

# What Happened to the Workers' Socialist League?

By Tony Gard (as amended by Chris Edwards and others), September 1993

Note by Gerry D, October 2019: This is the only version I have of Tony Gard's document, which contains the unauthorised amendments as explained in the rather tetchy note by Chris Edwards below.

[Note by Chris Edwards (May 2002). War is the sternest possible test for any Trotskyist organisation. While many British organisations failed this test in the case of the Malvinas/Falklands War (e.g. the Militant group with its "workers war" against Argentina position), the British proto-ITO comrades did attempt to defend a principled position against the bankrupt positions of the leadership of their own organisation, the British Workers Socialist League (WSL).

This is an account of the tendency struggle over the Malvinas war and many other issues to do with British imperialism. This document was written with the stated purpose of being a "balance sheet" of the tendency struggle. It was somewhat ironic that, Tony G, the author of most of this document, and the person who had played the least part in the WSL tendency struggle during 1982-3, felt himself most qualified to sit in judgement on the efforts of those who had been centrally involved in the tendency struggle. This was despite his insistence that he did not wish to do so at the beginning of this account (see below).

In fact, one of the barely disguised purposes of this "balance sheet" was to rubbish and belittle the efforts of the comrades who had been centrally involved in the tendency struggle. This was done in the knowledge that he himself was not a subject of this criticism since he had only been a candidate member of the WSL throughout most of the period of the tendency struggle. He had consequently played little role in the tendency struggle. It takes a certain amount of arrogance for someone who was peripheral to a tendency struggle to presume to pontificate about the efforts of others who were at the sharp end. One consequent shortcoming of this document was that Tony G was unable to comprehend the dynamics of the struggle and the context in which decisions were made. He had to rely on second-hand information and documents. The result was that it was a largely scholastic document. Subsequent amendments made by those who were directly involved in the struggle made it less so. What was the context that Tony G underestimated? It was that of a circle of young, inexperienced, scattered, provincial, and overwhelmingly rank and file members, many of whom had never been in a tendency struggle before, who had to take on their own more experienced leadership in the middle of a war.

Nevertheless, this is the only account of the WSL tendency struggle of 1982-83 and the subsequent attempts of the participants to regroup after being expelled from the WSL. And despite the overly-cynical approach to the tendency struggle that permeates the document, it nevertheless records the main events and positions taken. Much of this account may seem excessively detailed and long-winded—Tony G always did like the sound of his own voice. The important point to bear in mind when reading it however, is that the crisis and disarray of the WSL and the opposition which developed within it was precipitated by a very real issue—a colonial war against Argentina. A group of people struggled to change a reactionary position in their organisation during an imperialist war. This document records that struggle].

# 1. Introduction

This assessment and balance sheet of the history of the British Workers Socialist League (WSL) was originally produced by Tony G, the secretary of the British Revolutionary Internationalist League (RIL), with the assistance of other members of that organisation. It was endorsed by the RIL Central Committee in 1989. Despite pleas by RIL members, it was never endorsed by the International Trotskyist Committee (ITC), the international organisation of which the RIL was the British section. Nor were any plans made for its publication. This was consistent with the client/patron relationship which had developed between the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL), the US section and dominant group of the ITC, and the RIL. The RWL was suspicious of any independent political development, such as the statements in the balance sheet about the reassertion of the progressive character of the struggle for Trotskyism carried out by the WSL between 1974 and 1980. Such a reassertion was seen as a challenge to the RWL's political, financial and organisational dominance of the ITC and its notion that it was the source of modern Trotskyist orthodoxy.

The RWL owed its domination of the ITC to a network of unhealthy clique relationships which increasingly acted as a substitute for published political positions which could then be put to the test in the class struggle. This regime facilitated increasingly sectarian, posturing interventions, particularly in the movements against the 1991 Gulf War and for abortion rights in the US and in Anti-Fascist Action in Britain and a turn away from the fight to regenerate the Fourth International. The revolt against this degeneration resulted in a split in the ITC in 1991 and the later establishment of the International Trotskyist Opposition (ITO). We are now publishing this assessment of the WSL ourselves in an honest attempt to draw up an objective balance sheet of the most positive reassertion of the Trotskyist programme since the Fourth International split in 1953 as well as the WSL's subsequent crisis and its immediate aftermath.

In fact, although Tony G.'s original document as a whole pointed to the healthy character of the struggle for Trotskyism in the WSL, and the short lived Workers Internationalist League (WIL), many aspects of it tended to denigrate that struggle and those who waged it in order to fit it into an exaggerated role for the RWL. In particular, the fact the RWL's clients found themselves on the wrong side of the split in the WIL in 1984, in opposition to the British supporters of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC), necessitated the belittling of the political struggles of those who were in substantial political agreement with the TILC. This included the GBL of Italy (later renamed the LOR) and the TAF of Denmark. The WSL was the British section of the TILC. Therefore the original document has been amended and altered substantially by those comrades now in the ITO who participated in that struggle. The RIL was formed in November 1984 as the British section of the ITC by a group of comrades all of whom had been members of the Workers Socialist League until their expulsion in May 1983 and of the Workers Internationalist League (WIL) until its splits in January 1984 and Summer 1984. Tony G. had been a full time organiser for Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League (SLL) in the 1960s before dropping out of revolutionary politics until he joined the post fusion WSL in 1982. There is therefore, a continuity of personnel between the WSL and the RIL. Though those who formed the RIL had struggled against liquidationism and insular national Trotskyism in the WSL and TILC and against sectarianism in the WIL, represented by supporters of Workers Power and of the South American based Fourth International Tendency (FIT). The latter's sectarian attitude to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) led them to attack the LOR, which had fused with the Italian USFI section to pursue the struggle for Trotskyism.

Producing a balance sheet of a movement or a struggle is never, for Marxists, an academic exercise or a question of scoring points (who was right or who was wrong). It is a serious question of understanding our history by analysing it in its material context, in order to guide our action. The defeat and retreats in the class struggle in Britain have produced a state of retreat and confusion among those forces claiming to be Trotskyist, which have had to pay a terrible price for British contempt for theory. The degeneration of leadership and squandering of cadre have been frightful. The desertion by the intellectuals (helped on their way by philistine economism and activism) has been almost total. There was only one future RIL member on a leading body of the fused WSL, Cde. Sue E, and none from the pre-fusion WSL and only two members of the National Committee of the WIL, nor a single member of the initial WSL break from Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party in 1974.

The struggle to develop the original perspectives of TILC and build a section of the ITC in Britain had to be taken up by a dispersed group of rank-and-file and, to a large extent, activist members, in a situation of widespread retreat, major attacks on the working class, and with the enormous weight of the Labourite tradition and its associated economist trade unionism in Britain. The problems make the theoretical development

and rearming of our movement desperately important. The alternative is to use our problems as a source of apologies and complaints: if we take that road, all we can do is try to preserve the memory of the old WSL until “something turns up”. That road leads only to political oblivion. An objective analysis of the WSL (its origins, its relationship to the crisis of the Fourth International, its development, degeneration, and fusion with the International Communist League and also of the struggle of the Internationalist Tendency/Internationalist Faction (IT/IF) and the failure of the WIL to overcome the IT/IF’s contradictions) is essential to the future of Trotskyism

## **2. 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 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 post war 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 Trotskyites 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 revisionist response to developments in post war Stalinism including the view that Tito’s nationalist Stalinism in Yugoslavia was a form of centrism. Subsequently there was no attempt to re-examine the lessons of this episode.

**(d.)** The 1953 split was a response to the effects on national sections of Pablo’s generalisation of his liquidationist orientation to Stalinism. For The Club this meant a clash of liquidationisms Pablo’s liquidation into Stalinism vs. Healy’s liquidation into social democracy. Both sides of the split (Pablo’s International Secretariat and the International Committee of Cannon, Healy, and Lambert) were part of the Fourth International’s centrist degeneration. There were positive aspects to the International Committee’s stand for the political independence of Trotskyists from Stalinism. Nevertheless, the International Committee remained trapped within national Trotskyist responses and thus never conducted an examination of the post war 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 International Committee split, was illustrated by The Club’s generally principled and quite successful intervention into the Communist Party’s crisis in 1956. This did not, however, mean a break with Labour Party liquidationist politics, as the poli-

tics of the 1958 Rank-and-file Conference indicated. However, it did provide a basis for the “left turn” with the formation of the Socialist Labour League as a public Trotskyist organisation (while continuing 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 regime. 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 latter have tended to adapt to the objective movement of the working class. The spontaneous struggles of workers and movements in the trade unions have been seen as the forward movement of workers breaking from reformism. This has led to syndicalist and economist adaptations of Marxism to the present level of consciousness of Rank-and-file movements in the trade unions. It has generally been clothed in the guise of orthodoxy an attack on the adaptation of the International Secretariat/USFI currents to petty-bourgeois movements. While much of that criticism was correct, the orthodoxy itself was poisoned. Fundamentally, it represented a legitimization of the equally revisionist workerism of the International Committee tradition. One particularly important aspect of this form of objectivism has been the attitude of the International Committee currents to the movements of the specially oppressed. At best this has been a nod in the direction of democratic rights for example, on abortion at worst outright hostility for example, to lesbians and gay men .

Movements of the specially oppressed were universally attacked as petty-bourgeois, single issue politics, and a diversion from the class struggle. None of this represented in reality any more of a struggle for the political independence of the working class than the International Secretariat/USFI's forms of objectivism. As the attitude to the specially oppressed shows, it has left workers open to and even reinforced reactionary bourgeois ideology. It has reflected an accommodation to the prejudices of the more conservative, more privileged layers of the working class.

In the SLL/WRP these tendencies were reflected in adaptation to the rank-and-file militancy of the shop stewards movements in the 1960s and early 1970s and were reinforced hand-in-hand with its increasingly sectarian, catastrophist turn. Indeed, there was a direct link between the objective process of workers' struggles as conceived by the SLL/WRP and catastrophism - the crisis and collapse of the capitalist economy pushing the working class further to the left and forcing it to break with reformism. However, this did not immunise the SLL/WRP or any other International Committee currents, from the very same accommodation to bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces that they attacked in the International Secretariat/USFI, so that the WRP was to display an uncritical worship of Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, and Yasser Arafat unsurpassed by anything in the history of Pabloism.

### 3. The WSL Split and Its Development in the 1970s

It was against this degenerate sectarian distortion of Trotskyism that Alan T. and his supporters formed their opposition. While there is an element of truth in the assertion that the origins of Alan T.'s opposition was pragmatic, it is dangerous and misleading to read back from later developments to argue that he was simply protecting his base in Oxford. It was an intensely political struggle.

The pragmatic elements in its origins were the conflict between the increasing sectarianism and catastrophism of the WRP and the actual situation in the class struggle and the destructive effect of this conflict on the work of Trotskyist militants in those areas where they had their most significant base primarily in the Oxford car factories. If that was all, if the opposition had not gone beyond the rejection of Healy's crazy sectarianism, it would have amounted to very little. It would very quickly have collapsed into some form of syndicalist opportunism. That did not happen because the opposition consciously struggled for a principled Trotskyist response which they based on assertion of the validity of the Transitional Programme, not as an icon, but in practice in the class struggle. Thus, in the first paragraph of his first oppositional document, Alan T. writes:

"I submit this statement to conference both as a critique of the wrong positions of the party, positions which in my view threaten to liquidate the party, and as an attempt to create the conditions to direct the party back to the founding document of the Fourth International the Transitional Programme." (Alan T., "Correct the Wrong Positions of the Party Return to the Transitional Programme", *The Battle for Trotskyism: Documents of the Opposition Expelled from the Workers Revolutionary Party in 1974*, 2nd ed., London: Folrose Books, 1979, p.1)

He then goes on to give an account of how his differences with Healy's analysis of the economic and political situation developed from the time of the 1973 oil crisis, of the difficulties Healy's analysis and method created in trade union work, and of problems with Healy's economic analysis and mechanical view of the relationship between economics and politics. While there are significant weaknesses in Alan T.'s own analysis (which we will have to return to), these sections do constitute a wide ranging critique of Healyism, at least as it had developed in the early to mid-1970s Alan T. then turns to the question of the Transitional Programme.

He starts by contrasting the maximum programme approach of the WRP to Trotsky's method in the Transitional Programme and then goes on to examine in considerable detail the question of workers' control and its role in the Russian revolution. None of this nor the remainder of the document dealing with the WRP's sectarianism nor the second document which begins an analysis of the roots of Healyite sectarianism and of its international perspectives can be regarded as anything other than a serious, profound, and political struggle. This second document exposes the myth of Healy's fight against Pablo prior to the 1953 split and begins a critical examination of the history of the International Committee's propagandist, sectarian method. It was a political struggle because of the character of its pragmatic origins not the attempt of a senior shop steward or a party functionary to protect his base but of a revolutionary fighter drawn to Trotskyism to overcome the problems which his sectarian centrist organisation was creating for his struggle to win workers to Trotskyism. That this attempt was incomplete and contained a number of important weaknesses was inevitable, but it does not cancel out its predominantly positive character. It is extremely important to recognise this because of the tendency of some ex-WSL members to denigrate or to minimize the significance of the Alan T. opposition struggle in the WRP. For instance, comrade Aly M., in a privately circulated document intended for publication by the rump WIL, writes as follows:

"It can be seen that Alan T.'s response to Healy's ultraleftism developed because of the near impossibility of the application of positions that stated that the trade union leaders were 'corporatists' and that a military coup was imminent by comrades in positions of responsibility in industry.... In short, Alan T. belatedly

took up some sort of challenge to Healy to defend his own position at Cowley.” (Aly M., A Balance Sheet of the SLL, WSL and WIL, 1 May 1986, p. 15)

Aly M. backs up his interpretation in two ways. First he places a one-sided emphasis on the shortcomings of Alan T.’s oppositional documents. Then he makes great play with the links between Alan T. and the Bulletin Group led by Robin Blick and Mark Jenkins. On Alan T.’s weaknesses he makes a number of correct points, to which it would not be difficult to add and to which we will have to add points of more political importance than this balance sheet contains, concerned as it is with Alan T.’s failure to date Healy’s ultraleftism far enough back in the history of the Socialist Labour League. However, this omits any mention of the detailed attention which the documents give to transitional demands and to international questions. On the links with the Bulletin Group (the British supporters of the French OCI, led by Pierre Lambert which was the origin of the Socialist Labour Group), Aly M. has the following to say:

“...to a large extent Alan T. had borrowed political positions from the Blick-Jenkins group to decorate his challenge to Healy. This challenge, though valid nevertheless, was motivated by Alan T.’s desire to defend his base in Cowley from Healy’s ultraleftism. It did not accompany any further efforts to break with Healyism. Here the significance of the authorship of the documents becomes very great as the documents contain quite well developed criticisms of not only WRP political positions but also Healy’s method. These criticisms clearly pointed towards the subsequent formulation of a full critique and break from Healyism through a balance sheet.... Once they had been expelled from the WRP and been forced to set up the WSL the Alan T.-John L. leadership decided in effect that the politics they had taken from the Bulletin group had served their purpose and... embarked on a course of reliving the early 1960s SLL, albeit trimmed of some of its worst features.” (Aly M., A Balance Sheet of the SLL, WSL, and WIL, 1 May 1986, p. 17)

The belief that a break with Healyism could be made ‘through a balance sheet’ (not without one, certainly, but not just ‘through’ one) betrays an idealist approach to political questions. The assertion that there were no ‘further efforts to break with Healyism’ is simply untrue. On the substantive issue of Bulletin Group influence, Aly M. is extremely vague. Even the Bulletin Group’s 1976 document from which he quotes only claims that “substantial sections” (which ones unspecified, in the quotation at least) of Alan T.’s documents were written by a leading member of the group. From this he infers that the politics of Alan T. were taken in totality from the Bulletin Group, without indicating the links between their politics. One is left wondering why the Bulletin Group did not come into the open as the principled fighters for Trotskyism!!

It is necessary to examine this point in some detail, not because we have to defend the past political honour of Alan T., Tony R., and John L. (which they certainly will not do!!) and certainly not because we seek to sanctify our political origins in the WSL, but because important questions of method are involved. First, the approach is fundamentally un-marxist. Second, it is the basis for a sectarian attitude on the question of the struggle for the reconstruction of the Fourth International. It fails totally to understand the contradictory nature of Trotskyist-centrism and is therefore unable to recognise the dynamics of leftward moving oppositional struggles in these movements (of which the Alan T. opposition was, for a whole number of reasons, a particularly important example).

Such currents are simply ‘marked’: so much for effort, but a list of crosses against their bad positions. Hence a sectarian inability to envisage any strategy or tactics to intervene in such developments. It is not, of course, to be denied that the Bulletin Group did have influence and connections with the Alan T. opposition. It is reported that Alan T. himself confirmed this at the public meeting called by the WRP immediately after the expulsion of Gerry Healy in October 1985. It appears that the Bulletin Group were circulating Alan T. and other oppositionists with their material prior to their expulsion and had contact with Alan T., which did apparently include involvement in drafting the documents. Since the Lambertists shared the same objectivist/ catastrophist method as the Healyites, this influence was a political limitation on the opposition.

## **Evolved to the Left**

The two important points, however, are that the Bulletin Group influence was a secondary factor in the emergence of the opposition and that it (the opposition) evolved to the left, not to the right with the Lambertists. The life of the opposition in the WRP was inevitably very short, and, of course, it was impossible to widen the opposition’s impact much beyond Oxford. A good number of those expelled were ‘suspects’ rather than members associated with the opposition. Even some members associated with Alan T.’s opposition went in other directions politically after their expulsion. The new organisation formed after the expulsion, the Workers Socialist League, thus emerged from an incomplete and partially developed political struggle.

The test would be its ability to develop politically as an independent organisation. Turning again to AM's balance sheet, we find the following quotation from a review by John L. of *The Battle for Trotskyism*:

“This [the expulsions] immediately confronted the opposition comrades with a dilemma either to immediately organise a centralised grouping, now inevitably outside the WRP, to ensure a continuity of the fight for leadership inside the working class or engage first in lengthy haggling over abstract “perspectives” and “orientation” in the course of which the inherent strength of the movement and cohesion of its forces could be wasted away.”

(John L., Review of *The Battle for Trotskyism: Documents of the Opposition Expelled from the WRP in 1974*, Socialist Press, no. 30, 24 March 1976, p. 4)

This is his only quotation from Socialist Press, throughout its six and a half year history (1975-1981). It is used to maintain the line of argument adopted towards the initial opposition within the WRP, that is, to stress the activism and contempt for theory of the WSL from its origins and to minimise its post expulsion development. In fact, while activism was an aspect of the one-sided development of the WSL, it was by no means the whole story. While the passage quoted contains serious problems (‘continuity’ with what?), it also indicates something of the contradictory character of the WSL, in particular its commitment to the political struggle in the working class.

The strengths of the WSL, during the 1975-1979 period, were its serious orientation to workers in struggle, including its principled intervention in and leadership of a number of important struggles, and to the application of the Transitional Programme in these struggles, while at the same time taking a principled stand on the Trotskyist programme internationally in opposition to Healy's abandonment of permanent revolution and the USFP's tail-ending of guerrillaist and Castroite politics. Moreover, what was crucially important was that the WSL broke with the notion that the International Committee or any other fragment of the Fourth International represented the political or organisational continuity of Trotskyism.

## **Healyite View**

In general, its practice recognised the centrist character of these leaderships and asserted the need for a struggle to reconstruct the Fourth International. Its international work was based on this approach, culminating in the formation of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee in December 1979 as the basis for the formation of an international democratic-centralist tendency. In this context, the WSL broke with the Healyite view of Cuba as a capitalist state, recognising it as a deformed workers' state ruled by an unreformable Stalinist bureaucracy in opposition to the USFP's view that political revolution is not required in Cuba.

The WSL also broke with the WRP's essentially British chauvinist position on Ireland and took up the defence of the Republican movement. This is obviously a vital question for Trotskyists in Britain and was particularly important for the WSL, since the section on Ireland in Alan T.'s second opposition document is extremely weak: while it criticises the International Committee's sectarianism and lack of programme on Ireland, it shows only the most abstract acknowledgement of the application of the theory of permanent revolution to Ireland's uncompleted national tasks. Thus it ignores the Republican movement totally, while arguing for intervention in the Irish Labour Party and the Northern Ireland Labour Party.

Its healthy development is further indicated by its ability to apply permanent revolution in a principled way in some of the major tests for Trotskyists during that period, particularly the Iranian revolution and the Iraq-Iran War, the Nicaraguan revolution, and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The WSL also started to make a genuine break from the backwardness of the SLL/WRP and the International Committee generally on the struggles of the specially oppressed in particular with the development of a cadre of women involved in important struggles and the development of the WSL's women's paper.

It took important steps to break with the Healyites' homophobia and to defend lesbian and gay male struggles (the basis of its break with the Communist Internationalist League of Greece). It must be stressed that the WSL did not develop an organic Marxist understanding of the importance of the struggles of the specially oppressed. What was done was achieved without the serious involvement of the central leadership.

Nevertheless, the fact that an important layer of women activists and a significant group of intellectuals were drawn to the WSL and were able to have a positive involvement in its development, testifies to its overall healthy character for a period of several years.

## 4. The Political Weaknesses of the Old WSL

It has been necessary to assert and examine at some length the overall political strengths and positive development of the WSL in order to grasp its contradictory character and its degeneration. It would be a serious mistake to regard the WSL as an attempt to restore the 'best period' of the SLL of some period in the early to mid-1960s; nevertheless, the WSL failed to overcome the contradictions of the SLL's 'left turn'.

The weaknesses of the WSL have been discussed at some length in the first part of "The Crisis of Proletarian Leadership and the Crisis of TILC: A Balance Sheet of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee" (International Internal Bulletin of the International Trotskyist Committee [IIB ITC]), 1985, no. 2) and to a lesser extent in the ITC founding conference's resolution on "The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle" IIB ITC, 1985, no. 1), to which comrades should refer.

