On the Continuity of Trotskyism
Four Internationals since 1864:

Founding of the 1st (Workingman’s) International (IWA, 1864–1876) in London. It held left-wing socialist, communist, anarchist and trade unions. Dissolved by Marx because of anarchist reaction to his defence of the Paris Commune.

Sixth Congress of the 2nd (Socialist) International in Amsterdam in 1904: Includes Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky (Germany), Victor Adler (Austria), Georgii Plekhanov (Russia), Edouard Vaillant (France) and Sen Katayama (Japan).

Second Congress of the 3rd International (Comintern) Moscow 1920: Karl Radek (third), Nikolai Bukharin (fifth), Maxim Gorky (ninth), Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin, tenth, hands in pockets), Grigory Zinoviev (thirteenth, hands behind his back), Maria Ulyanova (nineteen white blouse).

Second Congress of the 4th International Paris 1946: Pierre Favre (PCI, France), S. Santen (Holland), Pierre Frank (PCI), Jock Haston (RCP), Colin de Silva (standing, LSSP, Grandizo Munis, who bloced with Max Shachtman here.)
Where We Stand

1. WE STAND WITH KARL MARX: ‘The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves. The struggle for the emancipation of the working class means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies but for equal rights and duties and the abolition of all class rule’ (The International Workingmen’s Association 1864, General Rules).

2. The capitalist state consists, in the last analysis, of ruling-class laws within a judicial system and detention centres overseen by the armed bodies of police/army who are under the direction and are controlled in acts of defence of capitalist property rights against the interests of the majority of civil society. The working class must overthrow the capitalist state and replace it with a workers’ state based on democratic soviets/workers’ councils to suppress the inevitable counter-revolution of private capitalist profit against planned production for the satisfaction of socialised human need.

3. We recognise the necessity for revolutionaries to carry out serious ideological and political struggle as direct participants in the trade unions (always) and in the mass reformist social democratic bourgeois workers’ parties despite their pro-capitalist leaderships when conditions are favourable. Because we see the trade union bureaucracy and their allies in the Labour party leadership as the most fundamental obstacle to the struggle for power of the working class, outside of the state forces and their direct agencies themselves, we must fight and defeat and replace them with a revolutionary leadership by mobilising the base against the pro-capitalist bureaucratic misleaders to open the way forward for the struggle for workers’ power.

4. We are fully in support of all mass mobilisations against the onslaught of this reactionary Con-Lib Dem coalition. However, whilst participating in this struggle we will oppose all policies which subordinate the working class to the political agenda of the petty-bourgeois reformist leaders of the Labour party and trade unions

5. We oppose all immigration controls. International finance capital roams the planet in search of profit and imperialist governments disrupts the lives of workers and cause the collapse of whole nations with their direct intervention in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan and their proxy wars in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, etc. Workers have the right to sell their labour internationally wherever they get the best price. Only union membership and pay rates can counter employers who seek to exploit immigrant workers as cheap labour to undermine the gains of past struggles.

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Introduction

This pamphlet on the continuity of Trotskyism consists of two parts. The first part is an article from Socialist Fight No 8, November 2011 by Gerry Downing On the Continuity of Trotskyism: Programme vs. Struggle? No, Programme via Struggle! The second part is a development from that and was part of the documentation for the founding conference of the Socialist Fight in March 2014; On the Continuity of Trotskyism: Reply to Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT) Part 2.

The following quote could have been written at anytime in the post war history of Trotskyism. It neither guarantees the orthodoxy of the authors not the success of their endeavours. It could describe either an unprincipled lash-up or a principled fight for revolutionary Trotskyism. But it does speak of struggle on a programmatic basis similar to the one we are engaged upon now.
“The process of winning political hegemony for revolutionary Marxism in the upsurge will involve a range of tactics and organisational forms. But we must be clear on our goal: to build revolutionary Marxist, that is, mass Trotskyist parties in every country as sections of the Fourth International. One important aspect of the struggle to build the Fourth International is attempting to unify the world Trotskyist movement — the political forces that affirm the Transitional Program and identify with the Trotskyist tradition. If we achieved this, we could qualitatively increase our impact in the workers’ movement and clarify and resolve our differences in the framework of international democratic centralism. Our International needs to promote a process of political clarification and organisational reunification of the world Trotskyist movement. To build the Fourth International as a real World Party of Socialist Revolution — this is the core of the problem we face. To take advantage of the contradictions in the present, undeniably difficult situation to advance the struggle to build the Fourth International — this is the decision we must make.”[1]

We might mention this Wiki article on the life of Jock Haston which shows the struggle for Trotskyism was waged by many:

“With the turn of the war against the Nazis the RCP was at pains to look for any signs of the coming revolutionary upheavals that were expected in line with the perspectives of the Fourth International as outlined in the famous Transitional programme. The leading theoretician of the RCP, Ted Grant, was therefore far seeing when he sought to tailor the political demands of the movement to the actual movement rather than succumbing to a rosy view of events. This realistic view of events was also prompted by the agreement of the RCP leadership with the documents of the Goldman-Morrow-Heijenoort minority in the American Socialist Workers Party. Therefore when in 1946 Haston led a delegation of the RCP to a conference of some of the sections of the Fourth International in Paris it is surprising that he moved that the conference be considered as a Congress of the movement. This was in part motivated by the opposition of the RCP to the demoralisation of the German comrades of the International Communists of Germany (IKD).

More important, politically, were the amendments that Haston wrote, along with Bill Hunter, to the resolutions of the FI leadership put forward at the meeting. In contrast to the FI leadership the RCP amendments recognise that Stalinism had emerged from the war strengthened and that an economic crisis was unlikely in the near future. Therefore it was argued political demands and expectations had to recognise these changes
and not pose revolutionary tasks in the absence of a revolutionary situation. The FI majority around Ernest Mandel and Michel Pablo, backed by the SWP in the United States, prevailed however.

The dispute with the leadership of the FI deepened with time and became centred on three interlinked questions. Firstly there was the role of Stalinism in Eastern Europe where the RCP took a different position to the FI in particular when the latter began to support the split of Josip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia from the USSR the RCP became very critical. This criticism being expressed in documents written by Haston. Secondly there was the question of economic perspectives and the growing tendency of the Labour party government of Clement Attlee to take various industries into state ownership as was also happening in Eastern Europe. Again it was Haston who opposed the idea that state ownership could be equated with any form of socialism in the pages of Socialist Appeal.” [2]

Did the Fourth International die in 1943?

The Fourth International degenerated and died as a revolutionary organisation, we are told by Comrade Jim, in the period 1943 to 1951. This is the conclusion drawn by James Robertson at the Third World Congress of the Fourth International in 1966 in London (he was bureaucratically expelled from the conference essentially for this speech on the initiative of Gerry Healy and Mike Banda), “The pressure which produced Pabloism began in 1943, following the failure of Leon Trotsky’s perspective of the break-up of the Soviet bureaucracy and of new October revolutions in the aftermath of the war: this failure resulted from the inability to forge revolutionary parties. After 1950, Pabloism dominated the F.I.; only when the fruits of Pabloism were clear did a section of the F.I. pull back. In our opinion, the “orthodox” movement has still to face up to the new theoretical problems which rendered it susceptible to Pabloism in 1943-50 and gave rise to a ragged, partial split in 1952-54.”[3] On one level there is a great deal of truth in this assertion, serious problems beset the Fourth International during the war, the US SWP was clearly falling victim to national isolation, but is very wrong to speak of “the failure of Leon Trotsky’s perspective of the break-up of the Soviet bureaucracy and of new October revolutions in the aftermath of the war”. Trotsky’s perspectives were those of revolutionary struggle. The Trotskyist fought those struggles heroically as outlined below. We cannot speak of the “failure of perspectives” in this manner as if was wrong to have these perspectives in the first place.
and what happened was inevitable. It was not. But problems there were as IDOT No. 1 points out:

“\begin{quote}
In WWII a very powerful wave of national chauvinism swept the US including the working class. This assisted in the trial and jailing of the 18 Trotskyist leaders, including Cannon. Cannon’s failure to defend revolutionary defeatism in that trial was a crucial victory for the state. Grandizo Munis was correct on this, even if he clearly attacked from an ultra-left perspective. This national isolationism grew until it produced the 1946 American Theses [4] and Cannon’s The Coming American Revolution [5] – which was both objective and chauvinist at the same time.”[6]
\end{quote}

We now know that the SWP was heavily infiltrated by state agents at that time, whilst repudiating the Healyite Security and the Fourth International slander campaign against Joe Hansen and George Novak, nevertheless as IDOT No. 1 points out, “Sylvia Callen Franklin was a GPU spy in the SWP and passed on internal documents. Floyd Cleveland Miller organised the assassination of Trotskyist seamen on the WWII convoys, having infiltrated the movement and there were others, like the Dallins and Robert Sheldon Hart who had a case to answer.”[7]

**More to the Fourth International than the US SWP**

But there was more to the Fourth International than the US SWP. There was the political and ideological disruption caused by lack of an International during WWII but we maintain that the proceedings of the Second World Congress in 1948 went a long way to overcoming that disruption and its resolutions and proceedings are still within the norms of revolutionary Trotskyism. This is shown particularly in the clear manner in which it tackled and fought out internal problems in constituent national parties, like any real functioning International must. But as it points out, “Comrade Trotsky, the founder, leader and inspirer of the International, was among the first to be murdered by Stalin after the outbreak of the war. Later the Stalinist gangsters claimed other victims. In Greece they killed over one hundred Trotskyist, included among them the most qualified leaders of the movement. In Indochina they disposed of Tha-Tu-Thau and numerous others. They killed Blasco, the Italian Trotskyist leader who could have rendered inestimable service in the construction of the Italian party.

