of the womens movement) but that it is idealist to imagine that all these problems can be solved by what Big Flame refer to as 'theoretical homework'. New experiences of mass work will be decisive.

Where then do we disagree with Big Flame? First their argument contains a good deal of polemical caricature, in which all the Trotskyist groups are held to have the same features of ultra-vanguardism etc. Fair enough, polemical exaggeration generally plays a certain role in these debates, but in all honesty it is difficult to sustain the argument that the organisations of the Fourth International have been characterised by a complete incomprehension of the womens movement, student movement etc., or have played a simple parasitic role in relation to them. So let's draw the line between polemic and dishonesty on that.



But at a theoretical level, where we differ with the Big Flame comrades is that in our opinion their attempt to re-situate Leninist organisational theory runs the risk of jettisoning a decisive element of that theory. When they say about modern capitalism:

".....some conditions of struggle encourage struggles to take on a political, i.e., anti-capitalist, basis, which in turn makes for greater potentiality for the development of socialist consciousness. We would argue that these conditions are present in modern relations between working class, capital and the state — as experienced in peoples daily lives in the factory, community or college.....It is necessary to restore a materialist emphasis about the form and content of class struggles in line with Marx's formulation that — 'social being determines social consciousness'. Putting consciousness and ideology at the centre of analysis fixes social being in such a rigid way....." (7).

they are beginning to put in question the ideological domination of the working class, and to suggest that it can be overcome spontaneously. Lenin always argued, it was central to his theory of organisation, that the working class was dominated economically, politically *and ideologically*. It seems as if the comrades are arguing that in modern conditions it is much more easy for the working class directly to reach socialist consciousness *through struggle*: the ideological role of the party, and with it the importance of the programme are down-played. But when Big Flame quote as part of the evidence for the changes that have brought this about:

".....conditions of modern capitalism have changed, most of which have gone unnoticed by Trotskyism. The state is a larger and more complex set of structuresin particular the reformist parties are more strongly rooted, with a corresponding weakening of the revolutionary left....." (8).

how these changes modify the situation in favour of a lessening of the ideological domination of the working class by bourgeois ideology. Surely these tendencies would tend to re-inforce and strengthen that domination? The argument is not whether the many changes in capitalism do or do not tend to more readily lend an 'anti-capitalist' objective dynamic to struggles: we can argue about this one way or the other, and frankly we don't see much evidence for it. But what is more important is the second stage in Big Flame's argument that a greater potentiality exists for the emergence of socialist consciousness. Now either this can mean that the ground is more fertile for socialist intervention, or it can mean that a greater potentiality exists for socialist consciousness to emerge spontaneously. If this latter meaning is what the comrades have in mind, then they have revised the central element of Lenin's theory of organisation and class consciousness, namely the radical difference between bourgeois ideology and socialist consciousness, and the latter as uniquely the product of revolutionary political intervention. We can hardly accuse Big Flame of denying the need for socialist intervention; but their theory contains an important ambiguity on this point which is not fully developed. Let's finally note that the materialist notion which the comrades quote approvingly that 'social being determines consciousness' is more complex than they seem to think. 'Social being' of course includes ideas, ideology, the ideological effects of the state and reformist parties etc.

Socialist Intervention and the problem of 'exteriority'

If Big Flame do not deny the need for socialist intervention, their whole text is concerned to show the dangers of what might be called 'external', 'ultra-vanguardist' intervention. According to this model (pp. 20-23), wrongly attributed to the Trotskyists, political consciousness, is developed by party intellectuals outside the working class and then taken into the working class from the 'outside'. This then leads to the problem of 'parachuting leaderships', artificially trying to takeover struggles from the outside etc.

A number of points have to be made about this caricature of Trotskyist theory and practice. First, socialist intervention takes numerous forms — leaflets, speeches, slogans, etc. — which are developed from marxist theory, but not its immediate product. But Marxist theory, if it was first developed by bourgeois intellectuals (an historical factor in the emergence of Marxism) was not developed outside the working class movement — i.e., it was not just a speculative development but part of a political intervention and practice. It is now the property of much wider forces than just 'party intellectusls'. All that is meant by socialist consciousness coming from the 'outside' is *not* Lenin's historically contingent repetition of Kautsky's thesis on the role of intellectuals, but rather that socialist consciousness comes from 'outside' the sphere of normal or spontaneous relationships on the factory floor or in society in general — i.e., it is the product of socialist intervention. The problem of 'exteriority' which so concerns Big Flame can only appear as a problem when revolutionaries are not firmly rooted in the workers movement. We can only agree with Big Flame when they urge that revolutionaries must be part of the mass movements, and give leadership from within. Who could possibly disagree with that? But the objective problem of the lack of implantation of revolutionaries can only be gradually overcome. Further, this lack of implantation cannot stand in the way of intervening in key struggles, even with limited means at a propaganda level, because that is the only way to begin to solve the problem. For example, every socialist group worthy of the name intervened around Grunwick's and the Firefighters struggle, despite their lack of implantation; and every group had a position on how best to develop the struggle. To merely support these struggles, without a critical view of their course, in the name of respecting the 'autonomy' of each group of workers has a very simple consequence — capitulation to the trade union bureaucracy and the class politicians of the bourgeoisie who will 'intervene from the outside' whatever their 'degree of implantation'.