The weaknesses of the WSL were closely related to its political strengths its intervention in the class struggle and its assertion of the Transitional Programme, as well as its commitment to international work. In Alan T.'s opposition documents it is correctly pointed out that Healy had reduced the Transitional Programme to the recital of its first sentence. The WSL argued for and practised the use of transitional demands, as a bridge from workers' present reformist consciousness to revolutionary consciousness of the need for the working class to take power and correctly focused on the crucial importance of workers' control within all transitional demands. However, there were two closely related problems with the WSL's assertion of transitional demands. First of all, the demands they used were those most closely related to their immediate practical work that is, to trade union work in particular, the sliding scale of wages (immediately important in the conditions of high inflation in which the WSL first developed) and opening the books.

There was little attention to the wider use and development of transitional demands and thus some tendency to concentrate on demands which had the most immediate relevance to particular struggles of trade unionists, which were, naturally, sectional struggles. Of course, sectional struggles will be one of the areas in which it is practically necessary to intervene on the basis of the Transitional Programme. In the nature of things, these will, in most periods, be the most numerous of our practical interventions. But transitional demands go beyond sectional limits.

Within the particular struggle they represent the necessary interests of the working class as a whole: they thus present to workers the need to extend, unite, and generalise their struggles, even where this cannot be immediately realised in practice. This aspect of transitional demands, of the process of building a bridge to revolutionary consciousness, was insufficiently stressed by the WSL or by Alan T.'s opposition documents. It should have led to a consideration of the role of less immediate demands. The WSL's failure in this respect meant that there was no real struggle to apply the method of the Transitional Programme to work among the specially oppressed. This tendency to restrict transitional demands to those which were of clearest practical relevance to the immediate work of the WSL's worker militants is related to, indeed, springs from the second problem. The WSL always presented transitional demands in terms of winning the mass of the workers, thus in generally agitational terms. For instance, an article in one of the early issues of Socialist Press contains the following quotation from the Transitional Programme:

"It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between the present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution. The article proceeds through reference to the question of workers' control in the Bolsheviks' agitation in 1917 to the following statement: It is essential in preparing a demand for a factory meeting or trade union branch that it is not seen just as a resolution but part of this preparation, a part of mobilising the masses. The demand of "open the books" must therefore include an elected committee of trade unionists..." (Our Fight for the Transitional Programme", Socialist Press, no. 8, 15 May 1975, p. 6; emphasis in original)

This is all completely correct, and we have to be absolutely clear, as this Socialist Press article is, that it is our fundamental aim (to win the masses to Trotskyism). However, the emphasis is one-sided. There is no attention to the educative role of transitional demands in our propaganda work, in situations where it is unlikely that we will win support from wide layers of workers. In other words, there is a failure to consider the importance of the Transitional Programme in winning and consolidating the political vanguard. This was a general problem with the WSL's political work. Understandable oppositional documents in the WRP or in an early article on the politics of the split, such as the above, the failure of the Alan T. leadership to overcome this problem was to prove a central weakness. The WSL, after all, was a relatively small group, mainly a propaganda group, despite its significance in Cowley and the high proportion of workers among the membership and lead-

ership. It never had much above 150 members. For such a group the question of winning and consolidating the vanguard had to have a very high priority.

This was never properly understood by the WSL leadership. If anything, there was a tendency to brush the question aside, as if it illustrated a sectarian mentality. Thus, the British Perspectives of the Workers Socialist League (drafted in November 1977 and adopted by the WSL's second national conference in February 1978) contains a lengthy section, "Fighting for the Programme", which starts with the following comments:

"There is a direct relationship between our understanding of the political crisis and fighting in practice for the transitional programme. In the rarefied atmosphere of sectarian discussion circles, the WSL is termed "workerist". This is because unlike them we have never seen the central question as abstractly "educating" the class, but as developing workers' consciousness in the course of action in which our own consciousness is also transformed. In this way we actively combat spontaneity and trade union consciousness within the wider labour movement and within our own ranks. In their eagerness to avoid opportunism, sectarians find themselves scared to get into the water of the class struggle. At most they throw in an exploratory stone or two while sitting on the bank. The WSL however has fought for its principled positions within the mass workers' organisations. And, though our successes have tended to be confined to one or two areas, we have developed our programme and perspective in this way!! The following thirty two paragraphs detail experience of and plans for these practical interventions:

1. the fight against the Social Contract in the unions and for the sliding scale of wages, including taking the slogan "regain and defend living standards" into the unions at Cowley;
2. support for seamen, Port Talbot steelworkers, and Leyland toolmakers against Phase 2;
3. their role in opposing Scanlon's rejection of the AUEW mandate against the twelve month rule;
4. the need to set up "at least one exemplary price committee";
5. the need to set up a national car fraction;
6. and then, more briefly, work in the health unions, among women (very briefly), and youth (NUSS, fighting police harassment, etc.). At every point the key role of WSL comrades and the support they have been able to win in practical struggles are stressed."

The section concludes that:

"Weaknesses undoubtedly remain in the practical work of the League in fighting for the programme. These weaknesses must be tackled as they arise. But the overall pattern of development of our movement in the class struggle is one of qualitative strengthening in almost every area and the consolidation of a Trotskyist cadre capable of understanding, explaining, exposing, and fighting the reformist and Stalinist bureaucracy at every step."

At no point is there any mention of the role, on a general national scale, of a group of the WSL's size and resources. There is no attention to the question of winning the political vanguard, no differentiation in fact between that and winning mass support, no recognition that transitional demands have an educative role in winning political vanguard elements as well as an agitational role in mass struggles. This failure is repeated in the final part of the perspectives document, "Development of the WSL", which makes it clear that "consolidation of a Trotskyist cadre" really means a cadre of activists/leaders in practical work. Thus:

"The failure to achieve the recruitment we have aimed at for over the past year has reflected itself in a continuing financial problem for the movement and a resultant heavy burden on our full-time workers. Our central resources are stretched often beyond breaking point. A sales drive with the weekly paper coupled to a turn to recruitment can help tackle this problem of development. By breaking the sterile routine of many branches, recruitment of fresh forces has an impact on the movement far more wide reaching than simple numerical growth."

The emphasis on activity and organisation demonstrated here is repeated throughout this final section. The tone is familiar to anyone with experience of the 1960s SLL. While Alan T. had correctly criticised the bizarre and totally apolitical mass recruitment targets (3,000 new members to be recruited in ten days, agreed in thirty seconds at the 14 September 1974 WRP Central Committee meeting [see *The Battle for Trotskyism* p. 91]) and the extreme activist routinism of WRP branches devoted to daily paper sales, the WSL leadership never really developed an alternative conception of building a Trotskyist movement.

Thus the unexplained reference to “the fight to develop new members!” could only be seen as a fight to develop activist militants, and the statement in the final paragraph on the need to “ensure that education, with further summer schools and weekend schools, is developed to further steel the movement” has the air of a ritual peroration, with the clear implication that political and theoretical education is some kind of ‘topping up’ process. Of course the old WSL did conduct political education, and there was a great deal of excellent political and theoretical argument in the pages of Socialist Press. But the overall direction of its work was towards a one-sided emphasis on mass work, on transitional demands as agitational demands in the day-to-day struggle. The draft balance sheet of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee, referred to previously, rightly points out that the WSL’s strengths outweighed its weaknesses because, with this emphasis:

“...through the Winter of Discontent (1978/1979) and up to the election of the Thatcher government in May 1979, the intensity of the British class struggle in particular, the industrial class struggle was high enough to enable the WSL consistently to raise transitional demands and maintain a relatively high political profile in its public work. (The Crisis of Proletarian Leadership and the Crisis of TILC: A Balance Sheet of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee”, (International Internal Bulletin of the International Trotskyist Committee IIB ITC, 1985, no. 2, p. 17)

Yet even for the period 1974/1979 the Alan T. notion of the ‘forward movement of the working class’ was an inadequate description of the state of the class struggle in Britain. And the WSL’s one-sided emphasis on mass work contributed to the limitations it experienced throughout its history in expanding significantly beyond its Oxford base or into industries other than motors. These weaknesses of the old WSL were fundamentally related to serious problems with its understanding of the economic development of capitalism and the relation between economic developments and the political development of the working class. These are discussed at some length, with detailed quotations, in the ITC’s draft balance sheet of TILC quoted above (see IIB ITC, 1985, no. 2, pp. 1017).

The draft balance sheet examines a fundamental confusion in Alan T.’s first opposition document (see *The Battle for Trotskyism*, pp. 1011), a confusion which was to remain part of the WSL’s political outlook:

“Healy is presented [by Alan T.] as, in effect, simultaneously “underestimating” and “overestimating” the British working class: underestimating the strength of its immediate capacity to defend itself against capitalist attacks and overestimating the rapidity of its development toward revolutionary consciousness.... But.... the criticism is presented as if fundamental. Healy is accused correctly of a mechanical, economist view of the development of working-class consciousness, which leads him to conclude the working class has already achieved nearly revolutionary consciousness. This, we are told, leads him to “underestimate” the actual strength of the working class in the immediate situation. But, in reality, this strength expressed primarily a trade union militancy under conditions in which the British capitalists still had sufficient economic and political options to head off major political radicalization of the working class and prevent the development of a revolutionary situation. The fall of the Conservative Heath government and the victory of the Labour Party certainly reflected the strength of the working class but also the economic and political options still available to British and world imperialism (and the limitations of the political consciousness of the British working class)

. ...[Alan T.] presents the strength of the working class in its partial struggles and the leftward movement associated with that strength as his major difference with Healy. Yet the real point should be that Healy has misread a situation still limited to partial working-class struggles and still characterized by the capitalists’ ability to prevent development beyond these limitations (as an ultimate crisis of capitalism and an imminent proletarian revolutionary upsurge).

...Alan T. himself with his supporters fails to see the actually prolonged and gradual nature of the period of stagnation and decline into which world capitalism had entered by the mid-1970s that is, a period of long-term and overall but relatively gradual decline, within which ups and downs in capitalist development would continue to occur.

And the Alan T. anti-Healy oppositionists fail to see the inevitable consequence of this: the alternation throughout the world for a substantial period of phases of partial advance with phases of setback and retreat in the class struggle. But more than this. Implicit in Alan T.’s own conception of “leftward advance” through partial working class struggles is a somewhat different mechanical, economist theory than Healy’s, not a complete break with mechanical economism.

Of course, there is in Alan T. a partial break with Healyite economism specifically, with its ultimatist aspects in insisting on the necessity of intervention in the class struggle by the conscious vanguard on the basis of the Transitional Program. But Alan T. seems to see the key to the validity of the method of the Transitional Program in the inevitable leftward motion attending the partial struggles of the working class.

Again, this is, in a very important sense, true. But what does Alan T. offer as the basis of the development of these struggles and their attendant “leftward motion,” if not economic developments? In the end, Alan T. suggests nothing in his original opposition documents which differs fundamentally with Healyite economism. He simply sees the crisis of capitalism as less acute than Healy and the class struggle and workers’ consciousness developing along with this crisis at a slower rate but in no less automatic a manner.” (The Crisis of Proletarian Leadership and the Crisis of TILC, IIB ITC, 1985, no. 2, pp. 1112)

The first two sections of the WSL’s 1978 British Perspectives (“The Crisis” and “Economic Crisis in Britain”), with the first containing an exaggerated account and prediction of trade war and the second dismissing any factors, such as North Sea oil, which might call its analysis into question, indicate that the WSL had not moved beyond the economic perspectives of Alan T.’s 1974 documents (see Trotskyism Today, no. 3, July 1978, pp. 46). And the confusion persisted in the 1979 document, The Transitional Programme in Today’s Class Struggle, one of the founding documents of TILC a confusion recognised by the ITC’s founding conference in a resolution criticising this fundamental statement of Alan T. politics:

“The economic analysis of “The Transitional Program in Today’s Class Struggle”... tends to misstate and overstate this (the extent of general economic decline in the present period), creating the impression of an “ever worsening economic crisis.” The document describes capitalism as an absolute fetter on the further development of production, which is not true. Its economic analysis is an eclectic combination of Yaffeism and Healyism. First, the Yaffeism, the falling tendency of the rate of profit marches in idealist fashion through history. Then, the Healyism, a Wall Street panic breaks out, leading to the collapse of an over-extended system of credit. The document provides no sense of the ups as well as downs of the world capitalist economy even during a period when its overall curve of development is turning down.” (Founding Conference of the International Trotskyist Committee, Resolution on ‘the Transitional Program in Today’s Class Struggle, adopted 27 July 1984, International Trotskyist Review, no. 3, autumn 1988, p. 10)

To the interrelated problems of mechanical economism in the WSL’s view of the ‘crisis of capitalism’ and its effect on consciousness and its one-sided emphasis on the use of transitional demands in mass work, we must add a further point. These weaknesses both reflected and produced a tendency towards economism in practice. In the case of the SLL this has been referred to above (section 2, point k). The SLL’s particular form of objectivism led it to adapt in practice to the shop stewards’ movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was not a political rank-and-file movement, like the Minority Movement of the 1920s. It was rather a number of shop floor based unofficial wages offensives in particular industries, which coalesced rather loosely in resistance, first, to the attempt of the Wilson government of 1966-1970 to introduce antiunion legislation and, subsequently, against Heath’s Industrial Relations Act.

Though the SLL played an important role in challenging the dominant tactics of the Stalinists (a role that was, of course, increasingly hampered by the sectarian policy of setting up their own trade union front, the All Trade Unions Alliance), they did not wage a fight for political development against the syndicalist and economist spontaneity of the movement. As we noted above, this involved a ‘workerist’ hostility to movements of the specially oppressed, students, etc. It was precisely in the milieu of this work that the Alan T. opposition emerged.

## **Syndicalist and Economist**

As stated above, it is essential not to see his opposition as just a reflection and protection of that base, nor even as just the defence of an earlier against a later form of adaptation. Nevertheless, it did continue to reflect the consciousness of that milieu, even though to a lesser extent, and this continued to be reflected in certain workerist prejudices the concentration of demands on those most relevant to trade union work, a tendency to see the most politically conscious workers as equating to the best organised workers, in a certain organisational suspicion of intellectuals (especially after the Spartacist splits) and a tendency to treat full-timers as hacks. In particular, it seriously limited the WSL’s ability to respond to the movements of the specially oppressed as Marxists, to develop programmatically on these questions, either to intervene on that basis in the movements or to take these struggles in any systematic way into the trade union movement.

It is not that no progress was made, but the developments were not made on the basis of an integrated Marxist approach to the questions involved, nor were they fully integrated into the politics of the WSL and fought for by the leadership. There were further problems with the WSL's positions on Stalinism and social democracy which reflected an incomplete break with the outlook of the International Committee. The ITC resolution on The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle points out that:

"...the document directs most of its fire at the Stalinist misleaders. It criticizes the petty-bourgeois nationalists somewhat less and the social democratic misleaders least of all." (ITR, no. 3, p. 11) and that: "It stresses the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism to the point where the reader wonders how the Soviet and other Stalinist bureaucracies could have been an instrument for the overthrow of capitalist property...."

The tendency to overstate the role of Stalinism as compared with social democracy was a general feature of the International Committee. In the case of The Club/SLL/WRP in Britain this had covered at best confusion and at worst liquidationism with regard to the Labour Party. While the old WSL resisted the chronic Stalino-phobia and social democratic liquidationism of the Lambertists, it retained much of the confusion on the Labour Party. In his first opposition document Alan T. devotes some attention to the question of a Trotskyist orientation to the social democratic bureaucracy in Britain.

He approaches this first through an attack on the idea that the trade union bureaucracy was 'corporatist' (that is, that it was somehow introducing fascism). He then takes up the importance of a campaign around the slogan "make the left MPs fight", which was a slogan the SLL had used during the Wilson government in the 1960s and clearly had relevance under the 1974-79 Labour government. (This question is also dealt with in the article "Lessons of Our History" in Socialist Press, no. 18.)

He finally moves on to a critique of the WRP's campaign in the general election of October 1974 (and thus, by implication, of February 1974, too), when the party's entire resources were devoted to a sectarian intervention in ten constituencies where it was standing candidates, rather than:

"...A national campaign... while the party programme was tuned towards the election, giving workers a perspective and posing the question of leadership to the working class." (The Battle for Trotskyism, p. 23)

This section of the document constitutes a completely correct attack on Healy's sectarian and maximalist attitude towards the Labour Party and a correct general statement of a Trotskyist position on the character of the social democratic bureaucracy, the need to intervene in the conflicts in the reformist organisations, and, much less clearly, on the attitude of Trotskyists towards Labour in a general election (the nature of the national campaign and how the programme is to be 'tuned' to the election are not spelled out).

"In the second document there is a single ambiguous allusion to the Labour Party question in the course of a discussion of the International Committee's international work. In Britain, the expulsion of the Young Socialists has meant that no work has been done for a long period inside the Labour Party. Therefore, it seems the entire International must mechanically take this lesson..." (The Battle for Trotskyism, p. 62)

It is far from clear whether Alan T. is implying support for the SLL's abstention from Labour Party work after 1964, acceptance of it as inevitable, or even some degree of criticism. The ambiguity does, in any case, rather characterise the old WSL's attitude on the Labour Party. On the one hand, they did follow a correct line of making demands on the bureaucratic leaders and differentiating between left and right reformists in their demands, taking this up to the demand to "make the lefts fight". (One might argue about the precise wording, but the general method was right.)

On the other hand, their practice continued to display the sectarian approach to the Labour Party shown by the SLL of the mid-1960s. For five years there was no intervention in the Labour Party. The WSL's trade union work was not used as a base for intervention; no work was done within local Labour Party organisations around the question of cuts, for instance; and there was no attempt to intervene in the LPYS to challenge Militant. During those five years the level of trade union struggle was sufficiently high to mask, in a sense, the inconsistency. That is to say, trade union struggles provided the WSL with an arena in which it could conduct agitation around transitional demands and make propaganda for the slogan "make the lefts fight", without its being too immediately obvious that they were not following the logic of this slogan themselves, that the start made with the criticism of Healy's sectarianism had not been thought through systematically.

In fact the mask was a tendency towards a syndicalist elevation of trade union work above Labour Party work and, indeed, above all non-trade union forms of work. Of course, there really is a sense in which the trade unions must be acknowledged to be more fundamental than the Labour Party: trade unions are the basic de-

fence organisations built by workers everywhere in their struggles with the capitalists. They are an international phenomenon, and intervention in trade unions is a principle for Trotskyist organisations internationally. On the other hand, the development or non-development of reformist political parties varies widely, and intervention in them is a tactical question for Trotskyists, requiring different answers at different times and places. There is also a secondary sense in which the trade unions can be described as ‘more fundamental’ than the Labour Party in Britain, because it was the unions that formed the Labour Party, which they still dominate through the medium of the bureaucracy.

However, this is not the point being made about the WSL; their syndicalist elevation of trade union work meant in practice an elevation of work around economic trade union issues. Along side this tendency towards sectarianism on the Labour Party, the WSL carried over with them from the SLL/ WRP elements of confusion which contained the potential for opportunism.

## Lessons of Our History

In *Lessons of Our History* Socialist Press, no. 18), John L., in the course of tracing the sectarian degeneration of the SLL and its abandonment of the transitional demands which it was advancing in the mid-1960s; includes the following section on the history of the demand, ‘make the lefts fight’, with approving quotations from the SLL’s Newsletter and its 1965 manifesto. It is necessary to reproduce this section at length to appreciate the extent of the confusion:

“Their the WRP’s current demand, “Make the Labour Government Resign”, is a clear example of this sectarianism. As we showed in our last edition, such a demand turns away from the necessary struggle to expose the fake left MPs to their supporters by pressing them to fight Wilson and the right wing under conditions where they refuse to lift a finger. Our slogan is “Make the ‘Lefts’ Fight Wilson”. It has a long history from the SLL. The demand was central to the campaign run by the SLL, its Young Socialists organisation (after they has [sic] been witch hunted out of the Labour Party), and the League’s weekly newspaper *The Newsletter*. This carried such banner headlines as: **Change Wilson Policy**, May 21, 1966) **Left MPs Must Learn the Lessons of 1966; Say NO to Wilson**, December 31, 1966 and the correct, if rather uncritical, headline: **Lefts Must Fight Wilson**, April 22, 1967. This policy had been carried forward from the SLL 1965 Manifesto which read: ‘Wilson and the betrayers must be removed and a socialist policy implemented.’ That policy must be bold and direct, and there must be no hesitation in relying on the workers themselves to enforce it along the following lines.” (How to Defeat the Tories for Good, September 11, 1965 Socialist Press, no. 18, 1 October 1975)

The WSL demand under the 1974-1975 Wilson/Callaghan governments (and that of the SLL under the post-1964 Wilson government), “make the lefts fight”, was correct: it is necessary “to expose the fake left MPs to their supporters by pressing them to fight”. (There is, of course, a sectarian danger in treating the left reformists as the ‘main enemy’ and thus letting the right wing off the hook, discounting working class support for and illusions in the Labour Party as a whole, but this was not generally the problem with the WSL on the early to mid-1960s SLL.) The problem with John L.’s argument and the SLL article from which he quotes is the way it runs together particular demands on the left reformists to fight Wilson with vague and confused points about programme and policy.

## Make the Lefts Fight

Thus, John L.’s first example of the SLL’s ‘Make the Lefts Fight’ campaign is the headline “Change Wilson Policy”. Regardless of the content of the article (which it has not been possible to refer to), the headline is at best ambiguous. Who is to change the policies? And to what? The implication has to be that the Labour (that is, the reformist) left should, through Parliament, bring in ‘socialist policies’. John L. offers no criticism of the very clear opportunist dangers in this ambiguity - though he objects that “**Lefts Must Fight Wilson**” is rather uncritical!!- presumably because it did not use the WSL’s favoured formulation, ‘Make the Lefts Fight’. Here John L., while ignoring the opportunist danger that really exists, veers towards a certain sectarianism over a form of words - in reality the choice is a tactical one to be decided on the basis of an objective assessment of the relationship between sections of the working class and the left reformists.