The Gestapo, wherever it had control, hounded the Trotskyist militants and submitted them to fierce torture and annihilation. Only a handful of the German Trotskyist survived the concentration camps. The Austrian Trotskyist lost some of their major cadres after they were placed on trial by the Nazis and condemned to death. The Czechoslovak Trotskyist lost about a dozen of their cadre elements. The Polish section was wiped out almost in its entirety. The French, Belgian, the Dutch organizations lost the most experienced leaders and many militants. The Anglo-American imperialists who fought the war ostensibly in the name of democracy and against fascism did not feel in the least restrained in persecuting the Trotskyist. The leaders of the American Trotskyist were thrown into prison for over a year. The British Trotskyist suffered a similar fate. But they were especially ruthless in the colonial countries. The leaders and many members of the Indian party spent the war years in jail without indictment, trial or any definite term. The Chinese Trotskyist were submitted to the triple brutalities of the Japanese imperialists, Chiang Kai-shek’s hangmen and the Stalinists. Even Switzerland, the ideal country of bourgeois democracy, which remained neu-
tral in the war, would not allow the Trotskyist to function freely and jailed its leading spokesmen.” [8]
The details were not known to the 1948 Congress but here is what happened to the French Trotskyists in 1944 (one year after Trotskyism had supposedly ‘collapsed’): “The Paris region was organised as two branches. But the heart of the organisation was in Brittany, both around Nantes and in particular around Brest where the soldiers provided the party with Ausweis [identity cards] and weapons. In Brest the organisation had about fifty soldiers on average despite some people being posted elsewhere. Contacts were established in Toulon, Valence, La Rochelle and at Conches aerodrome. Links were established with the German Trotskyist organisation, most importantly in the port of Hamburg, in Lübeck and in Rostock. Victor [a German Trotskyist, whose real name was Widelin] was responsible for these contacts. Arbeiter und Soldat was also distributed in garrisons in Italy. On 7 October 18 Fourth International Committees activists in Brittany were arrested, along with much of the Paris organisation. In total around fifty French activists were rounded up, and many of them were tortured, executed or sent to concentration camps. Similarly, as many as fifty Der Arbeiter soldier comrades were put to death, and their paper never reappeared.” The full contents of their press are available here thanks to David Broader, an AWL member at the time. We maintain those journals constitute an heroic struggle for Trotskyism; [9]

How the 1948 Second Congress fought
Here is how the 1948 Second Congress fought out the question of opportunism and sectarianism: “In summarizing the long intensive discussion, we see despite the various divergent tendencies, two main currents:
(a) The traditional Trotskyist current which forms the overwhelming majority of the functioning sections. This current retains its analysis of the fundamental crisis of capitalism in our epoch. This crisis has only been aggravated by the consequences of the war. It retains its perspectives of the socialist revolution, having confidence in the revolutionary capacities of the proletariat, in its ability to liberate itself from the grip of Stalinism. It places the main emphasis on the transformation of our organizations from propaganda groups into genuine mass parties, a transformation which is not only necessary, but for the first time also feasible.
(b) Opposed to this is the current which lays stress on the retreat of the socialist revolution, on the forces of historic retrogression, the sinking into barbarism, the incapacity of the proletariat, its degeneration, its profound contamination with Stalinism. They are im-
pressed, on the contrary, by every “success” of capitalism, by its “stabilization.” They look with scepticism on the future of the International and they denigrate its work and achievements. This revisionist current is profoundly defeatist in relation to the perspectives of the proletarian revolution. This current embraces principally the KDI and the Workers Party.

The line of this tendency would sterilize and paralyze the struggle of the International to sink roots into the mass movement.” [10] Robertson’s speech at the 1966 conference was, as the citation above shows, far closer to the truth than Healy and Lambert. They simply wanted to establish a bogus line of continuity running through the International Committee 1953 split to avoid the questions of their own past errors and opportunism. Here is some more of Robertson’s 1966 speech,

“We take issue with the notion that the present crisis of capitalism is so sharp and deep that Trotskyist revisionism is needed to tame the workers, in a way comparable to the degeneration of the Second and Third Internationals. Such an erroneous estimation would have as its point of departure an enormous overestimation of our present significance, and would accordingly be disorienting.

We had better concentrate upon what Lenin said concerning the various, ubiquitous crises which beset imperialism (a system essentially in crisis since before 1914); Lenin pointed out that there is no impossible situation for the bourgeoisie, it is necessary to throw them out. Otherwise, “crises” are all in a day’s work for the mechanisms and agencies of imperialism in muddling through from one year to the next. Just now, in fact, their task is easier, after the terrible shattering of the Indonesian workers’ movement; add to this the other reversals which expose the revisionists’ dependence on petty-bourgeois and bureaucratic strata, like the softening of the USSR, the isolation of China, India brought to heel, Africa neatly stabilized, and Castro a captive of Russia and the U.S…

Many statements and positions of the I.C. show theoretical weakness or confusion on this question. Thus, the I.C. Statement on the fall of Ben Bella declared: “Where the state takes a bonapartist form on behalf of a weak bourgeoisie, as in Algeria or Cuba, then the type of ‘revolt’ occurring on June 19-20 in Algiers is on the agenda.” –Newsletter, 26 June 1965.

While the nationalization in Algeria now amounts to some 15 per cent of the economy, the Cuban economy is, in essence, entirely nationalized; China probably has more vestiges of its bourgeoisie. If the Cuban bourgeoisie is indeed “weak,” as the I.C. affirms, one can only observe that it must be tired from its long swim to Miami, Florida.” [11]

However there was substance also in the charges laid against Robertson in that 1966 Congress by Healy and Banda. They charged Robertson with a US national orientation, and subsequent history has shown the truth of that assertion, and they charged him with a propagandist orientation because of his assertion of the need for a Fighting Propaganda Group,

“The Spartacist draft theses state: “The tactical aim of the SL in the next period is to build a sufficiently large propaganda group capable of agitational intervention in every social struggle in the U.S. as a necessary step in the building of the revolutionary party. For this intervention we seek an increase in our forces to at least tenfold. From our small force of around 100 we move toward our goal in three parallel lines of activity: splits and fusions with other groups, direct involvement in mass struggle, and the strengthening and education of our organization.” [12]
This, Healy claimed represented not an orientation to the working class in struggle but a deep scepticism of the working class and its potential to make revolution and a petty bourgeois orientation to other self-proclaimed Trotskyist groups which became a substitute for the class struggle in later years. They have now become parasites on all the other claimants to Trotskyism. This criticism was basically correct, leaving aside the constant ‘impeding catastrophe’ method of mobilising members Healy had which we will come to later. As the IDOT No 1 observed of the IBT and the Spart family in general, “You have “disappeared” the rest of the subjectively revolutionary Trotskyists internationally, the rest of the subjectively revolutionists of any colour outside the “Family” and with them the entire historical experience of the fight by other forces for Trotskyism internationally, however inadequate that might have been and with them has gone the working class and its revolutionary potential. The healthy revolutionary elements outside of your own ranks must now be reduced to a few dozen at most, in the eyes of the three opposing sectarian “Family” groups.” [13]

Now we will look at the history of the British Trotskyist movement and the IC tradition in Britain as set out in 1989 by Tony Gard, a former member who went on to join Thorndett’s WSL and later founded the Revolutionary Internationalist League, British section of the International Trotskyist Committee (ITC), the international remnants after the 1982 split with the WSL).[14]

“The origins and Development of the International Committee Section in Britain

The Workers Socialist League was formed in 1974 as a result of the expulsion by the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) of the Oxford based opposition led by Alan T., Tony R., and John L.. While there has been considerable discussion in TILC (The Trotskyist International Liaison Committee, the International formed by the WSL) and in the ITC and elsewhere on the history of the Socialist Labour League/Workers Revolutionary Party in the context of the crisis of the Fourth International, a summary of the main points pertinent to the development of the Workers Socialist League is necessary.

(a) The formation of the Revolutionary Communist Party in 1944 reflected (to a certain extent) a sectarian response to the Labour Party class collaboration (the coalition government, etc.) and to the lack of any real Labour Party activity during the war. The problems this created became marked with the end of the war and the revival of Labour Party political life in 1945 and thereafter. Subsequently, Healy led an opposition calling for entry into the Labour Party, but it was essentially an opportunist response to the strength of social democracy and the weakness of Trotskyist forces. These developments took place in a very difficult period for the Fourth International. The Stalinist purges, the assassination of Trotsky, the war, and the Nazi occupation of much of Europe had severely depleted its forces and disrupted its functioning internationally.