But there is one respect in which the intervention of revolutionaries is necessarily 'exterior'. Even when revolutionaries intervene from within a struggle, they do so on the basis of certain programmatic conceptions which exist a priori, which have been developed by the revolutionary organisations through the process of revolutionary intervention and its theorisation (and this is the 'theoretical production' which Big Flame dislike so much). Any other conception of revolutionary intervention leads either to a complete separation between programme and practice, or to simple empiricist practice based on a sense of smell. Big Flame's incomprehension of this is demonstrated when they say:

"...politics is less of an outside factor that organisations have to bring into the struggle. Rather they have to direct, generalise discover it from within the struggle...." (9).

There is no way in which revolutionary socialist politics can be 'discovered' within a struggle and generalised. If it were a question of generalising struggles within which socialist politics were already present, then this would lead to precisely what the comrades describe as a structural/administrative conception of the party. Once again, there is nothing in the Trotskyist theory which destroys the possibility of a modification and enrichment of the programme on the basis of new experiences of the spontaneous struggles of the class. But the theorisation of the experiences of the class struggle takes place necessarily 'externally', in the revolutionary socialist organisations, not within this or that struggle.

Programme, party, new vanguards

In dealing with transitional demands the basic accusation made by Big Flame is that the method of transitional demands is propagandistic, designed merely to expose the reformists and 'raise consciousness':

"it is worth noting that the concept of 'raising consciousness' in the transitional model is weak. It is built on a rationalist model where people's consciousness can be raised in a 'battle of ideas'. Trotskyists often explain that it is their aim to debate with reformists and expose them in front of the masses....." (p. 25).

There is no denying that some small Trotskyist groups have nothing but a propagandist practice, but that has more to do with the physiognomy of sects than the method of transitional demands. Transitional demands are designed not to 'raise consciousness' in a rationalist fashion, but to present concrete objectives which link any particular struggle with the overall fight for power. The point is not just to present dis-embodied socialist propaganda, but to show a way forward in which the working class can begin to challenge capitalist power in practice. But the task of 'raising consciousness' is inseparable from this process of presenting concrete objectives which can be organised for and fought around. Big Flame explicitly recognise the problem of the split between immediate demands and general socialist propaganda, characteristic of reformism. But when they present their own solution of 'medium term' demands (p. 26) it is absolutely unclear in what way their conception differs from ours: in fact their explanation seems like a simple re-wording of transitional demands. And when they include in their examples of their 'medium-term' demands such things as the sliding scale of wages, work or full pay and so forth, then our suspicions are a bit confirmed.....At any rate their whole critique of transitional demands is based on the caricature that transitional demands are abstract, rationalist, propaganda devices to 'expose' the reformists. Once again we plead 'not guilty'.

The final point of Big Flame's critique we want to take up is the relationship between the party and the 'new vanguards'. During the past ten years a whole series of mass movements have arisen; in Britain movements of students, women, black workers and so forth. Big Flame want to defend the 'autonomy' of these movements. But autonomy from what? Naturally Trotskyists will also want to defend the organisational integrity of these movements, their rights to make their own democratic decisions without interference from 'raiding parties' of whatever kind, their rights to self-organisation and so on. But we do not defend their 'autonomy' from revolutionary socialist politics, that is to say from the historic interests of the working class. On the contrary,

we fight to link these movements with the struggle of the working class. Like Big Flame we want to fuse the 'vanguard of the vanguards' in the revolutionary party, but on what basis? And this is where the problem precisely arises. Because the fact of the matter is that it is impossible to argue that the predominant ideology of these movements is spontaneously and automatically socialist. In many cases the job of revolutionaries will be to fight against the stream of these movements. The political fusion of the vanguard of these movements has to take place on the basis of marxist politics. Otherwise, what we get is an assembly of differing groupings in the heart of the revolutionary party, who import into the vanguard organisation all the one-sidedness characteristic of these movements in their 'spontaneous' development. An explosion invariably follows.