We then see the dangerous confusion compounded by the quotation from the 1965 SLL Manifesto. We again see the demand for the lefts to break with and remove Wilson linked with the suggestion that they should implement a ‘socialist policy’. Coupled with the reference to the right-wing Labourites as ‘the betrayers’, this clearly implies some more progressive role for left reformism. The implication that what is envisaged is a left

Labour government carrying out socialist policies through a parliamentary, legislative programme is brought out by the role assigned to the working class. It is to be 'relied on' by the lefts to 'enforce' this 'bold' 'socialist policy'.

Referring back to the article in the previous edition of Socialist Press referred to above (an article which is a reply to WRP charges that Alan T. believed that a Labour government could be forced to the left under the pressure of the working class), we find a brief but even clearer statement of this confused position:

"Before the lefts can be removed they have to be exposed. The way to expose them is demand that they carry their words into action, fight to remove Wilson and the right wing, form a government and implement socialist policies. ("Behind the Smokescreen", Socialist Press, no. 17, 17 September 1975, p. 45

What we see here is the confusion involved in the demand for "a Labour government with socialist policies", simply transferred to the Labour lefts, with the implication that their policies, if only they would implement them, are more progressive than those of the right wing (interestingly, this article shows the continuation of another element of confusion when it quotes without criticism the SLL's description - in a 1961 letter to the SWP/US - of the "Victory for Socialism!" group of left reformists as left centrists.

The problem was not that John L. or Alan T. - or the SLL of the 1960s - themselves thought that a Labour government, even a left Labour government, could 'implement socialist policies' - nor, for that matter, that they did not know the difference between left reformism and centrism. The problem was rather how they saw the task of exposing in practice the nature of the Labourites, right and left. The "Labour government with socialist policies" approach has little in common with the demand for a workers' government in the Transitional Programme, because it implies the possibility of a Labour government of the left bringing in socialism - with the further implication that this can be, at least in part, a legislative process. There is in the ambiguity of this second quotation at least the possible interpretation that such a left Labour government is a necessary stage in winning the fight for leadership with the left reformists. We find this confusion maintained if we turn to the WSL's 1978 British Perspectives document, in a long - and, again, generally correct - section entitled "Break the Liberal-Labour Coalition!!"

"While the workers support Labour we will help them put it in office independently of the openly capitalist parties. At the same time we encourage workers to demand and force measures on Labour in defence of their interests and to break the resistance of the capitalists.

While the specific demands we place upon Labour will vary in particular class battles, the slogan 'force Labour to implement a socialist programme' sums up our general orientation in the present situation

In our general explanation of this position the WSL warns the working class not to trust its leaders); explains that a socialist programme cannot be implemented by parliamentary edict; and shows that the task posed is for the working class to impose its rule over the bourgeoisie, smash the existing state apparatus, and institute a planned economy.

In no sense does the fight to force Labour to implement a socialist programme "sow illusions", as sectarians would have it. On the contrary it is the best means through which the working class can test out its leaders and organisation and develop a new, revolutionary leadership for the task of seizing power." (Trotskyism Today, no. 3, July 1978

Once again we see a confusion between the correct orientation in the first and third paragraphs quoted here and the confused position put forward as the 'general orientation' in the second paragraph, ending with the attempt to run the two together in the fourth paragraph.

The ITC resolution on The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle points out that something of the ambiguity we have referred to on the workers' government issue affects that document, too. The Transitional Program in Today's Class Struggle correctly states that:

"the culmination of the struggle for [the workers' government] demand must in the final instance - as in Russia in October 1917—be the definitive break with and destruction of the political forms, institutions, and state machinery of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of the (dictatorship of the proletariat)" (Section 9; ITR, no. 3, p. 31).

However, the document continues with an ambiguous statement which can be read to imply that a reformist "workers' government" is an inevitable step in the development of the struggle for socialist revolution:

“The workers’ government slogan thus contains within it the dynamic of the class struggle in which the working class, gaining in strength and self-confidence, demands increasingly more of its bureaucratic mass leaders, to the point where it insists that these leaders break from the bourgeoisie, take power in their own hands, and implement measures in the interests of the proletariat.” (Section 9, The Workers’ Government Demand; ITR, no. 3, p. 31)

“The class struggle may develop in this direction - with the intervention of a revolutionary party. But it may not. The working class may abandon its former mass leaders before it demands that they take state power”. (International Trotskyist Review [ITR], no. 3, p. 11)

In the state of the class struggle in Britain between 1974 and 1979 and with the WSL’s orientation to workers’ struggles, the correct positions of the first and third paragraphs of the previous quotation from the 1978 British Perspectives document tended to dominate its practice, rather than the confusion of the second paragraph - despite the claim that this was the ‘general orientation’.

The confusion with regard to the Labour Party, and through that to the workers’ government slogan, is connected with the problems discussed above in the WSL’s orientation to mass struggles, in practice largely trade union struggles, and its consequent one-sided understanding of transitional demands.

First, there was in the tendency to adapt the workers’ government slogan in the direction of a “Labour government with socialist policies”, with the emphasis on putting the bureaucratic leaders to the test, a strong element of the WSL’s one-sided emphasis on ‘winning the masses’ and its failure to seriously consider its own role as a propaganda organisation, in the task of winning and consolidating the vanguard. Hence, rather than considering the important role of the workers’ government demand as a propaganda argument, it tended to concentrate on its agitational use, in circumstances where this necessarily had limited immediate use. Thus it became adapted to a form which appeared to have more immediate relevance (the development was not, of course, original to the WSL Second, as with the economist tendencies previously noted, this confusion reflects the influence of the current reformist consciousness of the working class and adapts to it, not just pedagogically but politically).

Since a detailed examination of the weaknesses of the old WSL has inevitably required more space than its strengths, it must be borne in mind that the two existed in a state of tension in the politics of the organisation and that, from its emergence in 1974 down to 1979-1980, it was the strengths which dominated and gave to the WSL its overall positive and healthy development.

## **Internationalism**

Of course, the commitment to internationalism leading to the formation of TILC was one of the healthiest, if not the healthiest, aspect of the WSL. Starting from its break with the idea that any of the fragments of the Fourth International represented the political or organisational continuity of Trotskyism, the WSL recognised the need for a fight for the reconstruction of the Fourth International and for an international democratic-centralist tendency not as a new claimant to the Fourth International’s title but the indispensable weapon in the fight to resolve the crisis of the Fourth International. Even within this, however, there were problems.

There was, at least in the early part of the WSL’s history, some confusion on the question of continuity. In the article from Socialist Press of 24 March 1976 quoted above, there is an ambiguity about its continuity with the WRP. Our Fight for the Transitional Programme concludes with the following statement (coming immediately after an attack on the International Secretariat/USFI):

“Despite the attacks of all kinds of tendencies who attempt to revise Marxism, there is a continuity of the struggle for the Transitional programme since Trotsky’s assassination by a Stalinist agent in 1940. This continuity now flows through the Workers Socialist League and its struggle to mobilise workers around the demands and the principles of the Fourth International’s founding document.” (Our Fight for the Transitional Programme, Socialist Press, no. 8, 15 May 1975, p. 6)

There is a sense in which it is important to recognise that there has been a kind of continuity: that there have been repeated struggles for the Trotskyist programme or important elements of it, some more, some less well developed and that these have been possible within the framework of the degenerated centrist fragments of the Fourth International, have even to some extent been produced by them. In this sense, it is simply an aspect of the ITC’s concept of Trotskyist-centrism.

In these early WSL formulations there is clearly an ambiguity, perfectly understandable in the circumstances, between a movement towards this conception and a sense of some sort of continuity specifically with the International Committee tradition. More important, however, was a certain ambiguity and even lack of strategy in the WSL's understanding of the reconstruction of the Fourth International. The ITC resolution on *The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle* points out that:

“The document manages to be both somewhat opportunist and somewhat sectarian at the same time. The opportunism was shown by some tendency to reduce the crisis to the problem of a refusal by the various tendencies to participate in discussions. At the same time, we stress the refusal of any of the main currents of post war Trotskyism objectively to examine the roots of the crisis that have split and confused the world movement and reduced it to its present anarchic state. This refusal to discuss the experiences of the fight for the programme means that none of the existing international tendencies is equipped to lay claim to represent the political continuity of the Fourth International.” (Trotskyist International Liaison Committee, *The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle*, ITR, no. 3, autumn 1988, p. 55 [section 15])

The sectarianism is seen in the counterpart to this opportunism, putting forward discussions between international tendencies as the main solution. Such a take-it-or-leave-it approach was not an adequate strategy for an international tendency. The opportunism was to be seen subsequently in the WSL's tendency to give the concept of a “world Trotskyist movement” an opportunist interpretation (a ‘family of Trotskyism’). The sectarianism was to be reflected in a tendency to prioritise national over international work. Eventually, as the ITC resolution indicates:

“It was also borne out by the old, pre-fusion WSL leadership's conciliation of the national sectarian ICL leadership and their willingness to abandon their own international organization, TILC, for what they perceived to be their national “advantage.” (Founding Conference of the International Trotskyist Committee, Resolution on, *The Transitional Program in Today's Class Struggle*, adopted 27 July 1984, ITR, no. 3, autumn 1988, p. 13)

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## **5. WSL Politics in Crisis**

From its emergence as an opposition in the WRP in 1974 through to 1980, the WSL tendency remained overall a dynamic consistent Trotskyist organisation, in fact the most significant tendency to reassert the Trotskyist programme in practice in Europe. The WSL had taken the most positive steps to break out of the national isolation which had undermined other battles for Trotskyism - the formation of TILC. (Only the GBL in Italy had developed a similar perspective.) Nevertheless, it had failed to resolve a series of related political weaknesses arising from its origins within the International Committee tradition. However, it would be idealist to view the WSL's subsequent political degeneration as the inevitable working out of its bad ideas over time. The WSL did not simply have some good and some bad features, the former predominant in its earlier period, the latter in its later period. These contradictory features of the WSL's political development were intimately related. Crucially, for instance, its positive commitment to a fight for leadership based on transitional demands in mass struggles had as its other side, its opposite, the failure to recognise the educative (propaganda rather than agitational) role of the *Transitional Programme* in winning and consolidating the political vanguard.

### **The Turn in the Political Situation**

There was a basis for this contradiction, as we have seen above, in the material situation in the class struggle from 1974 to 1979 and to a considerable extent through to the spring of 1980 (the end of the steel strike). The

WSL's orientation to this material situation was 'justified' by its understanding of the economic crisis and the effect of the crisis on the working class. It was the changes in the material context of the WSL's work and the effect of these changes on its analysis and methods which threw the WSL into crisis. Unable to resolve these contradictions, the weaknesses rapidly became the dominant features of the WSL: the fusion with the International Communist League was part of this process. By 1979 the Labour government had served its purpose for the ruling class. It had, against considerable but sectional resistance, inflicted a period of tight wage controls, introduced large-scale public sector cuts, and undermining the shop stewards' organisations in key industries. Now while it had nothing to offer the working class, it was a barrier, in an immediate sense, to the further attacks the ruling class required, because it had, in the short term, lost its ability to control the working class.

That was the significance of the rejection of wage controls by the trade unions and the strike wave of the 1978/1979 Winter of Discontent - a storm the union bureaucrats had to ride in order to deflect and dissipate its force. But the rejection of the Labour Party at the polls by considerable sections of the working class was not progressive. It reflected these workers' perception that Labour could no longer run the country as a viable capitalist government and offer them reforms (or even safeguard their position) as a result. This situation left the Tories under Thatcher with the initiative in turning to bigger attacks on the working class in order to carry through the more fundamental shift in the balance of class forces and distribution of wealth which capitalism required.

This was not just a British phenomenon, of course: throughout the imperialist countries governments (including nominally socialist governments in France and Spain) have implemented similar policies. And globally the early 1980s witnessed a series of major setbacks for mass struggles - Iran, Nicaragua, Poland. Thus, after 1979 there was a steady decline in the level of industrial action and, particularly after the 1980 steel strike, an increasing sectionalisation. This was particularly marked, compared with the earlier period, in those areas of industry where the Alan T. leadership had its traditional base - in British Leyland and throughout the motor and allied industries. Moreover, there was, between 1979 and 1987, the development of a strong left movement in the Labour Party.

## **Opportunist Direction**

The problem for the WSL was not that it was unable to recognise that these changes were taking place or that they had important implications for its work. It was, rather, that it was not equipped to analyse what was happening or to respond to these developments as a consistently Trotskyist organisation. In these circumstances, its response was increasingly to accommodate to developments in an opportunist direction. In practice there was, on the one hand, a more and more opportunist, liquidationist right wing, oriented to Labour Party and local government work and fusion with the International Communist League, while, on the other hand, there was an amorphous and rather atomised left which tended to a somewhat conservative WSL traditionalism, which meant that, though it defended the positive features of the old WSL, it did not see the need to overcome its contradictions, was even inclined to defend its weaknesses and thus had no alternative to the right wing. Instead it clung to a certain workerist and economist activism.

The central leadership of Alan T., Tony R, and John L., not without some differences, straddled the two wings but in practice increasingly accommodated to the right. The problems and dangers were indicated in the WSL's April 1980 British Perspectives document. In its discussion of the shift of emphasis in industrial struggles from wages to jobs, of the importance of the fight against cuts, of the demands to be fought for in these struggles, and of the importance of the general strike slogan in the context of the steel strike, the document still maintains a Trotskyist perspective. However, the uncertainty and inadequacy of the following passage indicate the problems in the changing situation:

"We must understand that the working class is facing massive problems without the development of such a revolutionary leadership. Old methods of struggle have become hopelessly inadequate to today's conditions. The effect of the betrayals of the leadership which we have catalogued also have an accumulative effect.

In short, it is a period where, despite (the readiness of workers to struggle), there can be major setbacks and defeats for the working class. We do not say that this outcome is inevitable. We do say that a revolutionary movement must be steeled against such events and must learn to be patient in the light of them. Historically major outbreaks of class struggle have often been preceded by periods where the working class appeared to be on the retreat. Failure to understand that such a period is one possibility, where the attacks of the employers and the government appear to be successful, will demoralise our comrades in the way it

can also demoralise militant workers. A clear grasp of this danger will ensure that the movement remains strong, undismayed and ready to lead to the offensive when the inevitable explosions re-emerge. (Socialist Press, no. 197, 7 May 1980)

This passage condenses a whole number of classic WSL confusions and Healyite conceptions in a fashion which, in the context, was actually and immediately dangerous.

The first paragraph starts with a more or less timeless generalisation, then moves to a conclusion about 'old methods of struggle' which is hopelessly over-generalised and only applies to the 'methods of struggle' of the working class - not of the WSL. Nothing specific is said about which methods of struggle have become outdated or what is to replace them, other than the methods for which the WSL had always correctly agitated. But, as we can see, the message of the rest of this passage is that the WSL may not be able to do too much of that in future. However, the statement about old methods of struggle becoming outdated is misleading. Workers do not simply abandon the forms of struggle built up over generations in any case. Moreover, this way of looking at the class struggle ignores the interrelation of different forms of working-class activity in different phases of a period of overall disequilibrium in the capitalist system. It also prepares a disoriented movement to rush after - in practice to tail-end - any developments it can identify as the new methods of struggle. The second paragraph indicates the dangers of the WSL tendency to over-concentrate on the role of the trade union bureaucracy as the source of all the problems standing in the way of the working class's fulfilling its revolutionary role - at the expense of all the conditions of life and political experience of workers within capitalist society. This emphasis - which is linked to the WSL's emphasis on industrial trade union struggles - was in the 1970s the counterpart to its trenchant hostility to the bureaucracy.

### **Specially Oppressed**

In the 1980s it was clearly an obstacle (it was, in fact, also a serious obstacle in the way of the WSL's relating to the struggles of the specially oppressed). The "forward movement of the working class" is still there really, in the "readiness of workers to struggle" only held back by the "betrayals of the leadership". The logic of this approach is to reduce the crisis of proletarian leadership to the need for union leaders who will not sell out - a very dangerous outlook particularly when one appears, like Arthur Scargill!! One can only wonder how it is that workers are at one and the same time ready to struggle and, in the fifth paragraph, demoralised. The same failure to come to grips with what was happening is seen in the fourth and fifth paragraphs, which maintain that workers only 'appear' to be retreating and the government only 'appears' to be successful in its attacks. Given this outlook, what can be made of statements about the movement's being "steeled against such events" and "patient in the light of them", in the third paragraph.

In a general sense the statements are true, but nowhere is there any suggestion of what this means, because the WSL could not provide one as long as it remained tied to the one-sided emphasis on winning the masses in struggle and to its agitational view of its political work. The implication, clearly brought out in the last paragraph, is that the WSL's cadres should plug away at what activism they could still find to do and wait until the class struggle hots up and they are back in business. Being 'steeled' becomes a moral recipe for workhorses. The treatment of the crisis in the Labour Party, while recognising the importance of these developments, offers no analysis of them. It repeats the old criticisms of the left MPs and talks of "the changed mood in Labour's rank and file" without recognising that these developments predated the general election defeat and without making the essential connection with the developments in the trade unions, an odd yet actually not so very surprising result of the WSL's economist and syndicalist tendencies. Without an analysis there is no indication of how Trotskyists should orient to the situation in the Labour Party beyond the vague statement that conditions for intervention are likely to "remain good in the months ahead". Without a proper analysis and a clear tactical orientation, the way was open to the liquidationist element to pull the WSL in its direction.

In July 1980, in the course of an article on the Draft Manifesto produced by the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC), dominated by the Labour left at that stage - an article which makes a perfectly correct critique of left reformist policies - John L. makes the following comment:

"Only insofar as it reflects the forward movement of Labour's rank and file and offers an opportunity for a discussion and debate on policies within the party itself does the Draft represent a step forward." (Socialist Press, no. 208, 30 July 1980)

Here, in what looks at first like a merely pedagogical adaptation to the Labour left milieu, we see a confused political adaptation. The crisis in the Labour Party has become "the forward movement of Labour's rank

and file” (a kind of transposition of the ‘forward movement of the working class’ from the unions into the Labour Party) and the policies which are alleged to reflect this ‘forward movement’ (described in the article as class collaborationist) are welcomed as a step forward because of this. Then the issue is presented as one of debate within this movement.

Once again the opportunity to examine the real significance of the crisis in the Labour Party is lost. The WSL leadership has moved one step closer to the strategy of being close to the left in order to influence them - regardless of whether they saw themselves moving in that direction consciously.

Yet in a two part article published in the same and the next issue of Socialist Press, John L. and Pete F. subject the Workers’ Action (International Communist League) position on the workers’ government to detailed critical examination from an entirely Trotskyist perspective. They demolish the notion that the workers’ government we demand could be a left Labour government accountable to the Labour Party, changed into “a real instrument of the working class” by constitutional reforms. The second article details Workers’ Action’s shift to the right on these issues and its consequent liquidation into its own ‘broad papers’ - Socialist Organiser and Women’s Fightback.

These reflected the views of the Keith W wing of the WSL which was in the process of collapsing politically into the ICL. This wing was to become dominant in the period leading up to the WSL/ICL fusion with Alan T acquiescing to their demands and Sue and John L and Helen and Pete F fighting a bitter rearguard action against this perspective which would eventually be unsuccessful

Yet by October 1980, in a front page article on the Labour Party conference, we find the following comments on the constitutional reforms:

“Before the very eyes of the capitalist class, there emerges the grim spectre of a Labour leader elected by, and therefore in the longer term being made answerable to, the broader labour movement. For employers who for generations have relaxed in the knowledge that successive Labour leaders have, the moment they took office, contemptuously brushed aside left-wing Party Conference decisions and manifesto pledges, this change has come as an unpleasant jolt. Instead of providing a reliable second option to direct Tory rule, the Labour Party now threatens to fall into the clutches of the very workers it has fraudulently claimed to represent for three quarters of a century.” (Socialist Press, no. 218, 8 October 1980)

Despite the subsequent comments that this could only happen under “conditions of mass action” and that “Socialist Press does not share” the belief that the working class can move towards socialism by electing a Labour government under Benn, there is very little difference between these remarks and the arguments of Workers Action criticised in Socialist Press not much more than two months earlier. Nevertheless the fact that John L stated that “Socialist Press does not share” these beliefs was evidence of the bitter struggle which was being carried out by himself and others in this period against the crypto-ICL current.

At least Workers Action had the merit of greater consistency. After all, if it was really likely that, under pressure of mass action, the Labour Party could “fall into the clutches” of the working class and its leaders be made answerable to them, why should it not become “a real instrument of the working class”? Why should it not be possible for the working class to start to move towards socialism, at least, by the election of a Labour government?

The confusion and, in fact, adaptation to the left Labour milieu comes out further in the penultimate paragraph, which refers to their “limited policies” - as though the only problem with left reformist policies is that they don’t go far enough. On an inside page of this same issue, the report on the Labour Party annual conference describes the events there as “telling confirmation of the emergence of a mass anticapitalist current within the British Labour movement”.

This response to the autumn 1980 Labour Party conference provoked letters in the next week’s Socialist Press from two Leicester comrades, Pete F. and William G., attacking the notion that the left current in the Labour Party was anticapitalist and criticising the enthusiasm of Socialist Press over the conference events - without, however, suggesting an alternative orientation towards these developments.

### **Pete F.-William G. letters to Socialist Press along with John L’s reply.**

“Dear Comrades

Earlier this year Socialist Press published a series of articles by me on the counter-revolutionary history of social democracy. In those articles, using the example of Germany in 1919, the General Strike in Britain,

the international crisis of the late 20s and early 30s I tried to show the way in which reformism's commitment to a gradual evolution towards socialism within the framework of a capitalist society had historically driven social democrats to line up with their own bourgeois against the working class.

Your article on the Labour Party conference raises, I think, a number of fundamental questions for Trotskyists, not least the role of centrism. To describe the events at Blackpool as being evidence of the emergence of a mass anti-capitalist movement within the organised working class is somewhat premature and also politically rather dangerous. What we saw at Blackpool was a confused expression of the frustration and anger within the working class and the recognition which has begun to develop within sections of the workers that the right wing leadership within the Labour Party do not represent any formal alternative to Thatcher and the Tories. Essentially that was the lesson drawn at Blackpool from the experience of the last Labour government. But being anti-EEC and unilateralist does not yet constitute anti-capitalist. This empirical rejection of the bankrupt policies of the Callaghan clique does not however necessarily constitute the emergence of a mass anti-capitalist movement, though that possibility certainly exists as part of that process.