It had, nevertheless, come through the war and into the postwar world as a revolutionary international. However, the strength, politically, of Stalinism and the expansion of the Stalinist bureaucracy’s area of control, the beginnings of the restabilisation of capitalism under US hegemony, and the Cold War posed enormous problems for Trotskyists, led in some cases to physical liquidation and generally to their isolation from the masses. Healy’s split from the RCP on the basis of Labour Party entry and the consequent collapse of the RCP was the application in British conditions of the liquidationist course taken by the Fourth International under its International Secretary, Michel Pablo, as it
sought short cuts out of its isolation and
looked to larger forces that could in some
way be substituted for building Trotskyist
parties.
(b.) Healy’s group, The Club, practised a
liquidationist form of entrism in the period
1948 to 1956 and to some extent down to
1958. It was an early example of Trotskyists’
attempting to create themselves as a centrist
current in the Labour Party when one does
not exist and adapting to the bureaucratic
leaders of left reformist currents when these
emerge. The principal vehicle for The Club’s
politics was the journal Socialist Outlook.
When this was banned, the arguments of
Labour Party legality were accepted without a
struggle, and The Club became part of the
Tribune tendency.
(c.) In the late 1940s and early 1950s, The
Club completely supported the policies of
Pablo’s International Secretariat. It endorsed
the increasingly confused and ultimately revi-
sionist response to developments in postwar
Stalinism including the view that Tito’s na-
tionalist Stalinism in Yugoslavia was a form
of centrism. Subsequently there was no at-
tempt to re-examine the lessons of this ep-
isode.
(d.) The 1953 split was a response to the
effects on national sections of Pablo’s gener-
alisation of his liquidationist orientation to
Stalinism. For The Club this meant a clash of
liquidationisms Pablo’s liquidation into Sta-
linism vs. Healy’s liquidation into social de-
mocracy. Both sides of the split (Pablo’s In-
ternational Secretariat and the International
Committee of Cannon, Healy, and Lambert)
were part of the Fourth International’s cen-
trist degeneration. There were positive as-
pects to the International Committee’s stand
for the political independence of Trotskyists
from Stalinism. Nevertheless, the Interna-
tional Committee remained trapped within
national Trotskyist responses and thus never
conducted an examination of the postwar
Fourth International and carried over from
Pabloism the objectivist method which, for
instance, The Club applied in its Labour
Party work.
(e.) The contradictory character of Trotskyist
-centrism, and specifically of the Interna-
tional Committee split, was illustrated by The
Club’s generally principled and quite success-
ful intervention into the Communist Party’s
crisis in 1956. This did not, however, mean a
break with Labour Party liquidationist poli-
tics, as the politics of the 1958 Rank-and-file
Conference indicated. However, it did pro-
vide a basis for the “left turn” with the for-
mation of the Socialist Labour League as a
public Trotskyist organisation (while continu-
ing to work in the Labour Party) in 1959.
(f.) This “left turn” is particularly important for us, since from its contradictions developed the political tendency identified with Alan T. This turn did not represent a break with past methods or any political reassessment. The conjunctural basis of the turn consisted of the following elements:
1) the enlargement of the group as a result of its intervention in the Communist Party in 1956/1957;
2) the overall decline of the Labour left and the difficulties in Labour Party work created by the witch-hunt;
3) the growth of shop-floor militancy on the wages front, as shop stewards committees led largely unofficial strikes to improve living standards independently of the bureaucrats under conditions of full employment and to a much lesser extent, the rapid growth of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament as a mass movement outside the Labour Party but having close connections with the Labour and trade union left. Subsequently these developments were extended by the turn to youth in the early 1960s, as the Labour Party set up a national youth movement, the Young Socialists, in the wake of its third successive general election defeat, at a time of growing militancy among working-class youth. As a result, the Socialist Labour League (SLL) drew to itself (and to Trotskyism, despite its distortions), an important layer of student and working-class youth and a smaller but significant layer of industrial militants.
(g.) However, the general objectivist method was retained and applied to the process of economic crisis and class struggle. From liquidationism Healy’s forces lurched increasingly to sectarianism, especially after the break/expulsion of the Young Socialists from the Labour Party around the time of the 1964 general election. Objectivism and sectarianism were combined in an increasingly prominent catastrophism; the theory of an impending capitalist economic collapse which sees the working class break from reformism. At the same time, the elements of confusion on Stalinism continued and were reinforced by the way the Socialist Labour League reacted to the Castroism of the US Socialist Workers Party (which was the basis for the International Secretariat-SWP reunification that formed the United Secretariat of the Fourth International [USFI] in 1963) by asserting that Cuba remained capitalist. On the other hand, the Healyites were to show their own sort of accommodation to the Maoist Red Guards in China and to the successes of the Vietnamese Stalinist bureaucracy against US imperialism. They also retained their basic confusion on social democracy, a confusion embodied in the call for a Labour government on socialist policies.
(h.) The other side of the SLL’s objectivism was its failure to fight for the Transitional Programme. At best its use of transitional demands and the education of its cadres in the significance and method of the Transitional Programme were erratic. Increasingly the Transitional Programme simply disappeared from the League’s practice. To some extent, this point is made by John L. in an article, “Lessons of Our History”, published in the WSL’s newspaper Socialist Press in 1975 (see issue no. 18, 1 October 1975). In this article which compares most favourably as a serious piece of political argument with the superficial journalistic hack work John L. is currently churning out the abstract sectarianism of the 1974 WRP election manifesto with its ‘maximum demand’ calls for nationalisation, socialist policies, etc., is contrasted with the use of transitional demands in the 1965 SLL election manifesto.

The contrast is correctly drawn, and John L.’s arguments on transitional demands and against Healy’s 1970s sectarianism are well made, but this article illustrates some of the confusions the WSL inherit. In general, it gives uncritical support to the Socialist Labour League of the mid-1960s and traces its abandonment of the Transitional Programme from 1967 to 1974. It does not look at the strengths and weaknesses of the SLL in the early 1960s to mid-1960s in the context of its history as a whole, its previous as well as its subsequent development. Thus, though a rather routine reference to objectivism affecting both sides of the 1953 split is made at the end of the article, John L.’s general view is the same as Alan T.’s in The Battle for Trotskyism: the sectarian turn of the late 1960s and 1970s resulted from the impatience of previously isolated revolutionaries faced by a massive upsurge in the level of struggle worldwide.

(i.) Even during this supposedly best period, the SLL remained trapped by national Trotskyism, as did the French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI; the only other section of any size in the International Committee after 1963). Indeed, federalism and national Trotskyism were confirmed by the International Committee’s 1966 World Congress. This prevented the development of international democratic centralism and thus prevented also any international struggle against the weaknesses of the national sections. The International Committee continued as a mere bloc of the SLL and the OCI: the mutual nonaggression pact between them was the basis for their split in 1971, after which the International Committee was merely the SLL/WRP and its satellite clones.

(j.) Thus, by the late 1960s and early 1970s sectarianism and catastrophism were rampant and increasingly bizarre. These features facilitated the growth of other centrist such as International Socialists/Socialist Workers Party (IS/SWP) and the Trotskyist-centrist International Marxist Group (IMG) British section of the USFI. Neither of these could offer any political alternative to the SLL/WRP. On a number of points (the class nature of the Soviet Union, the leading role of the working class in the revolution) the SLL/WRP was correct over against the IS/SWP and IMG. However, they were able to expand because of the sectarianism of the SLL/WRP, for instance towards the student based movement against the Vietnam War. (Incidentally, the growth of Militant, though less spectacular in this period, was facilitated by the sectarianism of the SLL/WRP, IMG, and IS/SWP on the Labour Party.)

The turn to philosophy (that is, Healy’s idiosyncratic idealism) in the early 1970s served to create a wall between the SLL membership and the real world, with the former dominated by an increasingly brutal internal re-
The transformation of the SLL into a cult was complete. These features help to explain the failure to develop any internal oppositional struggle. Alan T.’s opposition was in reality a belated resistance emerging in conditions where internal discussion, clarification, and struggle were completely impossible.

(k.) Finally, it is necessary to make a general point on the particular characteristics of the objectivism of the International Committee tradition, represented by the SLL/WRP, since it has an important bearing on the subsequent development of the WSL. This has, in fact, been touched on, in points g and j above. All objectivism represents a denial of the role of revolutionary consciousness, thus of the struggle to build Trotskyist parties as the conscious revolutionary leadership of the working class, through a fight for Trotskyist politics and intervention in the class struggle based on the Transitional Programme. Objectivism substitutes a notion of revolutionary consciousness in some sense or other evolving as part of the objective process. This always involves a rejection of the political independence of the working class from bourgeois ideology and petty-bourgeois ideology (the latter, of course, representing no political independence from the bourgeoisie). This understanding of objectivism was established long ago in the communist movement. It is in fact the core of Lenin’s argument in “What Is To Be Done?”

Objectivism

Nevertheless, objectivism has been the theoretical basis of the centrist degeneration and consequent crisis of the Fourth International. It has led to the tail-ending of one movement or process after another (the attitude to Titoism in Yugoslavia in the late 1940s and early 1950s being the first clear example of this method). However, there have tended to be some differences between the objectivism followed by those forces which were part of the International Secretariat following the 1953 split and those which were part of the International Committee. The former have tended to adapt to petty-bourgeois forces and tendencies of nationalist or Stalinist origin: the FLN in the Algerian War of the 1950s, Castroism in Cuba, the student movement in Europe and North America in the 1960s and early 1970s, guerrillaism in Latin America during the same period, Sandinism in Nicaragua.