The experience of the Italian organisation Lotta Continua, the inspirers and mentors of Big Flame is instructive. By tailing the spontaneous development of the movement, by its lack of ideological homogeneity, Lotta Continua brought all the contradictory currents of the Italian vanguard into its interior. Faced with important political turns by the PCI, and the conflicts between the different vanguards represented internally (characteristically women versus workers) Lotta Continua has gone into a massive crisis, such that it hardly exists as a nationally structured organisation. This crisis and decomposition has its roots in all the themes expounded by Big Flame — underestimation of the ideological role of the party, denunciation of 'leadership' and 'external vanguards', attempting to build the party 'from the bottom upwards' without definite programmatic bases or secure organisational structures. Instead of giving leadership, Lotta Continua has become the victim of the 'spontaneous' disorientation of the Italian vanguard. It would be interesting to know what conclusions Big Flame draw from the experience of the organisation which inspires them.

(1) Paul Thompson + Cury Lewis: *The Revolution Unfinished: A critique of Trotskyism — Big Flame 1977.*

(2) John Robens: *Stalinism, Imperialism + Permanent Revolution*

(3) *Op. cit* p.3.

(4) *Ibid.* p.41

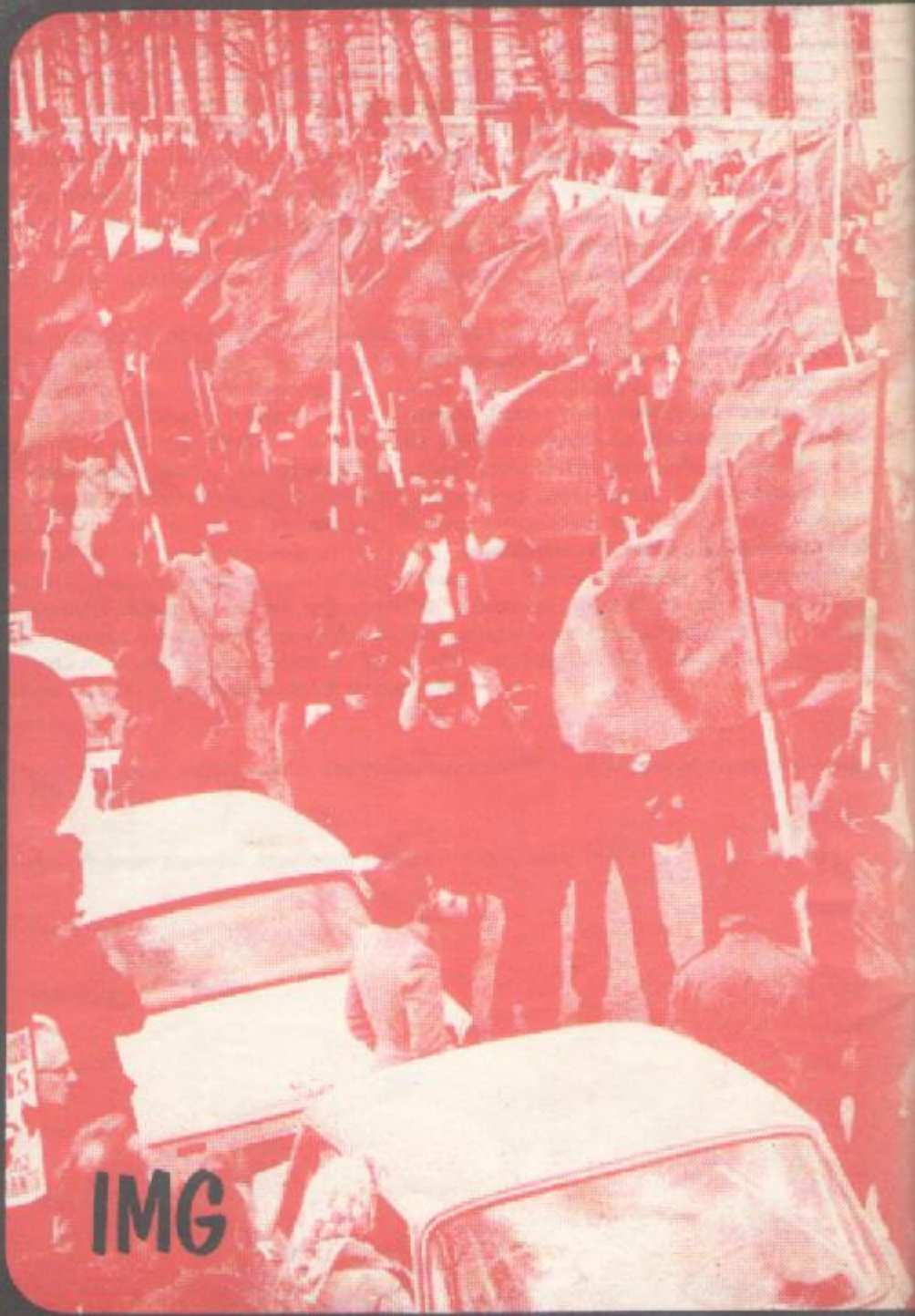
(5) *Ibid.* p.10.

(6) *Ibid.* p.33.

(7) *Ibid.* p.20.

(8) *Ibid*

(9) *Ibid*



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