At present the search for solutions remains firmly within the confines of bourgeois parliamentarianism. In practice the political confusion of the rank and file members expresses itself in the capacity of hardened centrists like Benn to head off and channel working class hostility into a series of reforms within the Labour Party which create conditions for the carrying out of the 'lefts' alternative economic strategy, which is itself formulated within the context of the continuation of the capitalist system. Benn's politics remain those of social democracy when it betrayed the class struggle to line up with its own ruling class in the First World War.

His support of a phased withdrawal of troops from Ireland rests on no principle but rather on the same tactical assessment which led him to argue for import controls.

As a consequence of this the central task for revolutionaries in this particular period must be to challenge the rights of the centrists to lead the labour movement. That Ben and Co. should find it possible and desirable to line up with Moss Evans at Blackpool as Evans arrived hot-foot from the betrayal of the Adwest strike shows clearly the counter-revolutionary content of the machinations amongst the upper echelons of the labour movement. For a class fighter today what is fundamental is not the potential for a mass anti-capitalist movement but the necessity to arm that movement with a programme which begins with the independent interests of the working class. I would suggest therefore that rather than being rolled over with enthusiasm for what happened at Blackpool, Socialist Press should be raising some questions about what didn't happen!

Fraternally, Pete F. Leicester"

"Dear Comrades,

Your reports of the Labour Party conference at Blackpool in SP 218 contain, I think, some rather dangerous formulations. I refer to the headline 'Victory at Labour Party Conference' and the article on page five which begins "Telling confirmation of the emergence of a mass anti-capitalist current within the British labour movement was offered by this year's Labour Party Conference." As revolutionaries we must be clear on what precisely the nature of this "victory" was. Benn and Co, in creating the conditions for the removal of the Callaghan/Healey clique from the leadership, failed in any way to link this to the necessary mass action of the working class to bring down the Tory government.

Benn and Co's moves at Blackpool represent, I feel, not such a victory for the working class, prepared to fight but lacking political leadership, but rather a victory for hardened centrists, like Benn, to channel and divert the energies of the working class into a fight for reforms within the Labour Party, and the continuation of capitalism in the guise of an alternative economic strategy. On the question of the "mass anti-capitalist movement" we must recognise that while the Labour Party Conference to both the Tories and to Callaghan, the emerging mass movement remains fundamentally an anti-Tory movement!

It is the task of revolutionaries to turn it into an anti-capitalist movement!

This can only be done by arming the working class with a programme starting from the independent interests of the working class and by the building of the organs of working class power which cannot only bring down the Tories but prepare the way for the taking of power. This means building councils of action, uniting struggles in every area against the Tories as the prelude for the creation of soviets, not with the limited

objectives of “creating the conditions for ousting Callaghan from the leadership of the labour Party” (and presumably replacing him with a “left” Bennite government?) but to lay the foundations for a workers’ government.

Yours Fraternally, William G. Leicester.”

## Editor’s Reply

“Have comrades Pete F. and William G. actually read the letters in Socialist Press to which their letters apparently refer? The question is worth asking because they solemnly inform us as if for the first time, of a series of points which were in fact contained within the original article, while on the other hand they appear almost wilfully to leave out perhaps the most crucial elements in our assessment. Our article of course gives no revolutionary credentials to Tony Benn: Socialist Press would not even grant him the status of “hardened centrist” allotted to him by comrades Pete F. and William G.

We made it clear that Benn remains a left talking social democrat, whose quests for reforms and socialism, legislated through parliament mean that he stands, quite openly, opposed to the mass action necessary to bring down the Tories. Unlike comrades Pete F. and William G. however, we also take note of the fact that Benn’s left rhetoric and fight for important democratic reforms within the Labour Party have reinforced illusions amongst large sections of workers that such politics can lead to socialism.

We therefore point, (particularly in our inside page article) to the kind of approach necessary to show workers the falsity of these illusions. While there is of course a certain abstract historical validity in equating Benn’s position today with those of the social democrats prior to World War 1 it is unlikely that such literary denunciations and extravagant comparisons are likely to change the minds of more than a handful of workers.

Socialist Press 218 on the other hand pointed out that, in the terms of a willingness to mount tangible actions to defeat the Tories, particularly around the cuts question, broad layers of Labour activists showed themselves at the Blackpool conference to have gone already way beyond Benn’s parliamentary, propagandist perspectives. In the next period the further development of this conflict - to the fight in practice for strikes, occupations and a stand by Labour councils against the cuts - can bring workers in large numbers face to face with the limitations of Benn and his fellow left talkers, in a situation where revolutionaries can spell out clearly the necessity for an alternative leadership.

As our front page article pointed out: “...the next period offers the best conditions to put such leaders to the test; by their willingness or refusal to fight for extra-parliamentary action to defeat the Tories; by their willingness or refusal to press home the gains of the Blackpool conference and drive out the right wing leadership, workers can quickly assess the real character of those who now put themselves forward as opponents of the right wing Callaghan gang.

We offer full support to every step forward taken by the lefts in the fight for united class action to bring down Thatcher; at the same time we fight consistently against the limited policies of the Labour lefts, to win support for the kind of programme that is vital to defend the interests of the working class in the next period.

In this way we seek to win the most principled sections of trade unionists and labour activists to the fight for a new, revolutionary, leadership in the labour movement.” In telling us we must build such a leadership, oppose Benn’s politics and fight for a revolutionary programme comrades Pete F. and William G. tell us nothing we did not clearly say ourselves last week; what they signally leave out is any appreciation of how or under what new political conditions these tasks must be carried out!”

Lister’s reply typified the way the WSL leadership tended to straddle the differences within the organisation. In this case he answered evasively, using the ‘left’ bits of the original articles to ‘refute’ the criticisms and Pete F.’s incorrect description of Benn as a centrist to blunt the attack.

Two weeks later - the week after Socialist Press announced the entirely correct and principled agreement for a united front with Socialist Organiser at the Lambeth conference against the cuts - the correspondence was taken up by K.W. of Coventry. K.W., a leading member of the WSL’s liquidationist right wing, reasserted, without any evidence, that the Labour left current represented “the emergence of a new anticapitalist mass movement.”

## **Keith W's letter to Socialist Press and John L's reply.**

Dear Comrade Editor,

“The test of any organisation which is seriously fighting to build a revolutionary party is as much its ability to recognise important political developments and draw the necessary strategic conclusions as it is to defend the programme against those who attempt to liquidate it. Recent issues of Socialist Press show graphically that the Workers Socialist League is able to do the former as well as the latter. I would like to continue the debate which has begun since the historic developments which took place at the Labour Party conference and take up where comrade John L. left off in his reply to Pete F. and William G. (Socialist Press 219).

It is interesting to note that even comrades Pete F. and William G. seem to have been effected by the clear manifestation of a significant shift to the left of a whole section of the Labour Party. Who would have thought that even a few weeks ago such principled “granite hard” Bolsheviks as Pete F. and William G. would have referred to Tony Benn as a centrist? Leaving aside whether or not this is a correct scientific description the important point is the un-challengeable fact which Trotskyists have to face is that something significant is happening in the Labour Party. A combination of pressure from the working class, a clear failure by successive Labour governments to make any impact on the chaotic effects of the capitalist crisis and the clear decision of the ruling class to launch a major assault on the working class have produced a major ferment which reaches right to the top of the left social democracy.

The recognition of Socialist Press of the emergence of a new anti-capitalist mass movement must be followed quickly by a wide ranging discussion amongst Trotskyists of what needs to be done now to make serious steps towards regrouping and politically sharpening that movement into an instrument which can be used by the working class - a revolutionary party. The central arena for the fight for a revolutionary programme must now become the Labour Party. The time when it was necessary to build organisations outside the mass party of the working class is now over. Trotskyists have always sought to stand alongside other socialist currents within the Labour Party fighting for our policies and perspectives. The real “entrists” are those such as David Owen, Shirley Williams and Reg Prentice - the people who, through their bureaucratic hold on the party and their openly pro-capitalist programme have witch-hunted revolutionaries out of have demoralised them into leaving in disgust.

If revolutionaries adopt a fraternal approach to those who are fighting the Callaghans and Healeys of this world and debate out the elements of our strategy then the days of left organisations numbering only hundreds will be over and a new stage in the fight for a revolutionary programme will be on the agenda. One final comment - the development of the class struggle test out those organisations claiming to be revolutionary, also throws into perspectives the differences which have led the Trotskyists to form different organisations. It is to be hoped the tremendous opportunities opening up before us will force us all to question the significance of the many petty differences which have prevented us from combining our resources for the great task we have to face.

It is therefore particularly heartening for me to note that Socialist Press 219 reports the agreement of supporters of Socialist Organiser and Socialist Press to present joint amendments to the conference called by Lambeth council. Roll on the day when supporters of these two papers can stop competing and produce one journal.

Fraternally K.W Coventry.”

### **Editor's reply**

“It is only fair to point out in reply to comrade K.W. that Socialist Press and Socialist Organiser are not so much “competing” with each other as carrying out very different political tasks. For Socialist Organiser the perspective is to map out a minimum basis of principled agreement for the formation of a left wing current within the Labour Party. For Socialist Press the task we set is to spell out as fully as possible the full programme for building a revolutionary party, drawing forces from the whole labour and trade union movement - including of course many elements who are not currently active Labour Party supporters.

There are obviously important areas in which these two different tasks overlap, and joint work is possible on a principled basis. We welcome such initiatives. But the outstanding political difference centres precisely on the extent to which political work in the next period must centre in the Labour Party as such, and how

much emphasis needs to be placed on the development of a Marxist programme and the building of an independent revolutionary party.

Socialist Press has stressed the view that the Labour Party is a central arena of the fight for revolutionary programme: but it is not the exclusive centre for such a struggle! The ongoing struggle of Trotskyist Ted Heslin against his expulsion from Oxford City Labour Party for selling Socialist Press confirms that there are many problems in seeking to wage a fight for socialism in the Labour Party. If we accept K.W.'s definition of "entrists" then we must recognise that it is still "entrists" who control most of the machinery of the Labour Party - while important forces in the fight for socialism remain alienated by years of Labour Party betrayals and outside its ranks.

To combat this a campaign against all bans and prescriptions of socialists in the Labour Party is needed. It can now take place in far more favourable conditions than previously: it is essential to fight on socialist policies and for democratic procedures to be broadened to incorporate this demand."

Keith W. is arguing for a fusion of the forces of Socialist Press and Socialist Organiser - that is, the Workers Socialist League and the International Communist League. Lister's reply is as evasive to this letter as to Morrow's, though with none of the evident hostility, arguing that the two papers were carrying out different political tasks but reducing the differences to differences of emphasis on working in the Labour Party and developing a Marxist programme.

These articles and letters give a clear picture of a movement in a state of confusion and conflict and increasingly lacking a sense of direction, except for that of its liquidationist wing.

### **The 1981 Miners' Strike and Benn's Deputy Leadership Campaign**

An illustration of this confused slide by the WSL can be seen in its response to two events of early 1981: the success of the brief miners' strike in February in forcing the Thatcher government to cancel plans to close thirty coal mines and Benn's announcement in April that he was standing against Denis Healey for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party.

The Tories' retreat in the face of the miners' strike was a purely tactical withdrawal in the face of a sectional trade union action for which they were not yet ready and reflected both the undoubted combativity of sections of the working class but also the government's careful and flexible tactical approach to its attacks on the working class, exploiting the weaknesses of an increasingly sectionalised Labour movement - in other words, its strong overall position.

It was important to use the opportunity of the miners' success to argue the case for action against the government and a struggle to defend jobs, and this Socialist Press did. However, it did it in a way which both overstated the extent of the victory and understated the government's strength. Instead of issuing a warning against government's strategy and the dangers of sectional trade union defensive action in combating it (however militantly), the Socialist Press article adopts a morale boosting approach which treats the miners' strike as an exemplary action to be emulated by others and nothing more. Thus the outcome of the strike was a "knockout victory" (which it certainly was not), and:

"Were similar action to be taken elsewhere in industry and the public services, it is possible even more concessions could be achieved. "(Miners' Victory Shows Workers Can Oust Thatcher, Socialist Press, no. 236, 25 February 1981, p. 1)

While true in a general sense, this does not give any indication of the actual problems. This approach is a direct outcome of the notion that workers only appear to be in retreat, that the government only appears to be successful, that everywhere workers are ready to fight, and that the problem is just a lack of militancy by the trade union leaders. And it leads Socialist Press to take an uncritical attitude towards the NUM officials who:

"...particularly in Kent, Scotland, South Wales, and Yorkshire - prepared consciously for this fight on closures. They campaigned in the coalfields for a mandate for all-out strike action. They secured 86% and 90% support - and created a level of militancy that gave rise to last week's spontaneous walkouts which in the event went far faster than the leadership had expected."

The article includes a call for a general strike to bring down the Tories, but in the context of the article it is not related to government strategy or the problems of the labour movement and is thus posed rather abstractly as the ultimate act of trade union militancy. Moreover, it becomes, in effect, a general strike to secure the re-election of a Labour government.

This indicated the extent to which the ICL rot had infected the WSL. This was particularly evident in the absence of any demands on the “fake left” to remove the right wing and implement policies in the interests of the working class which had been the hall mark of the WSL hitherto. This implied that the existing leadership of the Labour Party could implement socialist policies:

“...the only guarantee of protection for jobs and living standards is the mobilisation of the labour movement for a general strike to bring down the Tories, and to press home the fight for socialist policies from a Labour government.”

Finally, the article is notable - most notable - in its retreat from the Transitional Programme. The passage just quoted is followed immediately by this paragraph:

“Only a planned socialist economy can answer the anarchy of crisis ridden capitalism and develop the productive forces of society in the interests of the vast majority of people. Until then a threat hangs over us all.”

This is quite true. But it is really just the maximum demand. It is the other side of the militant syndicalism that infects the rest of the article. Moreover, coming directly after the passage implying that the purpose of the general strike is the re-election of a Labour government, it compounds the confusion of the ‘Labour government with socialist policies’ approach. The other side of this mini-max method is the quite incredible fact that absolutely nowhere in this front-page article on a major fight to defend jobs is there any mention in any form of work-sharing on full pay or a sliding scale of hours under workers’ control. It is impossible to imagine such an omission a year or two earlier.

## **1981 WSL Conference**

While there was no visible response to this retreat in Socialist Press as there had been by Pete F. in October, the bitter struggle within the WSL by the Sue and John L and Helen and Pete F and others continued and exploded at the 1981 WSL conference around a series of questions including Afghanistan, women, youth work, and the priority to be given to international work, and trade union work (as opposed to LP work). The 1981 conference documents indicated both the wide scope of the offensive by the crypto-ICL current (e.g. Keith W and Bob S - who had collapsed on the question of Afghanistan) as well as the resistance on the part of a wing of the WSL associated with the Sue and John L and Helen and Pete F and even Tony R on Stalinism. JL and TR wrote the conference document “The Latest Stage in the Crisis of Stalinism” which defended the WSL line on Afghanistan. This was in stark contrast to Bob S’s dreadful, moralistic alternative document. Pete Flack co-authored a document on youth work which was clearly couched as a clear alternative to the ICL’s liquidationist approach to the LPYS.

Sue L made a ferocious verbal attack on ICL women’s work in the conference. And John L. made an appeal for a “class struggle tendency in the ICL” during the conference. Nevertheless the collapse into the ICL did take place in spite of these interventions. They did at least serve to warn the membership of the problems which would be encountered in the fused WSL. The error made by the Sue and John L and Helen and Pete F and the left of the WSL generally was their failure to establish a tendency around these elements of a critique of ICLism right from the start. This would have entailed a break with Alan T’s approach - something which John L has never been able to do consistently. Pete F preferred to oppose Sean M by manoeuvre and stealth rather than through an open fight until he was dragged into it by the International Faction later on.

In April 1981 Socialist Press, in a front-page article, correctly gives critical support to Benn’s standing for deputy leadership. (It does not, incidentally, once question why he was just standing for deputy (to Michael Foot!!)). The effect of the ICL’s influence was to blunt the revolutionary, critical edge of the profusion WSL. Diplomacy towards the Benn Campaign was the result. The WSL failed to point out that left reformists and bureaucrats are sometimes capable of dramatic left manoeuvres in order to stay at the head of the masses in motion. They do so in order to behead the movement. The WSL failed to do this in relation to the Benn campaign. A correct application of the “Make the Lefts Fight” slogan would have been to very sharply criticise Benn on his reformist policies and governmental record and counterpose a perspective of demanding that he call for and defend industrial action and class struggle methods. It would have meant demanding that he go further in the fight to oust the right wing leaders, to declare himself accountable to the working class in struggle while warning the working class not to rely upon him.

This article concentrates on welcoming Benn's stand and demanding that left talkers in the trade union bureaucracy and the Tribune group of MPs support him, and then in the last part of the article comments that:

"There is no doubt that Benn, for all his correct and wide reaching criticisms of the right wing and of the record of previous Labour governments, has serious political limitations." ("Benn's Stand Tests Labour Left", Socialist Press, no. 242, 9 April 1981)

The article then proceeds to criticise the Alternative Economic Strategy and Benn's opposition to immediate industrial action to bring down the Tories but follows with the ambiguous comment that:

"But despite these limitations, Benn's campaign against Healey offers to reinvigorate the struggle for socialist policies against the right wing within the next six months."

Following on the rest of the article the impression is given that politically Benn is moving in the correct direction, only not yet quite far enough, still 'limited'. Hence the convoluted, almost apologetic tone of the criticisms: Benn 'remains' committed to the Alternative Economic Strategy, which 'certainly contains some progressive proposals'. "Socialist Press.. opposes the Alternative Economic Strategy... And we also strongly disagree with Benn's position of opposing" an immediate strike to bring down the Tories. The talk of 'reinvigorating the struggle for socialist policies' is a piece of pure Bennite vagueness. Whose struggle? What policies? To be 'reinvigorated' how? Once again we have a kind of objective process: the forward movement of Labour's rank and file, in fact.

Of course, Benn's stand against the right wing did offer an opportunity for Trotskyists to pose the questions of socialist policy, but through an intervention which had to pose an alternative to Bennism, and to place sharp demands on Benn in place of his left reformist/ constitutionalist vagaries. The weakness of this front-page article would not have been so bad if it had been combined with any serious analysis or criticism - but it was not. The emphasis in Socialist Press throughout the spring and summer of 1981 was on activism in the Benn-for-deputy campaign, particularly through the Rank and File Mobilising Committee (which, of course, it was essential for Trotskyists to participate in on a united front basis.) Only in one issue of Socialist Press is there a brief quarter page article entitled "a look at Benn's five points". At least a quarter of this is taken up by the five points themselves, so that the critical response is necessarily brief and general - correct as far as it goes but scarcely presenting an alternative. (See Socialist Press, no. 244, 23 April 1981.)

The domination of the pages of Socialist Press by militant activism proceeded throughout these remaining issues and affected all areas of the WSL's work.

## **Unemployed Work**

One particularly important area of work where the WSL was almost alone in fighting the Stalinists and right wing Labourite bureaucrats was unemployed work. It was entirely to the credit of the WSL that it recognised the importance of this work, taking the lead in building a National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM). The left of the WSL was particularly instrumental in this: Pete F had contributed the section of the 1981 WSL British Perspectives document conference on unemployed work. This was an excellent and creative application of the method of the transitional programme to the neglected field of organising the unemployed. It called for the unemployed to carry out their own enquiries into the needs of their communities and draw up plans for a programme of socially useful public works.

These were to be counterposed to the existing slave labour government schemes through demands for workers management and incorporation into the direct works on full TU rates of pay. While the material in Socialist Press on the NUWM did not reflect this, the perspectives were published by a Liverpool Unemployed workers Centre in the form of a pamphlet written by Chris E entitled Unemployed Workers for a Programme of Public Works. It was distributed by Chris E at the founding conference of the NUWM in London and had a very big resonance among unemployed activists in Liverpool. Even the TUC library asked for a copy of it which indicated the wide readership of this document. The perspectives were also later published in a regular column on unemployed work in Socialist Organiser - the column was a result of pressure from unemployed members of the fused WSL.

## **Poland**

This tail-ending also affected the Socialist Press coverage of developments in Poland. Its initial coverage at the time of the August 1980 strike in Gdansk and immediately afterwards was absolutely correct in the way that it posed the question of political revolution, and coverage always remained generally critical of the Solidarnosc

leadership around Walesa. But this became increasingly abstract, tending often to amount to no more than calls for building a revolutionary leadership, with no concrete perspectives. At one point Socialist Press called for workers in other countries of Eastern Europe:

“To take action to build their own Solidarity-type unions and overthrow their own parasitic Stalinist rulers.” (Socialist Press, no. 242, 9 April 1981)

Of course Trotskyists support and fight for independent unions in the degenerated and deformed workers' states, but to call for them as though they are part of the solution, as though they are the means of overthrowing the bureaucracy, ignoring the extent to which the transformation of the proto-soviet inter-factory strike committees into a trade union (or, rather, the only partially successful attempt to do this) was a step backwards from political revolution. This was thoroughly confused and objectively an adaptation to Solidarnosc.

It is, in fact, not too surprising to find that the political disorientation of the WSL was affecting its attitude to the most acute, critical international struggle of 1981. The opportunist accommodation to a left Labour milieu and to syndicalist militancy in the unions, along with its counterpart of activist routinism, meant that the WSL was increasingly concerned with its 'main' work in Britain at the expense of its international work, which thus became more of an abstraction. Inevitably it meant a growing hostility to the threat of 'outside' interference in its policies. This had a real practical effect: the WSL leadership were not interested in devoting time, effort, and resources to or developing perspectives for international work. It was left to the Danish section of TILC to make a visit to Poland; comrade Mike J., recently returned from Denmark, was unable to get the National Committee at the fusion conference to discuss the question of an intervention in Poland. Similarly, nothing was done to produce a final English version of “The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle” (a task which it has fallen to the ITO to carry out).