The former (USFI) have tended to adapt to petty-bourgeois forces and tendencies of nationalist or Stalinist origin: the FLN in the Algerian War of the 1950s, Castroism in Cuba, the student movement in Europe and North America in the 1960s and early 1970s, guerrillaism in Latin America during the same period, Sandinism in Nicaragua.
We contend that this record is merely a British-oriented record of what has been a post war struggle for Trotskyism worldwide. Part of that struggle also was the 1985 split in the Workers Revolutionary party and also the current regroupment process. It is correct to assert that there was a programmatic break with Trotskyism in this period. As Tony Gard outlines above this was based on fatalism and objectivism by the small forces that emerged from WWII. We may disagree on whether this happened in 1943 or in 1951-3. I favour the latter because of the political strength of the 1948 Second World Congress but agreement on that is not necessary in my view. However like Tony Gard I believe it is wrong to place an equals sign between the IS and IC in 1953. Despite all the problems of those years a fight against Pablo and what he represented, inadequate, one sided and without any real reassessment of what led to the liquidationist tendency though it was, had many positive aspects to it and must be retrospectively critically supported today. We should not just designate them as two equally degenerate centrists groups because this ignores a real struggle which did produce real gains for Trotskyism in Britan and internationally after Khrushchev’s secret speech in 1956. This does not deny real contributions to Trotskyism in the IS/USFI tradition, we speak here of tendencies, not iron laws of history.

Notes
[1] Building the Fourth International and mass Trotskyist parties in every country, Submitted by Chris Edwards and Alex Acheson (Britain), Jette Kromann and Inge Sorensen (Denmark) To the Discussion for the XIV World Congress 14 February 1995.
“The WRP was to display an uncritical worship of Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, and Yasser Arafat unsurpassed by anything in the history of Pabloism.”


[7] Ibid.


[9] Arbeiter Und Soldat, Worker and Soldier, The entire contents of Arbeiter Und Soldat here on the ETOL are the result of the efforts of David Broder, who put them up on the Alliance for Workers Liberty website. Broder translated the entire surviving contents of Arbeiter Und Soldat from the German. http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/soldat/index.htm


[12] Ibid.


[14] The WSL was founded in 1975 with a leadership grouped around Alan Thornett, Tony Richardson and John Lister, expelled from the WRP in 1974. Terry Eagleton was a well-known member. It inherited much of its politics from the WRP but fought successfully to break from this on Ireland, the woman question and gay and lesbian liberation. The group also concluded that Cuba had been a deformed workers state since the revolution of 1959. It published the weekly paper Socialist Press and a number of issues of the theoretical journal Trotskyism Today.


Socialist Fight and the Liaison Committee for the Fourth International affirms its belief that the Fourth International descended into centrism in the 1951-53 period, the programmatic continuity of Trotskyism was shattered at that time and no section, not the International Secretariat (IS, USFI after 1963) led by Michel Pablo, Pierre Frank and Ernest Mandel nor the International Committee (IC) led by James P Cannon, Gerry Healy, Nahuel Moreno and Pierre Lambert represented that continuity then or at any time subsequently.

Nor did any group, such as the groups led by Ted Grant or Workers Power Britain (WPB, who are for a Fifth International in any case), regenerate Trotskyism subsequently to the extent of correctly claiming to have re-established it. Big problems existed before the Third World Congress in 1951 but on balance we judge that these did not amount to a definite descent into centrism, although we acknowledge that it is possible to argue that the 1948 Second World Congress itself crossed that line.

We continue to fight for the political regeneration and reconstruction of the Fourth International via the traditional method of splits and fusions because, whilst we believe the Fourth International descended into centrism in 1951-53, we do not believe that the struggle for Trotskyism died in 1953 and did not rear its head again until WPB appeared to re-establish it in 1974 or even 1982 when *The Degenerated Revolution* appeared or in 1983 with the publication of the *Death Agony of the Fourth International* or when the *Trotskyist Manifesto* appeared in 1989. John Lister dubbed the position as counterposing the theory of the “red blob” to the “thin red line of continuity”. We therefore do not agree with comrade Michael Pröbsting that:

The IC, itself developing in a rightward direction (e.g. Healy’s work in the Labour Party) was distinguished from the IS by the pace of its development. It recoiled from the most blatant expressions of liquidationism issuing from the IS, but not from the right-centrist documents that underpinned that liquidationism. Therefore the IC did not constitute a “left centrist” alternative to the IS.

And later:

The RCIT strongly rejects any orientation of building the new International towards the so-called “worldwide Trotskyist movement.” We maintain that the slogan “rebuilding the Fourth International” either expresses an illusionary belief that any of the centrist fragments claiming to be Trotskyist in fact represents, in any way, a continuum of authentic Trotskyism, or that any of these fragments is somehow capable of self-reform.

Whilst it is true the IC opposition to Pablo was not an orthodox Trotskyist ‘alternative’ nevertheless the nature of the struggle forced the IC to advocate an opposition to liquidationism as Bill Hunter’s document, *Under a Stolen Flag* shows (see below), albeit only when an ultra-Pabloite opposition (advocating total capitulation to Stalinism) emerged in both the UK, France and the US (Cochran/Clarke in America Lawrence in Britain, the Lyon opposition in France). However it did contain many elements of a struggle for the Trotskyist Transitional Programme, despite the political degeneration of its central leaders, Cannon, Healy, Moreno and Lambert. It did assert the need for independent revolutionary parties based on that
programme to lead successful socialist revolutions to open up the path to world revolution embarked on by Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks in 1917. And whilst it is true that neither side “represents, in any way, a continuum of authentic Trotskyism” nonetheless some within the IC as a whole did represent a left centrist opposition to Pablo which informed and inspired future generations of Trotskyists in their struggles against centrist leaderships who were of the same opportunist/sectarian variety.

We see here the WPB/RCIT rejection of the transitional method, no orientation whatsoever to splitting the ranks from the corrupt leadership by placing demands and working patiently with oppositionists. Gerry Downing experienced this attitude in 1986 where WPB gave no serious assistance to the struggles of the Internationalist Faction as recorded in his *WRP Explosion* waged against the Slaughter/Pilling/Pirani leadership of the WRP/Workers Press apart from ultimatums to the group which meant split immediately and join them.

The ‘splits and fusions’ tactic is the practical application of the method of the Leninist/Trotskyist United Front and Transitional Programme which enables us to place demands for talks and fusions with left-moving centrists groups (we are aware that history might judge us to be objectively in that category also) to win the leadership to our common project or to provoke serious secondary leaders or rank-and-file members to fuse with us. We therefore do not agree with the comrade Michael that:

When Lenin and the Bolsheviks’ arrived at this conclusion in 1914 they called for the building of the Third International. So did Trotsky after the failure of the Stalinist centrist Comintern in 1933. And so do we, since history has shown so many times that the so-called “worldwide Trotskyist movement” has degenerated into ossified centrism and cannot be reformed.

Principled Trotskyists should have critically supported the IC against the IS in 1953, despite all the correct criticisms made of it in Bob Pitt’s *Rise and Fall of Gerry Healy* document, in the WPB’s *Trotskyist Manifesto*, in the RCIT piece itself which we are now criticising and in many other Left Trotskyist documents. See Bob Pitt’s comment:
There seems no reason, then, to dispute Livio Maitan’s claim that, when Pablo’s famous essay ‘Where Are We Going?’ was circulated for discussion within the International early in 1951, Healy expressed no disagreement with it whatsoever. Nor did Healy challenge the adoption, at the FI’s Third World Congress in August-September 1951, of a full-blown ‘Pabloite’ programme. This put forward the perspective that with the outbreak of another world war, which was held to be both imminent and inevitable, the counter-revolutionary character of Stalinist parties outside the USSR could be transformed. Following the supposed examples of the Yugoslav and Chinese CPs, some of these parties could be expected to break with Stalinist politics and ‘project a revolutionary orientation’. All the British delegates to the Congress – Healy, John Lawrence and Bill Hunter – voted for these perspectives. And in the Club itself only Betty Hamilton and Charles Van Gelderen opposed the Third Congress decisions.