It has been necessary to examine these developments at length - admittedly at depressing length - and to do so before turning to the fusion with the International Communist League, which led to the creation of the fused Workers Socialist League and the dropping of the public paper Socialist Press in favour of Socialist Organiser - technically the paper of the 'broad group', Socialist Organiser Alliance - in order to put the fusion in its proper context. It was not the cause of the problem. The process of disorientation and degeneration was under way before the prospect of fusion with the ICL as a result of that process, though, of course, the relationship with the ICL (and the prospect of forming a bigger group at a time when the WSL lacked a clear sense of direction) profoundly influenced the WSL and contributed to its political decline.

## **The International Communist League**

The International Communist League (ICL) current originated with Sean M, a member of the Socialist Labour League in the mid 1960s, in Manchester. Some time after he left, around 1965 or 1966, he joined the International Socialists (later the Socialist Workers Party), apparently with a small group of co-thinkers, and it was within the International Socialists that their Workers Fight group took shape, opposing state capitalism, arguing for an orientation to the Labour Party, and apparently defending an anti-imperialist position on Ireland. After their expulsion Workers Fight fused with Workers Power, who had emerged as a faction in the International Socialists, a left opposition to Cliff, initially on the question of Ireland, and had been expelled about the same time as Workers Fight, still, in the majority, holding a state capitalist position. The two groups formed the International Communist League, but the fusion broke down rapidly, with the departure of the Workers Power leadership and about half their original membership, with Sean M's increasing Labour Party orientation apparently a major factor.

The ICL that then developed under the leadership of Sean M, Valerie Wise, Martin Thomas, and John Bloxham, though having a formal commitment to the Fourth International, was in fact a very sectarian national Trotskyist group with a thoroughgoing entrism strategy in the Labour Party.

The ICL's mouthpiece was the journal Workers Action, an entrism paper for work in the Labour Party. Socialist Organiser was launched in 1979 as a broad paper, in collaboration with Labour lefts such as Ken Livingstone and the Chartist Minority Tendency a small right-centrist group with some vague Trotskyist pretensions. Subsequently this group split over the issue of rate increases, the ICL correctly arguing for a no cuts, no rent or rate rises position, leaving the ICL supporters in control of Socialist Organiser, which they nevertheless continued to promote as a broad paper organising a 'class struggle left wing' in the Labour Party, while abandoning Workers Action. (The Chartist Minority took the initiative in pulling the Labour lefts who split from Socialist

Organiser around what was in fact a far more successful broad paper - in Labour Party terms - London Labour Briefing.

Some time has been spent on these details because of their importance in understanding the fusion. The International Communist League understood, in a way that the WSL did not, the importance of the Labour Party question and work in the Labour Party for Trotskyists in Britain and was quicker to respond to the leftward movement in the Labour Party in the late 1970s and early 1980s. On a number of key issues, moreover, it took correct, principled positions - on troops out of Ireland, on opposition to local government cuts and rent and rate increases, and on the rights of women and of lesbians and gay men.

In place of the rather confused position of a disoriented WSL, the ICL had quite a clear conception of the character and purpose of its Labour Party work (and the same was to a certain extent true of the approach to the women's movement). Central to this conception, at least in the first phase of the Socialist Organiser turn, was Sean M's notion of convergence. This was later to be explained by Evington, one of the former ICL comrades who joined the Internationalist Tendency/Faction, in the following terms:

"The idea of convergence as presented by the ICL leadership was that the Broad groups around SO would over a period of time be drawn into being part of the WSL. The argument being that there was a layer of militants in the LP who would not be won directly to Trotskyism but were prepared to work with us. Once we had them organised around us then we could systematically educate them and through joint work win them over to the ICL." ("Crisis in the British Section", autumn 1982)

In 1980, according to Evington, the ICL leadership was arguing for this convergence to take place within a year. By the time of the WSL/ICL fusion in 1981, nothing of the sort had happened, of course, but the 'broad group' was still central to the ICL leaderships' thinking. It was integrally linked to other aspects of Sean M's orientation to the Labour Party.

First, Sean M's conception of building a broad group in the Labour Party was linked to the idea that, if the left reformists would fight for their programme, that would be a progressive step forward and therefore that the role of Trotskyists through the broad groups should be to build a fight on the reformists' own programme. As Evington pointed out this "if" indicated that Sean M's theory had nothing in common with Marxism - it rejected any Marxist analysis of or characterisation of reformism. Programmatically it meant a liquidation of the Transitional Programme into reformism.

Second, it was linked to Sean M's view of a workers' government as a left reformist Labour government made accountable to the labour movement through the democratic reforms - and as a necessary stage in the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus the Socialist Organiser turn of the ICL - which, as John L. and Pete F. argued in their July/August 1980 Socialist Press articles, was a turn to the right - was not in fact a short-term tactic but a long-term strategy. Moreover, it was both liquidationist and sectarian. The origins and early split in the Socialist Organiser broad group make this abundantly clear. It is not that the ICL was wrong to fight Livingstone and the Chartist Minority on the rate-rise issue but that the method of involving these elements in what was in reality a front for the ICL was sectarian and showed a failure to comprehend the method of the united front, let alone the nature of left reformism.

However, it is easy to see how the WSL, disoriented and confused over the developments in the Labour Party would be unable to mount any consistent opposition to the ICL's method. The abandonment of the method of the "Make the Lefts Fight" slogan, which had represented a stance independent of the left reformists, in favour of a diplomatic relationship with the Bennites and slogans suggesting that the "Labour government" should implement socialist policies indicated the bad influence of the ICL. It was not the idealist notion of the original sin of "the make the lefts fight" slogan which was instrumental in this degeneration, as has been argued by some critics of the WSL; it was the material impact of the shift away from the working class upsurges of the early and mid 1970s ending in the winter of discontent of 1979 towards a scenario of long-term mass unemployment and consequent tendency towards defeat and victimisation of the militants. It was this which was responsible for the lurch to the right and the liquidation into the Labour Party. The abandonment of the independent slogan of "make the lefts fight" in favour diplomacy towards Bennism and Scargillism was the effect not the cause in this process.

## **The Fusion**

The fusion was not based on any fundamental agreement on programme, perspective, or method, internationally or nationally. Its basis was purely conjunctural: the WSL and the ICL agreed that it was necessary to

work within the Labour Party and that in this context there should be a fight against cuts, for troops out of Ireland, and in defence of the constitutional reforms. As we have seen, there was not really an agreed basis for this work. Internationally there was agreement in opposing the USFI's liquidationism towards the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and on a dual-defeatist position on the Iraq/Iran War (though from quite different positions, as the dispute over the Malvinas War made apparent) - and on very few other issues. Important areas of disagreement were left for later decision - Afghanistan, the use of the general strike slogan, the EEC. Very significantly, there was, as we shall see, explicitly no agreement on TILC.

The ICL orientation towards social democracy had a profound effect on the fusion platform, coming out clearly in the section on the workers' government. In the first draft of the platform, this section was clearly based on the ICL's conception of a workers' government as a left Labour government, held accountable by a democratised Labour movement, which was an inevitable stage in winning the working class to the perspective of revolution:

“Whether the next Labour government in 1984, or earlier if the working class does as it has the industrial strength to do and kicks out Thatcher—will be a more or less radical new instalment of the sort of Labour governments we have had this century, or not, will be determined by two things:

- i) By whether a real attack is made on the wealth and entrenched power of the ruling class, and
- ii) Whether or not it rests at least in part on the organisations of the working class.

The working class itself would only serve and protect its own interests by organising itself outside the rhythms, norms, and constraints of Parliamentary politics, expanding its factory shop stewards committees, combine committees, Trades Councils, etc., and creating new Action Committees, to be an industrial power that could as necessary dispense with the Parliamentarians.

The Brighton/Blackpool/Wembley decisions to control MPs and to give the majority of votes on who shall be prime minister if Labour has a majority in Parliament to the CLPs and trade unions could open the way to a new kind of ‘Labour’ government—a workers’ government, instead of the government of the trade union party which merely administers capitalism’s own laws....

To get the most out of the breakthrough for Labour democracy at Brighton/Blackpool/Wembley, we must fight for the next Labour government to act radically in our interests and to base itself on the movement, not on the bosses’ state bureaucracy. And at the same time, we must prepare and organise ourselves to be able to protect our interests however it acts.

We must fight to commit the Party to radical socialist policies and use re-selection to make sure MPs are held to these policies.... (Draft Programme of the [Fused] Workers’ Socialist League, 1981, pp. 16-17)

The character of this section is clear. The whole orientation is towards the constitutional reforms in the Labour Party, which are in any case grossly exaggerated. The reforms did not control MPs but only meant that they had to face re-selection as candidates in a general election during the lifetime of the preceding parliament, and it was in practice the trade union bureaucrats, not the trade unions, that held 40% of the votes in the electoral college. The traditional forms of organisation of the Labour movement - essentially sectional trade union and electoral organisations - are seen as the key to the working class’s ability to control a left Labour ‘workers’ government’ and defend itself against capitalist reaction. “New Action Committees” are simply tagged on as a concession - meaningless in the context - to the old WSL.

And Trotsky’s insistence in the Transitional Programme that:

“At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should, in our opinion, form the programme of the workers’ and farmers’ government.”

is reduced to committing the Labour Party to “radical socialist policies” and using re-selection.

Amendments to the original draft of the fusion document from JL were accepted even though they were in contradiction to Sean M’s positions. Thus the following was inserted into the final draft:

“In a situation where mass action was mobilised that actually brought down the Tories, a totally new political situation could be created. It would provide conditions of struggle in which a revolutionary organisation would call for a workers government based on the organisations of struggle which would have developed.” (Final draft of WSL/ICL Fusion document. 1981. p. 19.)

This correct formulation, however, contrasted to the formulation a few paragraphs further on (in the previous quote) which presented the a left labour government as a necessary stage and as a possibility rather than as a demand on lefts to oust the right and implement policies in the interests of the working class

In the period prior to the fusion, objections from the GBL, TILC's Italian section, to this section led to the above and other amendments. However, these did not alter the essential character of the section. Rather, they toned down the implication that such a reformist 'workers' government' was an inevitable stage and added points insisting on independent working-class organisation and the role of a revolutionary organisation. Though these were positive elements in this section, they did not remove the confusion - in a way, they just heightened the contradictions - and, given the confusion on this question in the old WSL's perspectives document, quoted previously, this is hardly surprising.

The workers' government section is immediately preceded by and linked to a section on the Labour Party. This was unchanged in the final version of the platform adopted at the fusion conference in July 1981. It is extremely vague, with such meaningless remarks as:

"The organic connection between the Labour Party and the unions (allows for the possibility) of large scale working class (participation in) the party." (Draft Platform Document, WSL/ICL Fusion Conference, July 1981)

However, within the combination of such vagaries with condemnations ("It is a party which serves capitalism...") are two formulations of ICL positions on the Labour Party, not quite stated explicitly but in fact very clear: first, the contention that a revolutionary party can only be built within the Labour Party; second, the view that the Labour Party is 'reformable' in a revolutionary direction:

"The WSL asserts that it is organically part of the political and industrial organisations of the working class. It does not concede that the Labour Party is ordained to be the exclusive property of its pro-capitalist leadership. Neither does it concede that only those workers within the established organisations are of concern to the labour movement. We seek to direct workers as an organised force to take up their struggles in the Labour Party to give support to every working-class struggle.

(The WSL will build an organisation based on Marxist politics inside the labour movement), not outside it and needlessly counterposed to it in the manner of the sectarian abstentionist left. We relate to the Labour Party by developing the contradiction between the working-class base and the pro-capitalist leadership and by attempting to mobilise the working class in struggles which (will create the conditions for the masses to outgrow and break through) the particular stage in its development represented by Labourism. We aim to help bring (the political wing of the working-class movement to a political reconstruction) on the basis of revolutionary socialist politics, methods, and objectives." (Draft Platform Document, p. 18)

Given that the organic unity of the Labour movement was a basic tenet of Sean M's approach to the Labour Party, which he sees as "the political wing" of the movement, the meaning of this passage is absolutely clear. The Labour Party is where the political struggles of the working class take place, it is not inevitably a reformist party controlled by the bureaucracy but can be reconstructed. Essentially this will happen through an objective process of struggles creating the conditions for the masses to outgrow Labourism. The role of Trotskyists is to be in the Labour Party in order to be part of this process. The intellectual sleight of hand in the first paragraph two sentences about the Labour Party, then a shift to the term labour movement in the third paragraph) was a pure manoeuvre to make it easier for the old WSL to swallow the pill.

Of course, the Labour Party is an extremely important issue for Trotskyists, and it is essential to take the struggle into the Labour Party, to utilise the relationship between the trade unions and the party in order to put demands on the leadership, and to do work in the Labour Party and its left currents. Not to do so would be sectarian and abstentionist. But this was not Sean M's argument.

What the ICL (or at least its majority, for there was internal opposition, as Evington's document explains) and the WSL right wing around KW and AC were arguing was that the Labour Party is the mass party of the working class, that all working class struggles and currents are reflected in the party, and that it is only within the Labour Party, as part of its left wing, that a revolutionary party can be built. The WSL's left wing (and, in reality, its central leaders) did not share this perspective. However, they did not fully understand the implications and did not have any clear perspective to counterpose to this - either on the particular question of the Labour Party or the more general question of building the revolutionary party.

## Stalinism

The other major area where a key ICL conception was introduced without any kind of struggle was on the question of Stalinism, specifically, on the character of the degenerated and deformed workers' states. This was done via a considerable expansion of the section on the Stalinist states in the final version of the Platform. The paragraphs in question read as follows:

“The WSL is for the defence of the Soviet Union - that is we are against imperialist subjugation of the USSR, etc., and against the return of nationalised property to private ownership. With Trotsky we hold nationalised property to be progressive (on condition that) the working class can seize political control from the bureaucracy and therefore we are opposed to (the potential embodied in nationalised property) being destroyed. Against capitalism and imperialism we defend the nationalised economies of the USSR and the other Stalinist ruled states... believing that under all conditions the best way to defend the (potentially progressive survivals) from the October Revolution... is to overthrow the bureaucratic tyranny and set up the democratic power of the working class.” (Draft Platform Document, p. 17)

The suggestion that Trotsky held the view that the socialised property relations in the USSR were only ‘potentially’ progressive is totally false. The property relations resulting from the overthrow of capitalism are in themselves historically progressive. That is the basis for our unconditional defence. Although this section includes a statement that defence of the USSR is unconditional, the effect of the underlined passages is to introduce an element of conditionality. This was soon to become apparent over Poland. The failure of the WSL rank and file to react to this change can in part be put down to its late appearance and the lack of time given to read the document (a point made by Chris E. in an earlier balance sheet of the fused WSL) but also, certainly in the case of the leadership, it must be attributed to the element of Stalinophobia (already discussed) in the old WSL. As with the question of the Labour Party, weaknesses in the old WSL prepared the way for an accommodation to the political line of the ICL.

Possibly more serious than any of these questions and especially disgraceful given the past commitment of the WSL leadership to internationalism, was the treatment of the question of TILC and the struggle for the reconstruction of the Fourth International. The brief section on disagreements needs to be quoted in full:

“The WSL openly acknowledges the existence of different views within its ranks on (historical questions of the Trotskyist movement), on the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, on the EEC, and on the General Strike. A timetable has been fixed for a discussion and decision on Afghanistan, the EEC, and the General Strike. In the meantime the different views will be expressed publicly in the press of the movement.

Once a decision has been taken by majority vote, that is then the line of the WSL, and all members are obliged to support it in practical action. The minority may, of course, continue to argue internally and to try and change the policy. At the discretion of the majority public debate may also be allowed.

Since the historical questions are not questions of active political programme, no timetable has been fixed on them. The WSL will, however, strive for a common understanding through internal debate and at the discretion of the leading committees) public discussion.” (Draft Platform Document, pp. 21-22)

What this meant was that the international political struggle to resolve the crisis of the Fourth International was relegated to ‘historical questions’, which did not require a decision. This was another victory for the ICL leadership’s national sectarianism, but it also represented the serious degeneration of the WSL leadership into national Trotskyism. The inadequacies in the treatment of the Fourth International question in “The Transitional Programme and Today’s Class Struggle”, pointed out in the ITC resolution referred to earlier, meant that there was a lack of strategic clarity which made the WSL vulnerable to national Trotskyism, given its disorientation in a changing political context (and given that the WSL was the largest section of TILC, which had not yet become a democratic centralist tendency).

However, the national Trotskyist transformation of the WSL leadership was not simply a question of their theoretical vulnerability and their willingness to accept the foregoing passage (which in practice already put off international democratic centralism to the indefinite future). The WSL leadership had accepted the ICL leadership’s insistence that the fused WSL should not accept the TILC founding documents as part of its own political basis. To quote from the draft Statement of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee produced in the summer of 1983:

“The leadership of the ICL accepted none of the founding documents of TILC. It rejected the TILC analysis of the crisis of the Trotskyist Fourth International as presented in “The Transitional Programme in Today’s Class Struggle” and the (9 Point) Fundamental Programmatic Basis, which formed the political platform and basis of TILC. All this was accomplished with the agreement of the Alan T. leadership of the WSL. Thus, from the time of the WSL/ ICL fusion, these became documents of TILC but not of the WSL itself. The WSL therefore through this shoddy piece of political double bookkeeping, became the **only** section of TILC whose adherence to TILC was not based on political agreement with the basis of TILC.” (Draft Statement of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee, 1983, p. 2)

Such were the political foundations of the fused WSL. It was inevitable that such a fusion could only lead to further degeneration and new splits. What should have been done? It is important to raise this question, not in order to provide a blueprint for the future or an “if only” scenario of ‘what might have been’, but because of the questions of method involved and to make a fuller assessment of the fusion.

The links with the ICL were not, of course, the WSL’s first experience of relations with other organisations. It had been invited by the USFI in 1978 to submit material to its 1979 Eleventh World Congress and responded with the document entitled *The Poisoned Well*, (*Trotskyism Today*, no. 3, July 1978), which contained a critical analysis of the development of the USFI. Similarly, when the Morenoite Bolshevik Faction and the Leninist Trotskyist Tendency split from the USFI in 1979 and joined with the Lambertist OCRFI in calling an ‘open conference’, the WSL warned rightly of the dangers of the formation of another opportunist bloc. It responded positively on the question of an open conference and refused to participate in the process of closing the discussion by recognising the BT/LTT/OCRFI as the continuity of Trotskyism. In both cases the WSL’s method had been principled - though there were problems: its uncertainty about how to characterise the USFI in 1978, using the unsatisfactory term ‘Pabloite’ throughout, and its failure to publish its documents on the Morenoites and Lambertists in 1979. Further, of course, its work with the groups involved in the formation of TILC led to that organisation’s being established on the basis of a series of programmatic and perspectives documents, with a clear commitment to a period of further discussion and clarification in order to set up a democratic centralist international tendency.

## **The Transitional Programme in Today’s Class Struggle**

With all the problems indicated here and in the earlier discussion of *The Transitional Programme in Today’s Class Struggle*, it is absolutely clear that there was a world of difference between the method used in these cases and in the relationship with the ICL in 1980/1981 - and equally that the WSL cannot be presented as innocents conned and abused by the wily manoeuvrer Sean M. What we are faced with is a result and a further aspect of the rapid degeneration of the WSL during this period.

The relationship with the ICL was, moreover, not the WSL’s only contact with other organisations in Britain during this period. Talks were held with *Workers Power*, which were broken off by the WSL. *Socialist Press* later commented that these had only highlighted the differences in politics and methods. Such differences, however, can at the very least have been no greater than those which, formally, should have existed between the WSL and ICL. The refusal to continue talks with *Workers Power*, on the one hand, and the developing relationship with the ICL, on the other hand, reflect the increasingly opportunist obsession of the WSL leadership with something they called sectarianism, which they increasingly identified with any criticism from the left. They were unable to fight or even to recognise the real sectarianism in the ICL’s method.

The programme of discussion with the ICL that began in the summer of 1980 and then the ICL’s fusion proposal early in 1981 thus accelerated a process that was under way already. Hence the WSL’s increasingly opportunist (and thus increasingly national Trotskyist) response to it. This reaction is brought out in Chris E.’s description of the WSL/ICL joint National Committee meetings in the wake of the fusion proposal:

“At a joint NC meeting in the immediate aftermath of the fusion proposal, attended by a divided and embittered WSL NC, it became clear that a miraculous conversion of the ICL to Trotskyism had not taken place, that the right wing of the old WSL (AC, KW, IM, Traven, et al.) had shifted towards ICL positions, and that Alan T. and the rest of the NC with exceptions of Pete F. and DC were passively allowing the right wing to carry out a campaign within the NC in favour of the fusion....

At the joint NC in Feb. March 1981 it was Pete F. and Todd (as well as to some extent John L.) who led the political attack on the ICL. On the women’s issue in particular there was a sharp exchange. It became clear that a prime consideration for Tony R was the bigger trade union fractions that would result from a

fusion. The political issues were being down-played in importance, and pragmatic (let's get on with the job) considerations were being elevated into first place. This was spelt out most clearly (and most enigmatically) by Alan T. when he said at the joint NC that a number of political issues might exist and be a problem, but the 'day today orientation' was the key criterion for assessing whether a fusion was viable. If this orientation was common to both organisations, then the political differences could be solved within a common organisation." (Chris E., Draft Balance Sheet of the TILC, the WSL/ICL Fusion, and the WIL/WIRG Split, 1984, pp. 4-5)

This description gives a clear sense of the situation on the National Committee and the response to the fusion proposal. It also makes it clear that there was opposition to the fusion or at least to the form it was taking. Sue and John L were particularly important in this respect as has already been noted:

"John and Sue L. had both been amongst the most vociferous critics of the fusion. John L had warned at the 1981 conference of the WSL (which voted for the fusion) against the Traven group's pro-ICL line on Afghanistan, had warned about the absence of a class struggle orientation in the practice of the ICL, calling for a 'class struggle tendency' to be established after fusion, had warned about ICL's unserious approach to international work, and he made a plea for comrades to ensure that resources were made available to continue the WSL's international work after the fusion. Sue L made an impassioned attack on the ICL's women's work and moved a resolution which effectively denounced it, but which was defeated at the vote. In the run-up to the fusion itself after the 1981 WSL conference, the Ls had gone through a bitter struggle with Alan T. and the right-wing elements who were in favour of fusion but found themselves confronted by a quite determined line-up.... The Ls became very bitter and increasingly cynical as the fusion was perpetrated...." (Chris E. Draft Balance Sheet, p.8)

The problem was that those who were critical of the fusion process either were not sufficiently independent of Alan T to challenge consistently his accommodation to the pro-ICL elements within his own prefusion WSL. Or they were insufficiently aware of the depth and speed of the degeneration of both the WSL and ICL right wing (with Alan T allowing himself to be dragged along by them).

Many of them joined the fused WSL on the basis of an expectation of a nonsectarian struggle for Trotskyism on the part of the WSL leadership. There was a clear alternative in the 1981 WSL conference documents on Stalinism (including Afghanistan), youth work (which included an alternative to liquidation into the LPYS) unemployed work, women's work and the reconstruction of the FI and TILC. It is possible to be critical of this or that aspect of these documents, but they are clearly outlining a Trotskyist response whereas the crypto/ICL were galloping rightwards at a fast pace towards liquidationism. This clear alternative was abandoned by Alan T. The very real material reasons for this have already been mentioned above (the dramatic rise in unemployment and declining prospects for the kind of successful class upsurges and militant class struggle that happened in the 1970s).

The real problem of the fusion was that the turn in the political situation in the aftermath of the election of Thatcher in 1979, which led to a shift in focus from trade union struggles to a resurgence of the Labour left, opened the door to a right wing lurch on the part of the Alan T leadership. Trotsky noted in *Where is Britain Going?* this phenomenon of the periodic shifts of working class struggle from trade unions to the Labour Party and back again. There was a chain of loyalties going from Sean M to the WSL right wing whom Alan T was in turn accommodating. Sue and John L and Helen and Pete F generally, while posing a clear Trotskyist alternative in the 1981 conference documents, failed to persuade the Alan T leadership. Their mistake was not to have formed a tendency from the outset. Instead, having fought a bitter rearguard action they chose to oppose the pro-ICL people by stealth and manoeuvre. The existence of completely opposed sections of the final draft fusion document is eloquent testimony to this incomplete and unresolved rearguard action. They were not independent enough of Alan T to form an organised opposition, nor were they able to stop the fusion. But they did resist and the contradictory nature of the fusion document indicates this.

Clearly there were contradictions within the prefusion WSL. The two Spartacist raids had left Alan T with a one-sided conception that there was this thing in the world called 'sectarianism' which was the root of all political evil. This made him vulnerable to the right wing overtures of Sean M and his own right wing whose liquidationist project appeared plausible, in the political conjuncture of the rise of the labour left and the decline in the level of class struggle. At the same time the invasion of Afghanistan and the atrocities in Kampuchea had elicited a right wing Stalinophobic and moralistic reaction in certain academics such as Bob Sutcliffe and others in the WSL right wing.

This was not representative of all of the WSL however. The nature of the WSL meant that many comrades went into the fusion not because of a political collapse along the lines of the WSL right (the battles at the 1981 conference testify to this) but because Alan T had such genuine respect and very real (not corrupt as with Sean M) political authority within the organisation that many found it difficult to imagine that he could collapse in the way that he did in the run up to and during the fusion. In other words it took time for comrades to realise the full implications of what was going on. John L. and his partner, Pete F. and his partner and others played a positive role in trying to alert the membership. Their failing was that they did not draw the conclusions from this in terms of organised opposition.

## **The Development of the Fused WSL**

The development of the fused WSL was essentially a working out of the dangers clearly contained in the fusion and of the rightward (if differing) trajectories of both prefusion organisations, under the impact of rapid changes in the international and national political situation; the retreat of the Labour left in the face of the reassertion of bureaucratic control, the imposition of martial law and banning of Solidarnosc in Poland in December 1981, and the Argentine invasion of the Malvinas Islands and consequent war with Britain.

It was a very rapid development, in fact, from the summer of 1981 to the summer of 1982. However, it has to be stressed that the old WSL could not have continued as it was. The deepening crisis of the fused WSL could not have been avoided in that way. If the fusion process had broken down for any reason, that in itself would have thrown the WSL into a deeper crisis, and the degeneration and fragmentation would have proceeded as rapidly, if in a different fashion. The fusion was in crisis from the start. Alan T. and John L. have subsequently made Sean M's factionalism and manoeuvring a major issue, in fact, the major issue.

Of course, this reflects their own desire to avoid a political debate: if Sean M had genuinely factionalised, that is, formed a faction openly to fight for his full political programme and perspectives, no one could have objected on that score. Indeed, it would have contributed to a clarification of the issues. A regime of manoeuvres did dominate in the WSL from the time of the fusion, and Sean M was the arch manoeurer. But there was a political basis to this. Manoeuvres were the only way an organisation on such a basis as the WSL could be held together, and since Sean M and the central leadership of the old ICL had a clearer perception of where they were going, they were in a position to outmanoeuvre the old WSL leadership, which had subscribed to the political basis of the fusion in a confused, disoriented, and pragmatic fashion. Furthermore, the old WSL leadership avoided a political fight against the manoeuvres, accepted this conduct to preserve the fusion (in reality, because they had no political alternative), and thus had themselves, increasingly, to manoeuvre against the old WSL left wing. One of the first issues was the character of the press. It had been agreed at the time of the fusion that Socialist Organiser should carry WSL sponsorship on its masthead.

This itself was an unsatisfactory and confused position, a sop to the old WSLers to get the fusion through but not something the old ICL leadership had any intention of implementing once fusion was an accomplished fact.

“At the EC on 14 November 1981 [N.B.: three and a half months after the fusion], John L. proposed a resolution committing the EC to introduction of WSL sponsorship of SO within one month. The motion also called for a balance sheet of the success or failure of the SO turn. The motion on sponsorship was defeated; the balance sheet, though agreed, was never produced.” (Pete F., Statement of the Suspended WSL Internationalist Faction, May 1983, p. 1)

Pete F., himself a WSL Executive Committee member, continues.

“At the Christmas 1981 TILC meeting a serious dispute had broken out in the WSL delegation over Poland. This resulted at the EC of 17 January 1982 in a request that articles by Sean M should be discussed prior to printing. Sean M denounced this as censorship and victimisation.....

[Another issue was] whether the day-to-day work of full-timers should be under the scrutiny and direction of the movement through its leading bodies. This related specifically to Valerie Wise, in her capacity as women's organiser, and Sean M, whose 'work' remained a mystery even to most EC members. Alan T., in particular, was concerned that Sean M was apparently free to spend his time developing and presenting his own political ideas rather than undertaking specific work on behalf of the movement as a whole.... (Statement of the Suspended WSL Internationalist Faction, p. 12)

The old ICL leaders continued to use Socialist Organiser as a vehicle for their own views, rather than positions discussed and developed by the WSL as a whole or its leading bodies, to defend their right to do this, and to reject the old WSL leadership's points on accountability of full-timers. Sean M threatened to reconvene a meeting of the old ICL if these issues were pressed further. The response of the old WSL leaders was to arrange a purely organisational compromise.

“At the EC of 18 February 1982, it was eventually agreed to ‘see how things go’ - with no voting on resolutions presented during the dispute.... What it meant in practice was that none of the questions were resolved.

The report to the NC of 21 February 1982 indicated only that there had been problems of functioning in the leading bodies. In reality, after six weeks in which the work of the movement had been savagely disrupted, the gladiatorial contest on the EC on organisational questions had resolved nothing. There was no change in the regime of the paper, no accountability on the part of the full-time party workers. Valerie Wise, given her head, travelled rapidly out of the WSL towards the reformist bureaucracy via Women's City. That the occasion of her departure was a Women's Commission at which she was pressed to do work around the NHS strike in Manchester only goes to confirm the value of bending the constitution for comrades with seventeen years in the movement. Because the EC in the end **refused** to fight Valerie W.'s reformist trajectory they ensured her loss to the movement.” (Statement of the Suspended WSL Internationalist Faction, p. 3)

There is certainly an element in its attitude to the role of full-timers of the old WSL's increasingly dismissive attitude towards theoretical work and its tendency to treat full-timers as hacks. It was nevertheless correct to argue for them to have a clearly defined role. However, they were unable to carry through this particular struggle because of their general inability to pose any political alternative. Thus Sean M could always call their bluff by threatening to blow the fusion apart.

The problem was that this was the only dispute the leadership was involved in. In fact, there was a deliberate suppression of discussion. There was a kind of armistice to avoid conflict and let the fusion settle down. For the first six months there were no internal bulletins!!

Throughout this whole period, of course, the WSL, through Socialist Organiser, was moving rapidly to the right. The paper's orientation was clearly and almost exclusively towards a Labour Party milieu. It concentrated on left reformist struggles in the constituencies, quite narrowly. It did not go beyond their preoccupations but presented Socialist Organiser as part of their current, the most dependable fighters for Labour Party democracy and against the witch-hunts, though with some criticisms of the nationalism of Benn's economic policies. Thus it could not give the crisis ridden rank-and-file left reformists any alternative perspective of struggle. With the 1981 Labour Party annual conference, the January 1982 Bishops Stortford meeting, the Tatchell affair, and the Greater London Council (GLC) climb-down over the 'Fares Fair' policy, the lefts were already in a crisis. Instead, it was the dangers of the witch-hunt in the Labour Party that were used to justify the eventual decision that Socialist Organiser should not be sponsored by the WSL.

## Local Government

Part of this orientation was a serious accommodation to the left reformists on the local government question. First, the main focus of opposition to cuts was seen as Labour controlled councils (accountable, of course, to local Labour Parties). The clear and increasing implication was that the Labour councillors should be the leadership of this fight. While the demands put on Labour controlled councils for a policy of confrontation with the government were correct in themselves, it was inexcusable to leave any impression that the election of left-wingers to council seats could do more than allow them an important mobilising role, a platform. However, the role of the working class was always second fiddle to the councillors. There were no transitional demands against the cuts, no call for a workers' plan, no propaganda for councils of action.

Second, this local government policy led to an ill considered tactic of standing WSL members as Labour councillors in the 1982 council elections (the old WSL could scarcely criticise this, since one of their members had previously been elected as a councillor, with no real political base or perspectives, and had undertaken a long-term intervention in the borough allotments committee). It was not that standing as councillors was necessarily wrong, even when it was not possible to stand on a full Trotskyist programme (which was obviously not possible). The problem was that candidates were standing more or less where they could, without any real political basis beyond at best their local Labour Parties, and not necessarily where the local Labour manifesto

contained a clear anticuts stand. This was a direct consequence of the way the WSL adapted its policies on local government and the cuts to the left reformists. Having made their differences of perspective with the left reformists as small as possible, they had to stand to retain their credibility.

A clear indication of this accommodation was seen in the Socialist Organiser treatment of the court case against the GLC 'Fares Fair' policy. While they criticised Livingstone and the GLC Labour Group for raising fares rather than defying the courts and also criticised London Labour Briefing's hand-wringing apology for Livingstone, they were totally uncritical of the individualistic and diversionary 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' campaign led by Rachel Land Briefing. They simply tail-ended the Labour lefts all the way to defeat.

Later in 1982 the situation was to get far worse. Having largely adopted as its own, even if only for tactical reasons, the left reformists' perspective of local government work, concentrating on the council chambers and the meetings of Labour Groups and local Labour parties, Socialist Organiser inevitably slid behind them as they dithered, allowing Graham Bash of Briefing to expound yet another diversionary tactic: 'majority opposition' - which they never criticised. And when the Labour Party brought in the Register of non-affiliated groups, while Socialist Organiser roundly denounced it and refused to register, within the WSL Sean M argued strongly that this was only a tactic, which might have to be reversed. Within a few months the old ICL leaders were talking of abandoning Socialist Organiser if necessary and selling Briefing or Tribune.

### **Adaptation to Bourgeois Democracy**

But the clearest sign of the adaptation to left reformism was adaptation to bourgeois democracy, attempting to persuade the Labour left-wingers that there was not such a big gap between parliamentary democracy and socialism. This came out most clearly in the series of articles by John O'Mahony (Sean M) entitled Socialism and Democracy (Socialist Organiser, nos. 67, 68, 70, 72; 7 January - 11 February 1982). The purpose of these articles was to present the difference between bourgeois and proletarian democracy as almost a matter of degree, as though socialism was a logical extension of parliamentary democracy. The articles avoided the awkward fact that bourgeois democracy is a form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, which has to be smashed by the working class and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The dangers of Sean M's position on Stalinism came out around the banning of Solidarnosc. Here at least a strong response from Tony R checked Sean M's course, but his orientation was clearly to the Polish Solidarity Campaign run by anti-communists Blick and Westoby and associated with reactionary Catholic Polish émigrés. His position of support for Polish self-determination (rather than for an independent socialist Poland) effectively abandoned the policy of defence of the workers' states and implied that bourgeois democracy would be progressive in Poland. (See Socialist Organiser, no. 66, 16 December 1981, p. 1, for the formulation of the self-determination position.)

Tony R's response on Poland was effectively the only political challenge from any of the leading members of the old WSL, and no lessons were drawn from this experience. To do so would threaten the fusion. Internal debate was minimal, apart from a few early internal bulletins with some articles on the general strike, etc.

Thus well before the Malvinas war, the deepening of the WSL's crisis was all too clear, yet there was no organised opposition, no attempt to form a tendency or a faction. The suppressed internal life, infrequency of internal bulletins and the abdication by the leadership of any serious attempt at an organised discussion of the differences that existed meant that the opposition was confined to specific areas of work. The left was atomised and deliberately kept that way by the Alan T leadership.

### **Conflict and Struggle**

In spite of this, conflict and struggle took place from day one in a whole number of areas. The WSL left was disoriented and unorganised but a rearguard action was still being carried out. It was paying a dear price for the inability of the left within the old leadership to crystallise out an organised opposition from day one. Part of the problem was the still strong, genuine respect for, and acceptance of, the political authority of Alan T. The WSL lefts at leadership level acted as a left pressure on, and advisor to, Alan T. They could not bring themselves to see that sometimes the best way of helping someone is to break with them when they are about to take a wrong course and go into sharp political opposition.

The clearest opposition at this stage to the rightward orientation to reformism came from other TILC sections. The LOR produced a document (Some Critical Remarks about WSL Politics towards the LP, July 1982), which was not circulated for many months. The RWL produced a document at the same time, written by Eric

O'Brien, in reply to Sean M's Socialism and Democracy articles. The attempt to organise a discussion on this at the 1982 summer school was treated as a clandestine activity. Otherwise, opposition was confined to specific areas of work. NJ wrote an internal bulletin article against Socialist Organiser's condemnation of Irish Republican Army (IRA) civilian bombings, and this position was taken by the majority of the WSL Irish Commission. This was rejected by the NC; the Irish Commission became a dormant body.

The sharpest conflict was in the Women's Commission, between old WSL and old ICL women. The latter had a more or less exclusive orientation towards women in the Labour Party and a petty bourgeois feminist milieu through the journal Women's Fightback, which adapted heavily to its audience in the issues it concentrated on and in its politics. The old WSL women comrades wanted to maintain their orientation to working-class women in struggle and to fighting around an action programme. There was a certain element of truth in the charge of economism, because these comrades shared the general method and thus the same general problems as the old WSL as a whole, though probably less than the male trade union activists. On the whole, they were correct in their arguments against the old ICL women, but they were hampered because, in common with the old WSL left wing as a whole, they had no developed political alternatives. They were hit by the same crisis of perspective. Furthermore, they were so isolated and received no assistance from the old WSL leadership, to whom this was a secondary area of work which should not be allowed to disrupt the fusion. As a result the Women's Commission became virtually inoperative.

Before we turn to the Malvinas War dispute, we should indicate one other area of work which showed the rapid degeneration of the WSL, although this is not strictly in chronological order. The dispute in the National Health Service (NHS) which erupted in late spring 1982 and continued through to late autumn, should have offered the WSL especially good opportunities for a Trotskyist intervention. The fused organisation had a relatively large and potentially rather strong health workers' fraction, with several comrades already in a leadership role at rank-and-file level and with the experience of the old WSL in hospital occupations. However, the opportunity was totally lost. A regular bulletin, Health Workers for the Full Claim, was produced and got a positive response, and some sort of campaign was built around this.

However, this intervention was restricted to militant left-wing trade unionism. There was little in the way of a political intervention. Neither in the bulletin nor in Socialist Organiser was there any attempt to campaign around transitional demands, nor was there a serious struggle for rank-and-file control of the strike. Health Workers for the Full Claim became essentially a campaign of pressure on the bureaucrats. Thus, having organised a quite successful NHS shop stewards' conference in September 1982, the WSL opposed and secured the defeat of the absolutely correct proposal of Workers Power health workers to set up a national committee from the conference. After the end of the dispute, the industrial organiser, Levy, could only comment that the WSL had intervened well and couldn't be blamed for not having made a single recruit.

This is an important episode, because it indicates the degeneration of the very area of work, trade union struggles, which had been the main strength, the proud boast, of the old WSL. This was a direct outcome of the element of trade union economism which we have seen growing in strength in the prefusion WSL. And for all their attacks on old WSL economism, it was an attitude to trade union work shared by the old ICL leadership, the other side of their orientation to the Labour Party as the 'political wing' of the working-class movement.

## **Malvinas War**

It was the fight over the Malvinas War which brought the conflicts in the WSL to a head, in one sense, because of the formation of the tendency by Alan T. and the Special Conference. However, the Malvinas War debate was also used to stifle and defuse the development of any left-wing opposition in the WSL. Thus the outcome of the dispute solved nothing but intensified the crisis of the WSL and its move to the right.

The Socialist Organiser position of dual defeatism - that is, of neutrality - between British imperialism and a semi-colonial country and its 'self-determination for the Falkland Islanders' policy was a clear, straightforward abandonment of the Trotskyist programme. It abandoned the distinction between imperialist oppressor countries and oppressed semi-colonial countries - and thus between nationalism in the two cases - in order to justify its refusal to defend Argentina. Its use of the self-determination demand was a mockery of Trotskyist support for the rights of oppressed nations to self-determination. The whole position represented a move to social democratic pacifism - an accommodation to it in the pages of the paper and a pretty clear adoption of it in the arguments of some WSL members, like Traven.

This produced both confusion and hostility in the WSL, mainly but by no means exclusively among old WSL members. There was a strong reaction to the leadership's line from Merseyside and Nottingham. A resolution from the Merseyside branch (initiated by an ex-ICL supporter and backed by old WSL members including Sue E and Chris E) called upon the NC to recognise Argentine sovereignty over the islands and to reverse its line of calling for the withdrawal of Argentine troops. This received no votes in favour and only four abstentions. Pete F was not present at the NC but later announced that he would have voted in favour of it.

## **Self Determination for the “Falkland Islanders”**

Pete F. wrote a document shortly after Easter 1982 attacking the Socialist Organiser line and setting out a principled anti-imperialist position. The EC briefly overturned the position only to have it restored by a special NC. He began by voting for Sean M's line of 'self-determination for the Falkland islanders' at a TILC meeting in Paris. There was a huge row nevertheless between Sean M and Alan T over this issue. The compromise result was to move “self determination for the Falkland islanders” from the first point to a lower position in the resolution! The resolution also called for the withdrawal of Argentine troops from the islands and a position of dual defeatism. Such was the climate of confusion that this resolution was also supported by other TILC delegates (who reversed their line at the next TILC meeting in July).

Alan T.'s initial position had been confused and tending to compromise with Sean M. Though he moved away from Sean M's dual defeatism, he did not in fact move to a consistently anti-imperialist position. Instead, he adopted the confused position that it was only when the British fleet set sail that Argentine defencism became relevant. All other TILC sections (apart from the Socialist Fight group in Australia) and eventually TILC itself took the correct position, which was one of support for Argentina against Britain from the time of the Argentine invasion of the Malvinas Islands, on the basis of the general position of support for semi-colonial countries at war with imperialist countries. This position applies regardless of the character of the regimes in the two countries and regardless of who started the war.

Sean M's argument was essentially moralistic. Alan T.'s position hovered between that line of argument and a consistently Trotskyist position. He eventually announced the formation of a tendency on the specific issue of the Malvinas war without consulting other members about the basis of the platform - no tendency meeting took place at any point. The platform spoke of the need to defend Argentina from the moment that the British task force set sail. At around the same time a motion from the Merseyside branch to the NC, initiated by Sue E and Chris E, called for a special conference to decide the question of the Malvinas. This was carried at the NC. This along with the original motion to reverse the line on the Malvinas constituted the beginnings of a struggle to clarify the issues at the heart of the crisis.

Thus he was, in effect, neutralist as far as the initial Argentine attack was concerned. This led to confusion and uncertainty in the tendency fight against Sean M's supporters. At the last moment, recognition of the legitimacy of the Argentine claim to the Malvinas was inserted in the Tendency resolution. Yet Alan T. 'condemned' the invasion. Then, under pressure from Pete F., Alan T. changed that to 'opposed' the invasion as 'reactionary' - unable to distinguish between the objectively progressive character of the invasion as a challenge to an imperialist power by a semi-colony and the undoubted reactionary motives of the Galtieri junta.

## **Anti-imperialist Position**

Hand-in-hand with the confused and inadequate politics of the Alan T. tendency went the anti-Marxist, anti-democratic, and anti-internationalist methods employed. Thus, following the general logic that the highest priority had to be given to preserving the fusion, the main leaders of the tendency argued that the differences over the Malvinas War were simply about the best way to fight imperialism and that they had no connection with or implications for any other issues or differences. Not only was the absurdity of this argument patently obvious to everyone, on both sides of the argument, not only was it a blatant diplomatic fudge, but it was a thoroughgoing abandonment of the Marxist method. It argued, in effect, that the leadership of a revolutionary organisation was making what was a major concession to national-chauvinist sentiment (not to mention moralistic and empiricist methods of argument) under conditions of war as a simple isolated mistake, a difference of emphasis within a common struggle. Inevitably, this meant that the Tendency fought the Majority with one hand tied behind its back.