**Healy’s right centrist intervention in the Labour party**

Healy’s intervention in the Labour party was right centrist, Pablo himself even criticised his liquidationism and lack of a theoretical journal which defended the Trotskyist programme. As Bob Pitt explains:

Healy eagerly seized on the opportunist implications of this (Pablo’s – SF) perspective, in order to transform British Trotskyism into a left component of Bevanism. Thus Bevan’s speech to the 1952 Labour Party conference was hailed by *Socialist Outlook* with the headline ‘Bevan Gives the Lead that Workers Want’. Bevan’s election to the NEC on a record vote, and the replacement of right wingers Dalton and Morrison by the Bevanites Harold Wilson and Richard Crossman, the front page editorial stated, was ‘the clearest indication’ that the rank and file wanted socialism. A month later, next to a message of support from Michael Foot on behalf of Tribune, the paper carried the headline ‘Aneurin Bevan Demands a Real Socialist Policy’. Yet, by Socialist Outlook’s own admission, Bevan had done no more than defend political positions which were commonplace in the Labour Party before 1945, and he had made it plain that he had no desire to wage a serious struggle against the right wing. Healy provided a ‘theoretical’ gloss to this political adaptation in his review of Bevan’s book *In Place of Fear*. Not only did Healy accept Bevan’s reformist conception of the working class advancing to socialism ‘through the gate of parliament’, [2] but in doing so he shamelessly echoed the patriotism underpinning Bevan’s political philosophy. ‘Great Britain’, Healy wrote, ‘can never regain its position of world leadership under capitalist auspices.... Britain, however, can rise to a newer and higher level of world leadership, provided the Labour movement resolutely carries its struggle for Socialism to victory here in the coming period.’ The chief conditions for success, as enumerated by Healy, were: ‘1. Complete reliance on the organised power of the working class. 2. No confidence in Britain’s capitalists or America’s imperialists. 3. Finish without delay the job of nationalising, democratising, and reorganising industry along socialist lines. 4. Put into effect a Socialist and democratic foreign policy.’ This programme, which was to be implemented by a future Labour government, was, Healy wrote, ‘the only road to workers’ power and Socialism in Great Britain’. [3]

Tom Kemp has written that Healy’s attitude to Bevanism, as expressed in this article, was that of a ‘fully-fledged Pabloite’. [4] But this only reveals the problem in using the term ‘Pabloism’ in reference to politics which had general support within the Fourth International. Indeed, for all Healy’s later fulminations against ‘Pabloite liquidationism’, if he had any difference with Pablo in this period it was that Healy favoured a more thoroughly liquidationist course within the Labour Party. After all, the FI leadership did take the view that, in addition to Socialist Outlook, the British section should publish ‘a theoretical organ, openly defending revolutionary Marxism’ [5] – only to have their repeated requests
to this effect ignored by Healy. Indeed, Pablo himself would subsequently criticise Healy’s adaptation to Bevanism as an ‘opportunist application’ of the entry tactic! [6]

The 1951 French document Where is Pablo going? by Bleibtreu-Favre looks good at the start in its attacks on Pabloism but a reading of the second half, on China and Yugoslavia, reveals him as an enthusiastic supporter of the Pabloism of the first vintage and only an opponent of the ultra-Pabloism which was now emerging as clearly liquidationist. But Healy was not for tolerating any opposition to Pablo whatsoever. As Bob Pitt observes:

The Parti Communiste Internationaliste, the French section led by Bleibtreu and Lambert, did take a stand against Pablo at the Third World Congress. For, while they were enthusiastic supporters of the IS’s pro-Stalinist line on Yugoslavia and China, they baulked at its application to France, where the PCI had its base in the anti-communist Force Ouvrière trade union confederation. Faced with the PCI leadership’s stubborn resistance to his policy of ‘entrism sui generis’ in the French Communist Party and the Stalinist-dominated CGT unions, in January 1952 Pablo abused his authority as FI secretary to suspend the majority of the PCI central committee.

Needless to say, the French received no support from Gerry Healy. On the contrary, when Pablo’s bureaucratic action was narrowly endorsed – by five votes to four – by the IS, Healy sided with Pablo. And at the IEC Twelfth Plenum in November, Healy voted for the expulsion of the PCI majority from the Fourth International. According to one account, Healy even turned up in person at Pablo’s side to inform the Bleibtreu-Lambert faction that they had been expelled and replaced as the official section by the ‘Pabloite’ minority led by Pierre Frank and Michele Mestre. Healy played a no less rotten role in relation to the FI’s Vietnamese section, within which a minority faction supported the Bleibtreu-Lambert position. Before chairing a meeting of Vietnamese comrades who were about to return from France under orders to enter the Viet Minh, Healy approached his fellow IEC representative Peng Shuzi who was to address the meeting, and persuaded him to remain silent about the Mao regime’s persecution of Trotskyists in China. Peng was left in no doubt that this was ‘an instruction or suggestion from Pablo’. In order to defuse opposition to the entrism sui generis tactic, Healy and Pablo thus conspired to conceal from the Vietnamese Trotskyists the extent of the repression they could expect at the hands of Stalinism.

Bleibtreu’s document suffered from the same objectivism which was later to prove fatal to the PCI/OCI (the ‘Hasten’ condemned by him is undoubtedly Jock Haston who with Grant as leaders of the RCP had put forward the best position of Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia). This is part of what Healy and Cannon voted to expel, with all its Stalinophobia and its capitulation to Mao (“an inherently temporary compromise between the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy of the USSR and its NEGATION, the Chinese revolution”). This is surely a left centrist critique of Pabloism:

The main danger in the explanation given by Pablo (even when juxtaposed with the discussion of another, correct explanation, the above one) is that it has the effect of masking the organically counterrevolutionary nature of the workers bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. This bureaucracy cannot be equated with the bureaucratism inherent in any society in which a scarcity in consumer goods exist. This bureaucracy is the result of nearly thirty years of the degeneration of a workers state. Politically, it has totally expropriated the Soviet proletariat. Contrary to what Pablo states, wherever it has been able to act bureaucratically or to maintain its bureaucratic control over the masses, the Soviet bureaucracy had tried to develop the productive forces (in the USSR and in the annexed or satellite territories) in order to strengthen the base of its own privileges and increase their extent. On the other hand, its liquidationist attitude toward the revolution that began in France in
1936; the way it brutally crushed the conscious cadres of the Spanish revolution; its complicity with Hitler in order to allow him to crush the Warsaw uprising; its Yalta policy against the interests of the revolution in Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, and France; its blockade and military pressure against the Yugoslav workers state in the hope of delivering it bound hand and foot to imperialism (contrary to the interests of defending the USSR itself) unequivocally express the incompatibility between the Soviet bureaucracy and the development of the proletarian revolution. Such a revolution would represent an immediate and direct threat to the bureaucracy’s existence and it would do so even more sharply if it were to take place in an economically less backward country. [7]

Nor do we have any substantial disagreement with Bob Pitt and the RCIT on Healy’s unprincipled history in the Labour party (although Comrade Pitt now completely disagrees with his former revolutionary self, he informs in his introduction). If there are lessons to be learned from Healy and Grant’s entry work in the Labour party they are that it is necessary to have an open outside Trotskyist party and publication to guide this work and that genuine left moving elements in that milieu will never be won by capitulation to reformist currents. Deep entryism without outside assistance is absolutely politically fatal as a long term project, a few years at most is all that is appropriate.
On the Continuity of Trotskyism

Working with these currents, fighting their reformism and encouraging their moves in the direction of revolutionary Trotskyism is the essence of the tactic. Dissolving the former Revolutionary Communist Party into formations called ‘the Club’ or ‘the Group’ as Healy did produced nothing for eleven years for Trotskyism. In fact it was only when the Socialist Labour League was formed that the possibility of winning the leadership of the Young Socialist in 1963 emerged. But by then Healy was acting in such a provocative way that he presented the Labour party bureaucrats with every opportunity to expel him and his members.

As with Grant and Militant a decade and a half later it was possible to weather the storm and maintain a presence in the Labour party to renew the struggle at the next opportunity. But Peter Taaffe repeated Healy’s error and pulled out of the Labour party entirely after the expulsion of leading members. It is true that Healy never went to the extent of declaring the Labour party no longer a bourgeois workers’ party as Taaffe did after 1989 but the approach and method was very similar apart from that. However Militant, despite all its capitulation to reformism whilst inside the Labour party, did at least produce its paper which openly advocated various aspects of the Trotskyist programme. Healy’s Socialist Outlook [8] was not really an identifiable Trotskyist paper at all. The ISG’s paper, [9] of the same name was modelled on the earlier Healy paper, and was similarly liquidationist.

And it is necessary to criticise Healy’s perspectives of work within Labour too. As Bob Pitt observes:

Despite his future somersaults on the Labour Party question, the main threads of this analysis – impending economic collapse, the erosion of parliamentary democracy, a drive towards right-wing dictatorship, and imminent revolutionary struggles – were to remain constant themes in Healy’s political pronouncements throughout his subsequent career.

This made any serious long term work in Labour and the trade unions very difficult as the 1974 Thornett split showed. This catastrophe was in reality a modern, leftist version both of the German SPD programme before 1914, separating the maximum and minimum programme with no transitional demands whatsoever, apart from stock references every now and again which no one took seriously, and the German communist KPD ultra-leftism of the early 1930s, which later came to the fore. Ken Livingstone was quite happy to hear Healy speak of the imminent collapse of capitalism as long as it did not oblige him to oppose Thatcher in the GLC over the rate capping struggle in 1984-5.