Moreover, while posing as the defenders of an internationalist position on the war (a very limited one, in fact), the Minority leadership were forced in practice (by the Malvinas conflict) to turn more sharply to the methods of national Trotskyism and to manoeuvres in their relations with the other sections of TILC. The im-

portant thing for them was to restrict this to a single issue argument in the WSL. Hence they were party to the decision to depart from the practice of 1980 and 1981 and change the 1982 Summer School from a TILC school to a WSL school - unilaterally and without informing the other sections.

At the Summer School they were party to the EC decision to turn the debate on the Malvinas War into a separate WSL event, with other TILC sections only being allowed to make brief statements - and not bothering to inform them of the decision. This was later dismissed as 'a blunder' - the visiting TILC comrades only learnt of the decision because it was secretly leaked to them by Pete F..

The principled anti-imperialist position maintained by the minority within the TILC who had voted against the Sean M resolution at the previous TILC meeting which was adopted by the summer TILC meeting was a threat to Alan T. and John L. because it implied a fight against Sean M's position rather than an attempt to play down the differences. If the fight against Sean M was to be based on the TILC position and if TILC was to be involved in the WSL discussion, then it would be impossible to restrict it to the single issue of Argentine defencism (after all, the other TILC sections were already taking up the questions of the WSL's orientation to the Labour Party and to bourgeois democracy). Of course, Sean M was setting the pace of the moves to national Trotskyism.

## **1982 Summer School**

Thus, for instance, prior to the WSL National Committee meeting during the 1982 Summer School, the old ICL leadership convened a sort of private caucus (no question of issuing a political statement or forming a tendency), which presented to the National Committee a set of resolutions demanding no democratic centralism in TILC, an end to attacks on Sean M's politics in the Summer School, and the winding up of the Minority Tendency on the Malvinas War. (See "Statement of the Suspended WSL Internationalist Faction", p. 4.) Though this resulted in a furious argument, it seems to have been based on the disruptive character of Sean M's supporters' behaviour rather than the political issues involved. Though it appears that no vote was taken on the motions, this was on the basis of patching up peace. It would have been better to have had the votes, but this would have ended Alan T.'s attempt to restrict the struggle in the WSL. Thus politically it was another retreat by Alan T. which laid the basis for further agreement with Sean M's supporters.

As a result of these manoeuvres, national Trotskyism was further reinforced, TILC marginalised in the consciousness of most WSL members, the unprincipled character of the fusion became ever more blatantly obvious. While the effect of this was to atomise that part of the left closely associated with Alan T in Oxford, there was a parallel process occurring in which the Merseyside comrades (Sue E. Chris E and Mike J), the Leicester cdes. (Helen F, Pete F, Charlie S et al.) were beginning to cooperate in the struggle to change the line of the organisation at the special conference. This developed into an international collaboration with the TILC delegates at the WSL summer school in July 1982.

The Merseyside resolution calling for recognition of Argentine sovereignty and opposing the line of withdrawal of Argentine troops at the first NC (April 1982) after the war began represented the earliest consistent position (supported by PF) against the war in the WSL - in Britain the imperialist belligerent country. The TILC comrades who later formed the ITC were split on this question at the first TILC meeting during the war - some voted for Alan T and Sean M's line, others including Leland S, the RWL delegate and Fernando V of the LOR, voted it down. It was not until July, when the war was over, that the future ITC comrades in TILC adopted a united, unanimous and consistent position on the war. The Merseyside comrades (including an ex-ICL member), Pete F and other rank and file members had nevertheless been struggling for a consistent line in the imperialist belligerent country since the very beginning of the war.

At the Special Conference there was a polarisation which corresponded almost exactly to the prefusion WSL/ICL membership. Sean M put forward a resolution defending his original line and Alan T a resolution supporting defence of Argentina, but characterising the Argentine invasion as "reactionary". It was clear that the vote was going to be extremely close. There was a lot of very heavy lobbying going on. Alan T's position was seriously flawed on the question of the characterisation of the Argentine invasion. The continuing lack of organisation of the WSL left (and elements of the ex-ICL left) resulted in there not being an alternative resolution. There was no tendency meeting to decide the position to be adopted. Those who were unhappy with Alan T's resolution were reluctantly reconciled to giving critical support to it because it was obvious that the vote would be extremely close and they did not want to be responsible for Sean M's line being carried.

An amendment to Alan T's resolution was moved by Steve H and seconded by Chris E in the form of the text of the TILC resolution adopted at the July TILC meeting. This characterised the Argentine invasion as "objectively progressive" and it was counterposed to Alan T's characterisation of the invasion as being "reactionary". The suggestion for this amendment had come from the ex-ICL leadership as an attempt to create division in their opponents camp and Alan T protested at this suggestion vigorously. Outrage and dismay were expressed by the WSL left because they felt it jeopardised the chances of winning the vote. The movers of the amendment, however, who were aware of this, indicated that they would give critical support to Alan T's resolution if the amendment fell. This did not prevent recriminations from the WSL left, who could not see or did not want to see the importance of the distinction. The amendment got just 15 votes and thus fell.

None of the WSL left from Leicester and Nottingham voted for it. Among those who did vote for it were Sue E., Chris E, Margaret J, Eric J, Richard E. The Alan T resolution was then carried by just two votes. Because of this, there was no fight throughout the period of the Malvinas War debate on the basis of the TILC position. [Note by Chris Edwards (May 2002). This latter sentence is misleading and confusing since the comrades named earlier in the paragraph, who moved and voted for the TILC amendment, clearly did struggle for the TILC position. It was other members of the tendency who did not struggle for this position].

### **Lack of Democracy**

Lack of democracy, failure to function in any way as an organised tendency in a democratic centralist movement, was a consequence of the political positions and methods which the old WSL leadership adopted and developed in the Malvinas War dispute. Though the initial tendency statement (Against Neutrality on the Falklands War. Defend Argentina - No Confidence in Galtieri, 20 May 1982), signed by the five old WSL members of the fused WSL Executive Committee, concluded with an appeal to comrades to join the tendency (solely and exclusively to argue and organise with a view to changing the current line of the movement on the Falklands/Argentina [sic] war, of course), this never actually happened.

There really was no tendency. It had no declared membership, no organisation, no internal life or decision-making process. It never even had a single meeting. It remained a group of NC members - in reality, a group of EC members - and was organised on a basis of contact among them (especially between the Oxford group and Pete F. in Leicester), with the supporters kept in a passive role. This followed from Alan T.'s politics, because a fully functioning tendency would have been impossible to contain and would have been a threat to the fusion. It allowed Alan T. to close the tendency down without any discussion immediately after the September Special Conference.

All this meant that the change of line at the Special Conference resolved nothing, not simply because a majority of two votes was scarcely a resounding victory but because, rather than clarifying the real political issues, the WSL had become more confused and the conduct of the dispute had speeded its degeneration. One consequence was that it degenerated to a certain extent into a loyalty test between the two prefusion organisations. However, four ex-ICL members did vote for Alan T's resolution.

Pete F and others in the WSL left contributed to the confusion in the organisation. Just as Alan T oscillated between Sean M's politics and consistent positions, so Pete F oscillated between consistent positions and Alan T. He collaborated with Alan T's tendency trying to act as a left pressure. Having made an early contribution to the dispute with his April document, he thus preferred to offer a united front to Alan T insofar as he was ready to oppose the majority rather than use his leadership position to crystallise out a consistent alternative. It was necessary however to organise an independent tendency when it became clear that the basis of Alan T's tendency was both irredeemably inconsistent and undemocratic. The result was that it was left to inexperienced rank and file members to respond as best as they could to the crisis of the organisation.

The seriousness of this failure became apparent in the aftermath of the Special Conference. The changed position on the Malvinas War never received a mention in Socialist Organiser. After all, Socialist Organiser was not the paper of the WSL. But the WSL did not even go through the procedure of taking the retrospective change of line through the fictitious broad groups, the Socialist Organiser Alliance. The only public statement was a supplement to Workers Socialist Review, no. 2, which gave at least as much space to a restatement of the old majority position as the new and had a very limited circulation. None of the other contentious issues were taken up within the WSL. For some months there was scarcely a single internal bulletin. The WSL leadership, old WSL as much if not more than the old ICL, agreed on avoiding political conflict in order to give the organisation a cooling off period. This was simply a cover for the further political degeneration and rightward shift of the WSL. Demoralisation and confusion became widespread and was reflected in declining membership: in

July 1981 the WSL had boasted that the fusion created an organisation of over 300 members; it is probable that by the beginning of 1983 it had effectively lost nearly half that number.

In fact, it was in this situation that, through the winter of 1982-1983, the ex-ICL leadership pushed forward more openly right-wing positions on a whole range of issues: defence (or rather, lack of it) of the Republican movement in Ireland, on a united federal Ireland, on Palestine (the beginning of the move to the Socialist Organiser's' present 'two nations/two states' position), on work in the Labour Party, 'Campaign for Labour Party Democracy', etc. This happened still without any political fight from the old WSL leadership. Yet far from preserving the fusion, it was stoking up bitterness, confusion, disorientation, and recrimination, an atmosphere that was driving more and more members out of political activity or into passive routinism.

## **Split with TILC**

Objectively a split with TILC was necessary for both wings of the leadership. The old ICL leadership, of course, had never accepted TILC's perspectives and, as we have seen, ensured that the TILC documents were not part of the basis of the fusion. For Alan T. the logic of that decision, developed by the retreat further into national Trotskyism during the Malvinas War dispute, forced him to reject the (already overdue) transformation of TILC into an international democratic centralist tendency, and was leading him to abandon TILC altogether. This led Alan T., Tony R., and John L., along with Alan C., to compete with Sean M and Martin T in manoeuvres, denigration, and outright slanders against the other TILC sections, sowing further confusion and demoralisation.

Inevitably this national Trotskyism in its largest section created an increasingly serious crisis for TILC. Already the possibility of an important political discussion being developed with the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (an international grouping which had broken with the Lambertists early in 1979, led by the POR/Masas of Bolivia and Política Obrera of Argentina) had been lost because it would have raised the Malvinas War issue more sharply in the WSL - even though there was a pro-TILC tendency within the Workers League of Palestine, one of the sections of the FIT. Whole sections and opportunities of building sections were destroyed. Particularly disgraceful and directly related to the practice of the old WSL leadership was the treatment of the Turkish group. The undoubted problems of this group of Trotskyist exiles in London were exacerbated by the WSL's combination of arrogant indifference, chauvinist insensitivity, manoeuvring, and splitting, leading to its rapid disintegration.

Thus, internationalism itself, posed concretely by the question of international democratic centralism in TILC, was raised as a central political issue in TILC and in the WSL by the process of degeneration of the WSL. Having already taken up the issues of the WSL's orientation to the Labour Party and fought over the Malvinas War issue, the TILC sections took this issue up sharply in the winter of 1982-1983. It was only at this point that opposition within the WSL took an organised political form. This developed from essentially the same sources that had come together at the 1982 WSL Summer School i.e. elements within the WSL left and from the TILC sections. It was a common international struggle.

## **6. The Opposition in the WSL**

From the autumn of 1982 there were actually three more or less organised groups in the WSL. From November, Alan T. was organising meetings of his trusted supporters. In effect, there was a 'secret faction' - without, of course, any declared political programme. By December at least (when they were first accidentally discovered by a Turkish comrade), the Supporters of Sean M were holding their own secret meetings. Neither of these groups operated on a basis of principled politics. Thus neither was prepared to form a tendency or faction to fight politically within the WSL in line with the procedures of democratic centralism. Both were manoeuvres, cliques around a small group of leaders.

In the case of Alan T. and Tony R. (John L., no longer trusted by either side, was not part of either group), the manoeuvres were designed to hold together old WSLers on a limited, activist, 'workerist' basis (at the same time as holding back any political fight or, therefore, linking up with the struggle of the other TILC sections). It was thus a manoeuvre directed at least as much, and certainly more openly, against the left and against the rest of TILC (mainly against the RWL/US and the LOR/Italy) as against the old ICL leadership.

The third grouping was the internationalist left, the main part of which formed the Internationalist Tendency (IT) in January 1983. There were genuine internationalist left-wingers who, because of subsequent demoralisations, ties to the Oxford leadership and the mistakes and weaknesses of the IT, never became part of the tendency. In the main these were women comrades. Only this tendency fought an open political struggle on the

basis of a platform document and attempted to take the perspectives of TILC back into the WSL. This was its central importance and its major contribution. The formation of the International Tendency (which, correctly assessing the deep crisis of leadership in the WSL, transformed itself into a faction in March) was thus a positive, though long overdue, step forward. The response of the leadership - Alan T./Tony R., John L., and the old ICL leaders - was, while maintaining their secret manoeuvres, to bloc together against the internationalists.

It is with the political development of this current, within the context of the struggle to turn TILC into a democratic centralist tendency, that this section is principally concerned. It should, however, be noted that from January 1983 there was a fourth grouping, far more informal than any of the other three, but at least more open than the Alan T. and Sean M cliques. This was the group around Traven, which favoured fusion with the Socialist League, the British section of the USFI.

Rank and file members of the WSL left had been lobbying for a tendency within the organisation since the Special conference. In particular the Merseyside comrades (Sue E, Chris E, Mike J - a former WSL NC member and leader of the Danish TAF which he helped to found) produced a document (in the case of Sue E and Chris E their first ever) Against Unprincipled Revisionism, Against National Trotskyism which dealt with all the issues which had emerged in the dispute over the Malvinas. The differences on imperialism, Stalinism, Labour Party, Ireland and the Workers Government slogan. It also linked these to the attempts to ditch TILC which were then surfacing in the Alan T leadership. The general line of this document was subsequently adopted by the International Tendency (IT/WSL) at its founding meeting in Birmingham in January. This played an important role in crystallising out an alternative political line around which the IT could develop. The impetus for the first meeting of the IT came from these comrades.

They had to struggle against Pete F who was still playing an ambivalent role in relation to Alan T. His approach was to try and draw Alan T into a more oppositional role. He was hesitant about forming a tendency independent of him because of the effect this would have on his strategy of trying to draw Alan T away from Sean M.

The RWL played a role in the development of the IT. When they learnt that the Alan T leadership had decided not to transform the TILC into a democratic centralist tendency at the up-coming December TILC conference as planned, they were furious, recognising as they did that this was because Alan T had decided to preserve the untenable fusion with Sean M at all costs, including the transformation of TILC. In particular they recognised that it was because they had struggled against Sean M along with the other TILC sections at the Summer School - where they had walked out (along with all the other international delegates) of the Malvinas debate in protest at the attempts to limit their contribution to positive, non-polemical statements - that Alan T was now trying to obstruct the development of TILC into a democratic centralist tendency.

## **Platform for a Tendency**

An informal meeting between the Merseyside and some of the Leicester comrades took place in early January 1983 in Leicester to draw up a platform for a tendency (the contents of this are discussed below). The meeting decided to call a further meeting to establish a tendency in Birmingham a few weeks later to which other members would be invited. Pete F and the Leicester comrades subsequently tried to call the meeting off because Pete F in particular was very ambivalent about the whole thing. The Merseyside comrades were determined to go ahead with the meeting however and informed the Leicester comrades that the meeting was going ahead with or without their participation. Leland S of the RWL who was in Britain for the TILC meeting was invited to attend the founding meeting of the tendency by the Merseyside comrades to express the support of the TILC sections for the tendency. The meeting did go ahead and the Leicester comrades attended as did a group of comrades from Nottingham. There were around twenty five people at the meeting which agreed to establish a tendency on the basis of the platform drawn up at the earlier Leicester meeting. The meeting also adopted the general line of the much longer and more analytical document Against Unprincipled Revisionism, Against national Trotskyism.

Pete F. had been an author of the July/August 1980 articles in Socialist Press criticising Workers Actions's version of the workers' government demand and of the October 1980 letter attacking the view of the Bennite movement as a mass anticapitalist current (as well as of many of the historical articles in Socialist Press). A full-time organiser for the Socialist Labour League in the Northeast in the late 1960s, to 1971 or 1972 (though not a member of Alan T.'s opposition in the WRP, having left by that time), he joined the WSL in the late 1970s and was the principal builder of the WSL in Leicester. By the time of the fusion, this was the biggest concentration of members of the old WSL outside Oxford.

The IT/IF included only two other WSL National Committee members: Helen F. and Graves - almost the only black member of the NC (and, though still in his early 1920s, actually a more long-standing member of the WSL than Pete F. or Helen F.). To some extent the IT/IF also crossed the division between the pre-fusion organisations, though its thirty eight members were predominantly old WSLers, it included five old ICLers (as well as a small number who had joined after the fusion).

Apart from the above named individuals, the IT/IF was essentially a 'rank-and-file' tendency, but it was a particular section of the rank and file. It recruited no one in Oxford; in London it had only three members (two from the Turkish group); it had only two members in industrial unions (Chris E. in TGWU, MJ in EEP-TU) The bulk of its members were in Leicester (approximately twenty) plus six in Nottingham. The great majority of these Leicester and Nottingham comrades were in their teens or early twenties. Among these were two black comrades in each city - and two IT/IF members in Birmingham and Coventry were black students.

The tendency represented an alliance between the Merseyside comrades, who were largely instrumental in ensuring that the tendency was formed, the more ambivalent Leicester comrades some of whom were youth, and the Nottingham youth comrades whom Pete F had been reluctant to have in the tendency because of bad personal relations he had developed with them. Pete F had not invited them to the initial informal meeting in Leicester. They were invited to attend the founding Birmingham meeting at the suggestion of Leland S who knew them from WSL Summer School. The youth comrades gave the tendency an important source of dynamism and energy. The tendency eventually accounted for around 15-20% of the membership.

The personality of Pete F led to a number of problems in both the Leicester and Nottingham branches. Despite all his faults he was a very able, committed comrade with basically sound political instincts which were responsible for the fact that he was the only member of the NC and EC who took a correct line from the beginning on the Malvinas and most of the other issues. He along with Helen F had played a leading role in building the largest branch of the organisation outside Oxford. He had played a key role in the rearguard action against the WSL/ICL fusion. He was a leading militant in the NUT and used his abilities to good effect in manoeuvring Tony G into the national secretaryship of the STA. He played a key role in the national youth work of the pre-fusion WSL. His problems were a certain over-ambitiousness, overconfidence, a lack of independence from Alan T and a certain resentment and inability to cope with independence of his politics on the part of other comrades including youth.

## **Stealth and Manoeuvre**

He had a tendency as we have seen to try and achieve his political objectives by stealth and manoeuvre rather than through straight forward political struggle. There is of course a place for manoeuvre in politics as long as this method does not become the dominant aspect or a substitute for political struggle as it did in the case of Pete F. He was an outstandingly able comrade who could argue politically when he wanted to, but this was not his preferred method on too many occasions. Such methods are particularly disastrous when applied to youth. His relationship with the youth was based on a mixture of soft opportunist relationships when he was getting his own way and sly manoeuvre when he was not. Unfortunately for him he had a tendency to end up outmanoeuvring himself.

Thus, for an understanding of the political development of the opposition, considerable importance attaches to the way the WSL had been built in Leicester and Nottingham.

In the late 1970s the WSL had launched its own youth section, the Socialist Youth League (SYL), with its own youth paper, Red Youth, which had a serious orientation towards the then expanding National Union of School Students and towards anti-racist/anti-fascist work. The chief areas where this was built were in Leicester and London - most successfully in Leicester, where intervention in the struggles of school students was crucial. And it was in turn through this work that the WSL was built. Significantly, Leicester and Liverpool were the principal areas of the WSL's unemployed work. In Leicester the WSL had been militantly involved in leading nursery occupations, in the anti-fascist work, and in the 1981 youth uprising. (It is also significant that very little was done to develop any of these areas of work in Oxford - it appears that despite the apparent opportunities there was little student work done there either.)

Thus, the IT/IF membership reflected the recognition by the old WSL or by elements within it, of the importance for a revolutionary organisation of a turn to the most oppressed layers of the working class and the attempt to intervene in their struggles - the struggles of youth, of black people, of the unemployed, and to some extent of women and lesbians and gay men. These elements are always likely, (at least if there has been a

serious attempt to draw in the most militant and politically advanced people), to be the most dynamic (and the most rebellious) section of a revolutionary organisation. However, there was more to their role in the WSL opposition than this general truth.

## **Changes in the Class Struggle**

We have noted the importance of the changes in the class struggle from 1979-1980 in the degeneration of the WSL. By the end of 1982, with the defeat of the health workers strike following hot on the betrayal of ASLEF, the defeat of the steel strike, the extremely low level of struggle and virtual collapse of shop stewards' organisation in the motor industry, this situation had become markedly worse. At the same time, the left movement in the Labour Party had, if not collapsed, been on a rapid process of retreat, decline, and fragmentation for over a year. And in the wake of the Malvinas War and with the Labour Party quite openly in crisis, it was clear that the Tories would win the general election expected in 1983. This could not fail to increase the rightward drift of the WSL'S liquidationism and the tendency of many old WSL activists to a conservative routinism.

On the other hand (and without dismissing the importance of the continuing contradictory character of trade union struggles), some of the most important and explosive struggles had been those of the specially oppressed - particularly youth, black people, the unemployed, and lesbians and gay men. This was the period of the youth uprisings, of the rapid growth of YCND as the biggest youth movement in the country and a militant challenge to the CND establishment, of the Bradford 12 and Newham 7 campaigns, the People's Marches for Jobs, and growing militancy in the lesbian/gay movement. These were the very areas in which the comrades of the IT/IF were working. It is worth noting that the one union where the IT/IF had any concentration of members (5) was the National Union of Teachers, where there was a rising level of sectional militancy, where the left was making important political and organisational advances, and where racism and the lesbian/gay struggle were becoming increasingly important issues for the left.

This had a contradictory effect on the IT/IF. On the one hand, the militancy of these comrades reflected some of the dynamism of the struggles in which they were involved. On the other hand, as we shall see in more detail, it made it possible for the IT/IF (and its post-expulsion successor, the Workers International League) to maintain the one-sided 'mass' orientation and thus many of the contradictions and confusions of the old WSL.