Healy’s capitulation to bourgeois nationalism and left reformism

The manner of the expulsion of Gerry Healy forced serious discussions on revolutionary politics in the WRP from late 1985 after the departure of Mike Banda to early 1987 and the adoption to Nahuel Moreno’s MAS. The two central points that began it were the capitulation to Gaddafi, Arafat, Saddam Hussein and the Arab bourgeoisie and the capitulation to Labour left reformist politicians like Ken Livingstone, Ted Knight, Bill Sirs of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (a right wing trade union leader to which the WRP shamefully capitulated) and Arthur Scargill of the National Union of Mineworkers, etc. Also prominent were repudiation of the Security and the Fourth International case against Joseph Hansen and George Novak and later practically the entire leadership of the US SWP who were all accused of being KGB/CIA agents.
There is little disagreement about capitulation to bourgeois nationalism and left reformism. Nor is there much disagreement that these were not new phenomena but constituted an essential part of Healy’s political method as demonstrated by his entire history. Despite left turns at certain periods Healy would always return to these position established in his political youth. The following quotes from Bob Pitt, which gel with the RCIT analysis, established the opportunist and unprincipled nature of Healy’s Labour party work: it was carried out on Pablo’s perspective that by joining not very left reformists currents they could be assisted into evolving into ‘centrists’ (in fact Healy frequently incorrectly referred to them as ‘centrists’ without the need for any ‘evolution’)

As a result of Healy’s efforts, Bevanism was able to acquire what it had previously lacked – a base in the trade union movement. After the collapse of the upsurge on the docks, the Healy-ites continued to work closely with Tribune, for example in organising meetings for the Bevanite MPs Crossman and Mallalieu in Yorkshire. In exchange for such services, members of the Group were occasionally allowed a letter or short article calling for a programme of nationalisation without compensation under workers’ control or for a sliding scale of hours in response to automation. But if Healy had been minded to draw up a political balance sheet in terms of what he got for what he gave, the answer would have been – very little. For Healy, of course, no such question arose. His purpose was not to build a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, but to pursue Pablo’s strategic line of ‘assisting the evolution’ of Bevanism into a supposedly centrist movement.

Healy’s own contributions to Tribune were shallow, journalistic pieces which did nothing to introduce Trotskyist politics to leftward-moving workers within the Bevanite current. But he did give his readers a taste of what passed for ‘orthodox Trotskyism’ within the International Committee of the Fourth International. In November 1955 Tribune published Healy’s fawning account of his visit to Messali Hadj, the Algerian National Movement leader held under house arrest in France. In an article notable for its total lack of political analysis, Healy paid tribute to ‘the amazingly confident personality’ of Messali Hadj and to his ability to create ‘an atmosphere which is unique for its calm, impressive feeling’. Clearly, crawling to Third World nationalists was not something Healy invented in the 1970s! But this was no mere personal deviation on Healy’s part. He was visiting the Algerian leader to convey a message of political solidarity to the MNA from the International Committee, which earlier that month had passed a resolution hailing Messali Hadj as a ‘living symbol’ of the struggle against imperialism. [10]

History records that Messali Hadj became an open agent of French Imperialism; the RCIT provides the link to the Revolutionary History article:

The key year is 1958, as the working-class defeat constituted by De Gaulle’s seizure of power and the creation of the Fifth Republic together
with Messali Hadj (who became the main target of the Algerian FLN) going over to De Gaulle — while Lambert had presented him as 'the Algerian Lenin' — were hard blows for the group. [...] [11]

After the 1985 split the question of Messali Hadj and the MNA was one of the central issues bothering Mike Banda then in the throes of a breakdown following Healy’s expulsion. He gave Gerry Downing a pamphlet, The Algerian Revolution by Messali Hadj (1956) with and introduction by Peter James entirely uncritical of Hadj and with no class analysis whatsoever of the nature of this ‘revolution’; “the Algerian revolution is now developing at a rapid pace… For the Algerian revolution is no more than an extension of the Asian revolution into the continent of North Africa” he tells us in fine Pabloite style in paragraph two of his introduction. Banda revealed that he had escaped death in the mid-1950s by barely an hour in Paris when he arrived to discuss with Hadj’s followers only to find them assassinated by the FLN. This was during the so-called Café Wars between the MNA and the FLN, which the latter won in France and Algeria. Banda’s complaint was that the IC had capitulated to the wrong petty-bourgeois nationalists. We therefore had no substantial disagreement with the RCIT section on Algeria and the IC’s history of unprincipled relationship with semi-colonial bourgeois nationalism.

Healy’s thuggery cannot be the Continuity of Trotskyism

Healy’s internal regime in the later RCP, the Club, the Group, the SLL and the WRP, i.e. at all times when he had sole control of the group, was that of a Stalinist-type bureaucratic centralist regime, the very opposite of that required for a Trotskyist democratic centralist party. There was no internal democracy; Healy’s bullying and thuggery cannot be the continuity of Trotskyism. This is how Healy came to be the first ‘great leader’ of British Trotskyism as recounted by Bob Pitt:

At the 1949 Labour Party conference, Healy made a stirring speech in defence of ‘a democratic principle for which men and women have fought and died in this Movement: the right to speak, to differ, and to have their opinions democratically discussed without fear of expulsion and fear of threats’. 43 But these words would have appeared somewhat ironic to the victims of the purge which Healy now proceeded to carry out within the Club. In February 1950 Haston resigned, unable to tolerate the political atmosphere in Healy’s organisation (‘there was a terrible atmosphere’, Grant recalled, ‘of a low theoretical level, of a really ignorant character’), and a few months later announced his complete break with Trotskyism. Healy then proceeded to expel all those who refused to break personal contact with Haston.

‘Healy was just getting into his stride’, Bernstein and Richardson recount. ‘Up and down the country he went, dissolving, amalgamating and splitting branches apart at will.’ Grant, who had been transferred from his own branch into one led by Healy loyalist Bill Hunter, was ordered to get a job in a factory, and when he refused this instruction to become an industrial militant — a proposal which suggests that Healy was not without a certain warped sense of humour — he too was thrown out. In reaction to the pro-Stalinist line of Healy and the IS, the state capitalist position of Tony Cliff had won a growing number of adherents in the Club; but Healy, incapable of answering this faction theoretically, resorted to organisational suppression as a substitute for political argument, and the Cliffites were also expelled.

‘You cannot remove people and defeat their ideas by bureaucratic expulsion’, Healy had told the 1949 Labour Party conference. The truth of this statement was to be demonstrated when in later years both Grant and Cliff built large centrist groupings which
complemented Healy’s own efforts in politically misleading tens of thousands of genuine militants. In 1950, however, Healy’s victory appeared to be complete. He had succeeded in smashing up what was left of the RCP, driving the overwhelming majority of its members out of the Fourth International and establishing his own exclusive domination over what now passed for Trotskyism in Britain. [12]

Remember the date Bill Hunter’s Under a Stolen Flag was written: 1957. We have the evidence of the Socialist Labour League’s internal regime at the time from the 1959 resignation letter of Peter Fryer. It is outrageous to propose that the following extract could describe a party or regime which represented the continuity of Trotskyism:

We who came into the Trotskyist movement from the Communist Party, hard on the heels of the experience of Hungary and our struggle with the Stalinist bureaucracy in Britain, were assured that in the Trotskyist movement we would find a genuine communist movement, where democracy flourished, where dissenters were encouraged to express their dissent, and where relationships between comrades were in all respects better, more brother and more human than in the party we had come from. Instead we have found at the top of the Trotskyist movement, despite the sacrifices and hard work of the rank and file, a repetition of Communist Party methods of work, methods of leadership, and methods of dealing with persons who are not prepared to kow to the superior wisdom of the “strong man”.

That the ruling clique is an instrument of the general secretary is shown by the way it was elected. How many comrades know that the panel presented by the panel commission to the inaugural conference was first presented in toto by the general secretary to a meeting of the executive committee, as if that was the most natural thing in the world, then presented by the executive committee to the outgoing national committee, then presented by the national committee to the panel commission.

The denial of democracy to members of the organization is summed up by the general secretary himself in two phrases he has employed recently: “I am the party” and in answer to the question “How do you see socialism?” “I don’t care what happens after we take power. All I am interested in is the movement”. Politically this is revisionism, all too clearly reminiscent of Bernstein’s “the movement is everything the goal nothing”. Philosophically it is solipsism: if the movement is everything and “I am the movement”, then “the world is my world” – and “I” inhabit a fantasy world less and less connected with the real world. It is just such a fantasy world that the general secretary inhabits, in which “we” can “watch ports” (to stop me leaving the country!) and be “absolutely ruthless” to the point of carrying out “killings” (as the general secretary de-
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This state of affairs had not improved over the years. *The Battle for Trotskyism* was the name the expelled opposition of 1974 based in the Oxford Cowley car plant gave to its collection of documents on that split, and it certainly was that, even if it did not succeed in its initial revolutionary impulse. It was clearly a left split of serious revolutionaries who did wage a fight for Trotskyism for the next eight years, up to their political collapse to right centrism in 1982 over the Malvinas war. The charges of disloyalty to the party are spurious, who is obliged to be loyal to a party which treats its members in the manner described by Peter Fryer above and who intimidates and physically assaults both its own members and political opponents as a matter of course. How is one to conduct a legitimate political struggle in that atmosphere? Notorious incidents over the years include Mike Banda pulling a knife on John Lawrence during that split, The beating of Ernie Tate outside an SLL meeting (after the 1985 split Chris Bailey admitted to being part of the team who did this on Healy’s instructions), the visiting of Ted Knight’s house late at night with Cliff Slaughter forced to come along to teach him to be a thug also, the beating of Mark Jenkins, Tony Richardson and Healy’s appalling beating of Stuart Carter during a Central Committee meeting because he opposed the line of condemning the IRA over the Brighton bombing of the Tory Conference (no one came to his assistance, did some hold him down for Healy?) and Mike Banda’s assault on Corinna Lotz during the 1985 split.

**Healy would allow no opposition votes**

An open and honest opposition was clearly impossible; Healy would allow no opposition votes, let alone serious political discussion. There was just simply no way of politically fighting him within the organisation; such was the terror regime he operated with his close knit clique of personal followers in the leadership. Bob Pitt relates the appalling situation in the WRP in 1974:

All the conditions for a major crisis in Healy’s organisation were present (because of the falsified prediction of military dictatorship did not happen - SF), and it was not long in breaking. The catalyst was provided by a group of former SLL members linked with the French OCI – Robin Blick, Mark Jenkins and John and Mary Archer – who in January...
1974 began publishing a regular Bulletin aimed at WRP members. Although the Bulletin group held an unduly positive opinion of Healy’s earlier deep entry in the Labour Party, they were very effective at exposing the anti-Marxist absurdities of his current political line. In particular, the group emphasised the need for transitional demands instead of Healy’s ultimatist calls for the immediate nationalisation of major industries and the banks.

Healy’s reaction was to ban WRP members from reading the Bulletin, and to change the party’s constitution, removing the right of expelled members to appeal to conference. Even loyal party members baulked at this. Alan Thornett, the leading figure in the WRP’s factory branch at British Leyland Cowley, voted against Healy’s constitutional changes on the central committee. A furious Healy demanded, and got, from Thornett a written retraction of this vote. When the issue was put to the party’s special conference in July 1974 another Cowley WRPPer, Tony Richardson, made the mistake of asking a question of clarification. He was hauled off to Healy’s office and forced to admit, on pain of expulsion, that he was wrong even to have asked the question.

Hamstrung in their industrial work by Healy’s sectarian ultra-leftism, and faced with a party regime which prevented any serious reassessment of the WRP’s policies, Thornett and his supporters opened up discussions with the Bulletin Group, and began with the latter’s assistance to organise a faction against Healy. In September, Thornett presented a document in his own name urging a return to the Transitional Programme, which was in fact written in large part by Robin Blick. It demonstrated irrefutably that the WRP’s politics were utterly divorced from Trotskyism.

Healy responded to this challenge with his usual anti-Bolshevik methods. Thornett’s views were dishonestly misrepresented to the membership and denounced as a form of Menshevism, while Workers Press editorials suddenly began including the very transitional demands – sliding scales of wages and hours, etc – which Thornett had accused the WRP leadership of rejecting. As it became clear that he was incapable of answering Thornett politically, Healy abandoned any pretence of democratic procedure. In October, Tony Richardson was summoned to the party’s Clapham headquarters and physically assaulted by Healy. A control commission set up to inquire into the violence against Richardson was then rigged by Healy to provide trumped-up charges against Thornett and his supporters in order to justify their expulsion. Some 200 members were thrown out of the WRP, and its main base in industry liquidated. [14]

**Security and the Fourth International**

As the WRP moved to the right following the expulsion of the Thornett group in 1974 it moved back closer to the USFI/Pabloite position on the semi-colonial world and in many other ways. For instance it took almost the exact same position of capitulation to Ayatollah Khomeini on the Iranian Revolution after 1979. In fact it was only from within the USFI section in Iran that any serious opposition to this rejection of the Trotskyist theory of Permanent Revolution emerged. Now what distinguished Healyism from ‘Pabloism’ was the apparent fact that his rival organisations were run by agents of the CIA! The ICL statement on this charade is to the point:

As for North, he was specially chosen by Healy to be the WI “leader” as a reward for his eager services as mouthpiece for Healy’s obscene “Security and the Fourth International” campaign – a psychotic smear job impugning the integrity of the old, revolutionary SWP and Trotsky himself. Slandering the SWP’s Joseph Hansen as a conscious agent of the FBI and the Russian secret police, and an accomplice in the murder of Trotsky, the Northites have for over a decade echoed the Stalinist lie that Trotsky was killed by one of his own. “Security and the Fourth International” grew
straight out of Gerry Healy’s own particular combination of years of political banditry and paranoid megalomania. It was Healy’s way of “explaining” his International Committee’s failure to definitively expose and defeat Pabloism, the revisionist current originated by Michel Pablo which in the early 1950s abandoned Trotskyism with the perspective of liquidation into the mass Stalinist and social-democratic parties. In the 1960s Joseph Hansen became the main spokesman of the Pabloite degeneration of the SWP as it abandoned the struggle for an independent proletarian vanguard. But instead of political struggle the Healyites concocted their devil theory that Hansen had been hired by the U.S. government and the Kremlin Stalinists to destroy the SWP… An indisputable and monstrous fact is that the Healyites hailed the execution of 21 Iraqi Communists by Ba’ath rulers in 1979. Healy’s payoff was blood money!

Gerry Downing heard Healy in early 1980 boast that he had met Bert Ramelson (the CPGB’s Industrial Organiser) in Bagdad airport and he said to him, “aha Ramelson, the boot is on the other foot now” – in other words Healy’s ally Saddam Hussein was executing ‘Stalinists’ just as Stalin had executed Trotskyists. And Healy excused the execution of leftist, Trotskyist and trade union leaders and members by Khomeini in Iran on the same agent-baiting basis; they were all CIA agents who deserved what they got, the same method which Healy applied against Joseph Hansen and the US SWP. This made absolute sure that Healy and his International Committee could never recruit any serious revolutionary fighters or intellectuals in the Middle East or Iran to his version of Trotskyism.

One of the big questions after the 1985 split was when Cliff Slaughter would produce an evaluation of this campaign which he had been so central to founding and developing. He never did. This agent baiting campaign proved nothing apart from hiding the increasing inability of Healy to wage serious political struggle against his opponents in the world Trotskyist movement because he fundamentally agreed with many of their most important political positions.

**Centrists of Trotskyist Origin**

We agree with the International Trotskyist Opposition group on this in its 1992 document, *Theses on the crisis of the Fourth International and the tasks of consistent Trotskyists*:

Point 7. Only the emergence of ultra-Pabloite internal tendencies, which carried liquidationism to its extreme, drove the British section and the SWP/US to launch, in 1953, the struggle against Pablo. Conducted on the basis of the SWP’s federalist conceptions, and so on the basis of relations among the separate national leaderships, this struggle did not come near to achieving all the results which were possible.

Point 8. In practice, the International Committee, based on organizational federalism, did not in any way represent a Bolshevik response to Pabloism. It proved incapable of drawing the slightest lesson from the crisis of the International. The successive policies of its different organizations (the entism of Moreno’s organization in the Peronist movement; the policy of the French PCI in relation to Algerian nationalism and, later, in relation to social democracy; the more and more marked adaptation of the SWP to petty-bourgeois intellectual circles in the US; the zigzags of the British section in its work within the British Labour Party; etc.) clearly demonstrated that the International Committee itself -- even if obviously in a less serious form than the Pabloite International Secretariat -- suffered from opportunist deviations of a centrist type, which its federalist character could only exacerbate.

The great majority of the forces which have degenerated from Trotskyism maintain politics which are generally revisionist and centrist -- or, in a few instances, ultraleft-revisionist -- without breaking openly and completely with revolutionary Marxism.

The Pabloites have distorted the Trotskyist program and adapted it to various nonrevolu-
tionary petty-bourgeois and bureaucratic currents. They have subordinated or denied the role of Trotskyist parties as the necessary expression of the political independence of the working class, in favour of adaptation to these nonproletarian and nonrevolutionary forces. The organizations of the International Committee of 1963-1971 tended to combine national-Trotskyist adaptationism with extreme forms of national-Trotskyist sectarianism (Lambert most clearly characterized by capitulation to social democracy, Healy by collapse into crazy sectarianism).

...In continuing to proclaim their adherence, even in a distorted fashion, to the revolutionary program of Trotskyism, these organizations continue to attract militants breaking towards revolutionary politics from social democracy, Stalinism, and conventional forms of centrisim.

...For the orthodox Trotskyists to turn their backs on the advanced workers being drawn toward Trotskyist positions by the “Trotskyist-centrist” organizations and the militants fighting for Trotskyist positions within them would be an act of sectarianism of historically tragic proportions. Rather, the task of orthodox Trotskyists is to develop an international tendency oriented strategically toward reconstructing the Fourth International through linking up with, supporting, and organizing every struggle for Trotskyism, every genuinely Trotskyist development throughout the world, both within and outside the major “Trotskyist-centrist” organizations. [16]

However saying that it did not even represent a left centrist opposition rejects the fight itself and the effects that fight had on the ranks of these groups and on later generations of those who were fighting to be genuine Trotskyists. In equating the cynicism of the leaders with the idealism and self-sacrifice of the ranks it is classically sectarian and rejects the progressive effect on the body politics of the subjective revolutionary left of even a left centrist Trotsky group. In fact this analysis seems to reject the notion that there is such a category as left centrist Trotskyist groups at all.

And we assert that the degeneration of the Fourth International cannot be compared to the degeneration of the Second (Social Democratic) International or the Third (Stalinist) International. By definition centrist groups are those who mix elements of the revolutionary programme with reformism. In particular within these centrist groups again and again the Trotskyist Transitional Programme and method are the points of reference for oppositional currents and individual oppositionists. The leadership is accused of betraying the Programme, of being centrist, of capitulation to reformism and/or Stalinism. Invariably the degeneration of the group
is initially set at the point and on the single issue where the oppositional group or individual has come into conflict with the leadership or shortly before that, when the crisis of the group is seen as emerging. Once historical reasons begin to be sought for this degeneration outside their own tradition, identifying their own current as part of the problem of post WWII Trotskyism, then real advance is possible.

Severe crisis may see the opposition group deal with the entire history of Trotskyism as was the case with the WRP split of 1985 where the entire group, which this time uniquely constituted the majority, were obliged to account for their own past political errors and betrayals and then the entire history of Trotskyism and its post-war degeneration (this lasted for just over a year in the WRP, from late 1985 to early 1987) as recounted by Gerry Downing in the WRP Explosion.

The basic premise that I have set out to demonstrate is, that despite sincere efforts on the part of the rank-and-file of the party’s members and some of its leaders, it failed in the task it set itself in the immediate aftermath of the expulsion of Healy; that of the regeneration of Trotskyism and the orientation to the reconstruction of the Fourth International. The revolutionary impulse of the party to seek out the reasons for the degeneration of the Trotskyist movement in the post-war period was wrecked because those leaders, who had been responsible, with Healy, for many of the betrayals of Trotskyist principles in the past were unable to overcome their own corruption. [17]

**Self-proclaimed Trotskyist groups have not crossed class lines**

The vast majority of self-proclaimed Trotskyist groups have not become outright counter-revolutionary and have not crossed class lines leading to the slaughter of millions like the Second International did after 4 August 1914 and the Stalinists Third International did by allowing Hitler to come to power in 1933 to decapitate the best organised working class on the planet and set in train the political events that led to WWII. And the German tragedy happened without a struggle by the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and with no honest assessment of why and how it happened. Of course some groups who were Trotskyist have crossed class lines, like the LSSP in Sri Lanka, Michel Pablo own current within the USFI and some South American groups but they have been expelled from the ranks of Trotskyist centrist groups and are no longer seen as in the same tradition by those who regard themselves as Trotskyists. We do not include state capitalist groups like the SWP (UK) or its offshoots internationally in the category of Trotskyist centrists; internal struggles there are directed in the main at the ‘IS tradition’ and there is no talk in the current split crises in the SWP, for example, of the leadership having betrayed Trotskyism. Like the US Workers World Party and the Weekly Worker/CPGB and others of Stalinist/Maoist origins not tied to any degenerated or deformed workers’ states they may now be categorised simply as centrists.

In our fight against the positions of RCIT and LFI there is a further issue as well as the Anti Imperialist United Front (AIUF) and revolutionary defencism; another key element for analysis of the degeneration of the Fourth International: the question of the class character of the Trotskyist party. A petty bourgeois cancer, Shachtmanism, destroyed the Fourth International; the question of the class character of the Trotskyist party. A petty bourgeois cancer, Shachtmanism, destroyed the Fourth International founded in 1938. It was an internationalist Bolshevik organization that struggled to gain real influence in the labor movement. It directed important political and industrial working class struggles; its biggest section, the American SWP, led the Teamsters strikes in Minneapolis in the 1930s. However Trotsky knew the
risk that both the SWP and especially smaller sections could be hegemonised by the petty bourgeoisie.

The biggest fight waged by him in his later years was against the petty bourgeois tendency lodged within the Fourth International. The minority fraction of the SWP was led by Max Shachtman, an intellectual centrist who renounced defence of the USSR in the approach to World War II, the materialist dialectic and finally renounced Marxism itself. This reactionary tendency, Max Shachtman’s International Socialist League, refused to defend the Stalinist-led forces, claiming that their victory “would mean nothing but the extension of the slave power of Stalinism over the whole territory of Korea” (New International, July-August 1950). Shachtman defended the Bay of Pigs CIA mercenary dogs who invaded Cuba in 1961 and the US war against Vietnam.

The epigones of Trotskyism today as LIT, IMT, CWI, USFI, LFI, ITU, FT, FLT, RCIT and other “internationals” who proclaim themselves Trotskyists objectively defended the intervention of mercenary agents of imperialism in Libya and now in Syria against semi-colonial bourgeois governments, accepting the imperialist embellishing this tactic as “revolutions”. Degeneration repeats itself because, as the old Bolshevik warned:

A qualification must be made to this extent – that not only Shachtman’s personal failing is embodied therein, but the fate of a whole revolutionary generation which because of a special conjuncture of historical conditions grew up outside the labor movement. More than once in the past I have had occasion to speak and write about the danger of these valuable elements degenerating despite their devotion to the revolution. What was an inescapable characteristic of adolescence in its day has become a weakness. Weakness invites disease. If neglected, the disease can become fatal. To escape this danger it is nec-

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David Broder recounts the history of Arbeiter und Soldat: “It was with this aim of winning over German troops to a common struggle against the belligerent imperialists that in summer 1943 the French Trotskyists turned to organising among the German troops occupying France...In early October 1943 a meeting of Trotskyist activists and German soldiers held in Brest was found out by the Gestapo, who arrested all the participants. 17 German soldiers as well as Robert Cruau, who organised fraternisation in the region, were executed on 6 October. Once the Gestapo were on the trail, the Trotskyists were doomed. On 7 October 18 Fourth International Committees activists in Brittany were arrested, along with much of the Paris organisation. In total around fifty French activists were rounded up, and many of them were tortured, executed or sent to concentration camps. Similarly, as many as fifty Der Arbeiter soldier comrades were put to death, and their paper never reappeared. Arbeiter und Soldat was itself out of action until May 1944, such were the losses suffered by the Fourth International Committees. 

http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/soldat/broder.htm
necessary to open a new chapter consciously in the development of the party. The propagandists and journalists of the Fourth International must begin a new chapter in their own consciousness. It is necessary to re-arm. It is necessary to make an about-face on one’s own axis: to turn one’s back to the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, and to face toward the workers” [19]

The disease was fatal; it destroyed the Fourth International. But now we live in far worse times, almost all the Trotskyists groups have failed this test, those who do not directly link the banner of the Fourth International to the imperialist re-colonisation at best chose a third camp and elect not to fight for the victory of the oppressed nation in the war, creating confusion and distaste for Trotskyism by workers in Imperialist countries and semi-colonial ones alike. Their stance is typical of Shachtman whose sterile and petty bourgeois propagandism did such damage to the Fourth International. Although at first the anti-Pabloist wing, the International Committee (IC), has represented a more progressive left centrist sector against the revisionist liquidationism of Pablo and Mandel, leaders of the International Secretariat (IS), today all sections of that split are completely useless for the reconstruction of the world party of proletarian revolution.

Only by a principled break with pseudo-Trotskyism and a radical change of direction towards the labor movement and working class can regenerated the Fourth International. As Trotsky warned above: “The propagandists and journalists of the Fourth International must begin a new chapter in their own consciousness. It is necessary to re-arm. It is necessary to make an about-face on one’s own axis: to turn one’s back to the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, and to face toward the workers”. [20]

Our splits and fusion approach to the subjectively revolutionary cadres of the self-proclaimed Trotskyist groups will gather together the forces to begin the revolutionary regeneration and reconstruction of the Fourth International.
Notes

[2] Bob Pitt’s note: Healy took the phrase from Trotsky’s Where is Britain Going? Trotsky, however, emphasised that ‘a workers’ government created by parliamentary means would be forced to construct new revolutionary organs for itself, resting upon the trade unions and working class organisations in general’. This had nothing in common with Bevan’s commitment to a parliamentary road to socialism. Leon Trotsky’s Writings On Britain, CHAPTER V, The question of revolutionary force http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/trotsky/works/britain/ch05.htm
[8] Socialist Outlook (1948 - 1954), the first Socialist Outlook was the name of the newspaper published by the Socialist Fellowship from December 1948 until 1954. For much of that period, it was edited by John Lawrence and was formally published by an association of left wing members of the Labour Party. The paper’s editorial policy was controlled by a group around Gerry Healy. This Trotskyist group was privately known as The Club. Socialist Outlook was banned by the Labour Party’s National Executive Committee in late 1954 and soon expired. The Club moved to selling Tribune instead. Wiki Socialist Outlook, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Outlook
[9] Ibid. Socialist Outlook (1987 - 2009), The second Socialist Outlook was the publication of the International Socialist Group, the Trotskyist organisation which was the British section of the Fourth International between 1987 and 2009. Launched as a bi-monthly magazine in May 1987, the title Socialist Outlook was partly selected because, at that time, most of the ISG’s members were also active in the Labour Party. It was published as a fortnightly newspaper between 1992 and 2002. It was then a quarterly magazine and used the ISSN 0951-8657.
The vast majority of self-proclaimed Trotskyist groups have not become outright counter-revolutionary and have not crossed class lines leading to the slaughter of millions like the Second International did after 4 August 1914 and the Stalinists Third International did by allowing Hitler to come to power in 1933 to decapitate the best organised working class on the planet and set in train the political events that led to WWII. And the German tragedy happened without a struggle by the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and with no honest assessment of why and how it happened. Of course some groups who were Trotskyist have crossed class lines, like the LSSP in Sri Lanka, Michel Pablo own current within the USFI and some South American groups but they have been expelled from the ranks of Trotskyist centrist groups and are no longer seen as in the same tradition by those who regard themselves as Trotskyists.