Thus, the IT/IF never really tackled the task of examining and resolving these contradictions. This was fundamental to the weaknesses and mistakes of the IT/IF, though, of course, the relative inexperience of many of the comrades made their task more difficult. It was also this, rather than lack of time or personal ties and antipathies, that prevented the IT/IF from expanding significantly beyond its base and attracting either the very important left-wing women comrades or any section of the industrial worker comrades. And, again, it was this political weakness rather than any residual 'faith' in Alan T. and Tony R. which accounts for the IT/IF's relative weakness in criticising the Oxford leadership

The role of these comrades in Leicester, Nottingham and Liverpool was already clear from the beginning of the Malvinas war. The Merseyside resolution to the NC (supported retrospectively by Pete F who was absent) in April, the Nottingham comrades attendance at this same NC to express their disgust for the organisations' line and the subsequent resolution from Merseyside calling for the Special Conference indicated the opposition that existed which was independent of Alan T. There was also the vociferous support by the WSL left against Alan T for the international delegates during the altercation at the Malvinas debate at the Summer school. These things along with the moving of the TILC amendment to Alan T's resolution at the Special conference, indicated that at all stages in the development of the Malvinas crisis and afterwards, an unorganised, underdeveloped opposition was evident which was independent of, and went beyond the limits of, the positions of the Alan T leadership.

## **Quasi-Cult Ties**

The lack of organisation of this left constantly jeopardised and limited the nature and scope of this independence and led to a kind of reintroduction of the pre-fusion WSL quasi-cult ties as Alan T shifted leftwards to form his tendency under pressure from the WSL/ICL left. This more than anything led to the absence of an alternative resolution at the Special Conference. The very fact that the ex-ICL leadership put the TILC amendment on the agenda of the conference, however, testified to their awareness of the actual existence of this independent and more consistent view in the organisation - a view which they wished to bring out, but which Alan

T wanted to suppress (each for their own factional purposes) and which a section of the WSL left was independent enough to defend despite the enormous pre-fusion WSL quasi-cult pressures not to do so which were related to the anticipated closeness of the voting. This represented a genuine, unplanned, reassertion of the independent position expressed since the beginning of the war. The experience of the Special Conference, the issues in relation to imperialism which it highlighted, the closing down of the debate on these issues subsequently by Sean M and Alan T and the dissolution of Alan T's tendency without consultation with anyone made it clear to the future IF comrades that an independent tendency was necessary.

The transformation of the Internationalist Tendency into a faction was the result of a number of factors. The experience of Alan T's inability to consistently challenge the politics of Sean M which had emerged in all its "glory" during the Malvinas debate. The realisation that Alan T's politics were seriously flawed on a key question related to an imperialist war in which Britain was the belligerent imperialist country. The development of a national Trotskyist reaction by Alan T expressed in the pull-back from a democratic centralist TILC in December. This led to the crystallisation into a tendency of a layer of the WSL/ICL left which had been in practice associated with work amongst the most oppressed sections of the working class including an important group of youth.

In the wake of the Malvinas dispute, both wings of the WSL leadership were determined to block democratic centralism in TILC, and throughout the autumn of 1982 were manoeuvring against this transformation, under the guise of Alan T's arguments for yet another delay. This came to a head at the December 1982 TILC meeting, which the LOR and RWL argued unsuccessfully should be an international preconference leading to establishment of a democratic centralist tendency in the summer.

The WSL position was carried with the support of Socialist Fight of Australia against the LOR, RWL, and TAF. The arguments against democratic centralism in TILC were national Trotskyist to the core: only when the national sections had sorted out all their problems could they establish an international tendency. The problems, of course, were in large part the result of accommodating to the pressures of the national situation in Britain, and it is only through building an international organisation on a democratic centralist basis that such accommodations can be fought. Alan T. was opposing democratic centralism in TILC to protect his own opportunism in Britain.

It was a thoroughly dishonest manoeuvre, because it demanded a level of homogeneity within TILC as a precondition for democratic centralism which did not exist within the WSL, while fudging on the differences in the WSL. It was in practice an argument to split TILC in order to avoid (unsuccessfully, of course) a split in the WSL.

## **Democratic Centralism**

For these reasons, democratic centralism was not an organisational question, as both opportunist (Alan T.) and sectarian (Workers Power and the pro-FIT) currents alleged. It was a central political issue in the fight against the WSL's national Trotskyist degeneration and for a consistent Trotskyist international tendency. It was for that reason that the LOR and RWL declared a tendency on the issue (joined by TAF) following the December 1982 TILC meeting. The IT/IF was right to make this issue a part of its platform and to demand that it should be allowed to participate in the international tendency in TILC; if TILC had already been a democratic centralist organisation, there had would, of course, have been no question about this, and though that was not the case, it put to the test the seriousness of the WSL leadership's intention to move in that direction. The problem was rather that in the face of this attack on TILC by the WSL leadership the IT/IF did not make a more central issue of democratic centralism in TILC).

A WSL internal document produced for the IT by Pete F. in January 1983, "Towards an International Tendency: Problems and Tasks", argued the case for international democratic centralism, together with some practical proposals, and a resolution was put to the WSL national conference. However, in the document it appears rather oddly as the eleventh out of thirteen points, between points on the Stalinist ruled states and the workers government, with no attempt to spell out its significance or link it to the remainder of the platform.

This was because at the Leicester meeting which drew up the platform document there was a dispute between Chris E and Pete F on precisely this point. Pete F recognised that this point would be extremely contentious with Alan T. He argued for it to be placed low down so that it would not interfere too greatly with his

attempts to win Alan T to a more oppositional stance. Chris E opposed this but his position was defeated at the meeting.

In its main points the IT platform was a correct statement of Trotskyist positions on central issues in the struggle in the WSL. The first four dealt with the need for a primary orientation to the working class and for the Labour Party and LPYS work to be seen in that context, arguing for a public paper and against Registration (complying with the Labour Party's register of non-affiliated organisations). Points seven to nine dealt with the importance of an orientation to the specially oppressed, arguing for special forms of work and defending the rights of women to organise separately, while stressing the need for a primary orientation to the struggles of working-class women.

On youth work, the platform argued for a flexible tactic of using groups around the youth paper, *Class Fighter*, to relate directly to all layers of youth, while building a revolutionary tendency in the LPYS. Points eight and nine deal with imperialism, defending Lenin's theory of imperialism and Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, and on that basis supporting the TILC positions on the Malvinas and Palestine and the WSL Irish commission resolution of 1981 on the military actions of the IRA.

Point ten argues for political revolution against the bureaucracy and for defence of the property relations in the deformed and degenerated workers' states - against Sean M's view that these property relations were only 'potentially' progressive and his support for 'self-determination' for Poland, etc. Point eleven, as we have seen, argues for democratic centralism in TILC. Point twelve very briefly rejects the notion of a workers' government as a necessary stage, while point thirteen supports the Transitional Programme and "The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle" specifically against the attempt to substitute democratic demands such as 'police accountability' for transitional demands

The platform was a comprehensive, concise outline of the areas of disagreement with the organisation. As Trotsky said of his famous 11 Points on which the ILO was established it is not necessary to have "uniform, literary and ostentatious declarations" and "revelations out of an inkpot" in a platform document. A concise statement of differences in relation to the living experience of the working class internationally is what is required - in the case of the IT this included centrally the Malvinas, Ireland and the abandonment of the correct use of the Workers Government slogan in relation to the Labour Party.

Contrary to the mythology peddled by WP it was not a collection of "abstract principles": it dealt with such "key tactical" questions as the WSL's entry work in the MO, the misuse of the workers government slogan, the method of fighting the witch-hunt in the MO, as well as the very concrete (not abstract) principled questions involved in the capitulation to chauvinism on Ireland (about which WP still has something to learn itself) and the Malvinas.

However, there were three subsequent documents produced which attempted to develop these points. Apart from Pete F.'s document on international democratic centralism, there was the document he produced in January or February which was the first serious attempt in the WSL to give a Marxist analysis of the left movement in the Labour Party and its decline and to start setting out the forms Labour Party work should take ("On the Labour Party: First Part of a Document of Orientation", WSL (Internal Bulletin), no. 3). There was also the January document of Chris E., Sue E., and Mike J., "Against Unprincipled Revisionism - Against 'National Trotskyism'".

This document made the point that the dispute was not really between the old WSL and old ICL, but between the left and right wings of both, pointing to the role of the old WSL right wing and to Evington's document of the previous autumn, "The Crisis in the British Section". The authors saw "the opportunist orientation to the Labour lefts and adaptation to their backward nationalist outlook" as central to the WSL's degeneration. This was the only document to develop an argument on the full range of the programmatic points in the platform. The IT platform was remiss in the sense that there was no attempt to confront the economism and adaptation to a narrow trade unionism that was an increasingly important aspect of Alan T.'s politics and which was also reflected very clearly in the pages of *Socialist Organiser*. (Trade union work was simply not mentioned) - in the platform or elsewhere - leaving the clear impression that it was not a problem. The only exception was Evington's brief amendment to the industrial perspectives, dealing with the WSL's tactics in the health dispute - and this was despite the fact that the IT/IF had at least seven members very heavily involved in trade union work.

The same problem was demonstrated by the activist tendencies implicit in the document. The opening statement, "Our primary orientation is to the working class," is, of course, perfectly correct, but, taken together with point three, on the paper, the old WSL activism is very clear:

"In line with our orientation, our press must be directed towards the situation of the most militant layers of the class and the mass of workers behind them. In the present period that requires a clear revolutionary programme and bold revolutionary propaganda and agitation which can address the problems faced by these militants, in a language they can understand, providing an explanation and an understanding of their experience and drawing them towards an understanding of the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat. In practice this means having a party paper."

This is actually quite a misleading description of the role of a Trotskyist newspaper, which cannot be summarised as providing an understanding of 'their experience', as though this will of itself draw workers to understanding their revolutionary tasks. A revolutionary press has to provide far more than an understanding of 'their experience' to workers, it has to play a Marxist educative role, which involves a struggle against all attempts to limit consciousness to what workers actually 'experience'. Moreover, this section of the platform does not address the need to win and consolidate the political vanguard - a particularly important question for a small propaganda group. This shortcoming was not balanced elsewhere in the platform document or in other documents of the IT/IF. There was thus a clear continuation with the one-sided 'mass' orientation of the old WSL.

## **Areas of Disagreement**

The platform expressed its areas of disagreement with the organisation. It was not an analytical or alternative perspectives document. Its references to MO (Labour Party here) work were therefore necessarily confined to brief statements of what the problem was with the existing MO work. A more analytical and longer statement of the tendency's attitude to MO work was contained within the other document adopted by the founding meeting of the tendency "Against Unprincipled Revisionism, Against National Trotskyism."

When in March 1983 the IT declared itself a faction, the platform was expanded into a far more substantial document. By this time there were clear differences within the IF in relation to TILC and the Fourth International, as well as some less clear differences around international questions. Although the great majority adhered to the perspectives of TILC, this was not always with real clarity - a result of activist orientation, inexperience, and also a lack of political education (another feature of the way the WSL was built in Leicester, which we will need to return to later).

Three IF members were in political agreement with Workers Power and thus opposed to TILC and the regeneration of the Fourth International and holding a sectarian attitude to national struggles and democratic demands in oppressed countries (for example, Palestine). One IF member, Mike J., was a supporter of the FIT who maintained that grouping's sectarian stance towards the USFI, which it regarded not just as centrist but as counter-revolutionary.

Section twelve on TILC, considerably expanded from the original point in the tendency platform reflected the existence within the tendency from the beginning of sympathisers of Workers Power and the ex-Lambertist Fourth Internationalist Tendency based in Latin America. These comrades had developed their sympathies during the crisis of the WSL over the Malvinas. Each was demanding a positive orientation towards, and discussion with, these organisations. The relations between these different trends within the tendency were nevertheless comradely and there was a willingness at that point on all sides to engage in a process of dialogue on the differences that existed. It simply never occurred to anyone that there should be a split with these comrades or that they should be excluded in order to achieve a coherent faction.

On the day of the meeting however which was to declare a faction, the tendency was faced with an ultimatum by the supporters of Workers Power that it immediately discuss their Workers Power inspired draft faction platform document. This generated a certain amount of irritation expressed by some of the youth present because of the ultimatic nature of their demands in relation to the agenda and the way the platform should be drawn up. It was pointed out by Chris E that the tendency already had a platform which had been voted for by everyone in the tendency including the Workers Power supporters.

He asked them where they now stood in relation to this platform which he said should logically be the basis for any expansion or rewriting. He further suggested that perhaps they might like to consider moving sections of their WP inspired text as amendments or expansions of the tendency platform to which they agreed after a

caucus meeting. This seemed to be the most mature way to deal with their ultimatum. The meeting voted to adopt this procedure. The alternative was to say we are excluding you from the faction because you have a loyalty to a different political organisation.

## Common Ground

In fact there was a great deal of common ground in their struggle against Sean M and Alan T - sufficient to wage a common struggle (as had been demonstrated by previous common struggle in the tendency), but it was obvious that there was not political coherence beyond this.

That is why point twelve of the faction platform stated quite openly what disagreements existed together with a suggested programme and timetable for an organised discussion on these questions to test out the possibilities for resolving the differences. There was no alternative to this approach other than that of a policy of splitting, exclusions and a negative and sectarian attitude to the possibilities for regroupment in the future.

Having achieved a common platform in relation to the problems of the WSL (with the Workers Power sympathisers expressing their reservations in writing on the points where they lost the vote) the Workers Power comrades later announced that they were putting their own original document to the WSL conference as well! They subsequently announced their split from the WSL during the conference and it was obvious that Workers Power were worried that the IF's non-sectarian approach to them might lead to the WP sympathisers not joining Workers Power! Thus the effect of the IF's approach was that responsibility for splitting was clearly seen to be Workers Power's. They did not succeed in winning a single new recruit as a result of their intervention into the faction discussion.

The platform demonstrated an important breakthrough in that it criticised the Alan T leadership both in terms of its politics and its failure to fight Sean M consistently. On page 10 of the faction platform was a critique of the politics of Alan T and the WSL leadership which was located in an incomplete break with the party building methods of Healy. The critique questioned the WSL's ability to adjust its aims and expectations to its small size and resources after the break with Healy. It also criticised the notion of the "forward movement of the working class" and suggested that this led to a crisis in the early eighties when the level of class struggle declined compared to the Winter of Discontent. The platform also attacked Alan T for his fudged resolution on the Malvinas at the Special Conference (which was an implied self criticism by those in the faction which had voted for it at the time).

While this was a modest and undeveloped critique it was an important development which allowed for the possibility of winning Alan T's base towards the faction. The platform also contained a careful argued analysis of the need for fraction work in the Labour Party, but not wholesale entry. This was counterposed to the pre-fusion WSL right wing arguments in relation to the Labour Party. It also polemicised against the notion that the Labour Party and the trade unions could be equated in terms of their mass implantation into the working class.

As well as the documents discussed so far, the IT/IF produced four documents relating to specific areas of work (and, of course, some responding to the manoeuvres of the Sean M leadership). The documents on practical work were: the Youth Perspectives produced by Dale A. and Nick D. (IB no. 44, February 1983); the documents by Brown on future perspectives for work among young women (IB no. 40, February 1983), by Maidstone on unemployment perspectives (IB no. 43, February 1983), and by NJ on perspectives on black work (IB no. 53, April 1983). These documents reflected the areas of work the IT/IF members in Leicester and Nottingham were especially involved in and thus both the strengths and weaknesses of the faction. They were essentially documents on the activist/agitational work of the organisation and expanded on points 1, 5, 6, and 7 of the original IT platform.

In terms of an organic overall political strategy, NJ's document, which was entitled "Broadening Out the Struggles of Black Workers and Youth into the Mass Organisations of the Labour Movement," was the most clear, arguing for:

"...A solid orientation to black workers instead of seeing them as a part of anti-racist work and also for a method of work that is determined by the needs and struggles of black workers and putting forward a tactic of building black workers' alliances."

The document on youth perspectives argued clearly and strongly for work based on the practice of the Nottingham and Leicester Class Fighter groups and against the routinist LPYS liquidationism of the ICL

youth. They (Aly M. and Nick D.) argued for an orientation to the crucial struggles of youth, on YOPS schemes, in schools, in anti-racist struggles, in YCND, of which the construction of a tendency in the LPYS was one component. They argued the need to take transitional demands into these struggles.

The documents on young women and unemployment were rather different. The former was essentially a reply to the petit bourgeois feminist orientation of the ICL women and contained a lot of factual information but no clear perspectives for work and no sort of action programme. The latter was essentially concerned with tactical and organisational questions and, although very good on this level, contained no programmatic material beyond having a militant campaigning movement of the unemployed, independent of the bureaucracy.

### **Petty bourgeois Milieux**

In general, all these documents expressed a clear sense of the need for a revolutionary organisation to orient to the struggles of the working class, and particularly of its most oppressed layers. All were a clear challenge to the Labour Party liquidationism and orientation to reformist and petty bourgeois milieux which characterised the old ICL leadership and its allies. Moreover, all were implicitly a challenge to the economist, narrowly trade unionist orientation of the Alan T. leadership, which essentially reflected the outlook of some of the more conservative layers of the working class (the attitude which eventually led Tony R., in the Socialist Group in 1986, to deny that the British working class had benefited from imperialism).

However, the second aspect remained implicit, that is to say, undeveloped in the form of an argument against economism, and with only limited and in some cases no development of the policies and demands which should be the basis of this work.

The undeveloped nature of the IF's critique of the Alan T tradition is hardly surprising given the dynamics of the struggle against ICLism, a more right wing and obvious target, and under conditions of struggle which allowed for little time to discuss the much more complex and subtle contradictions within the Alan T tradition. The fact that the faction largely came from the Alan T tradition made it probably inevitable that they would deal with the problems of the limitations of their former leadership in a gradual, piecemeal way that would only be completed a long time after the struggle had ended. It would have been unrealistic to have expected anything else. The contradictions and limitations of Alan T's politics emerged only gradually and it took time for the full implications to be assimilated.

The IF did not produce a perspectives document specifically for the WSL conference in April 1983. It had however already adopted the general line of the perspectives contained within the document "Against Unprincipled Revisionism, Against National Trotskyism" which sketched out an approach to Labour Party work, attacked the opportunist use of the workers government slogan, argued for fraction work and a principled Trotskyist response to the witch-hunt. This was the central question in the conference. So while the IF was not properly prepared for it, it did at least have a position expressed in a document of sorts. The faction coordinator Evington unilaterally submitted this text as the faction's perspective document at the last minute without informing others in the faction because he felt it was the only possible thing which could have been submitted. Pete F and others in the faction, who had not been happy about the way this sharply polemical document had been drawn up independently of him, protested strongly at this procedure perhaps because he did not want a faction perspectives document counterposed to Alan T. It was always difficult to know what Pete F was thinking at any given time because he always seemed to have a hidden agenda. He did not allow for the unilateral action of the faction coordinator however!

The background to the IF's insufficient preparation stemmed from a number of problems. The first was that the faction meeting immediately prior to the conference which might have drafted a specific perspectives document was taken up entirely with the debate with the Workers Power sympathisers over the faction platform. This took up the whole weekend. This prevented any discussion of a perspectives document at this meeting.

The second reason was that the most experienced leadership comrade who had agreed to write such a document, Pete F, collapsed politically out of activity several weeks prior to the conference after an NC meeting at which he had been denounced by Sean M for not having raised previously on the EC and NC many of the differences expressed in the IT platform. It was also obvious that Alan T was not going to fight and his whole strategy of trying to prise Alan T away from Sean M was in ruins.

He had not attended the faction platform discussion meeting because he was so demoralised by this experience. Cde. Chris E went to see him during the weekend of this faction meeting to retrieve the elements of a

perspectives document that he had written prior to his collapse. He was also given a draft section of the intended document dealing with the Labour Party written by Tony G. Chris E then hurriedly typed these elements into a document called "Theses on British Perspectives" and circulated about 50 copies of it to contacts at the WSL conference in April having missed the deadline for submission of alternative documents. At the request of Chris E, Leland S also distributed copies of the RWL's perspectives document to selected contacts.

## **Workers Power**

In other words the faction did all that it could (often in an unplanned and in the case of Evington a unilateral way) to put forward an alternative perspective for the organisation and in fact succeeded in putting before the conference its views on the way to proceed in relation to the Labour Party in spite of the manoeuvres and collapse of Pete F and the time consuming intervention of Workers Power. The determination and more straightforwardly political approach of rank and file members thus prevailed over the manoeuvres of Pete F, its so-called leadership on the NC and EC.

The discussion on perspectives at the conference resulted in the faction document "Against Unprincipled Revisionism, Against National Trotskyism" not being debated. The faction was then faced with the problem of how to vote for Alan T's document on the Labour Party in IB 48 "On Our Orientation to the Labour Movement". The document was a reply to Sean M's assertion that the Labour party is the "pivot of mass working class politics" in Britain. IB 48 argued for a shift of emphasis in the WSL's practical work. The main line of its argument was for more emphasis on trade union work rather than Labour Party work. Thus, IB 48 sums up the problems of the fused WSL as follows:

"More generally, we have plainly failed since the fusion to amalgamate the strengths of the old organisations' work in the unions and the LP. In particular the ability of the old WSL to connect up with forces in trade union struggles and to focus on demands which won the active commitment of the best militants while exposing the role of the bureaucrats and careerists has not been sufficiently developed in the fused organisation; nor has it been sufficiently adapted to the struggles in the LP. It would be fatal if our goal now were to be restricted to "organising the existing left" and solidarity with trade union struggles. We must recognise the need to intervene and raise the political level of local struggles to the point where lessons can be learned on the role of the union bureaucracy and the Labour leaders. We must gain recognition not simply as people who are part of and stay with "the left" but as a distinct political current capable of giving leadership in struggles. Workers must be educated to measure the left in the unions and LP not by its general "solidarity" but by its ability and willingness to act upon policies which advance the struggle." (WSL IB 48, p. 9; emphasis in the original)

Then, after listing four dangers - the emphasis on 'organising the left' promoting an isolation from the trade union rank and file; the focus on the Labour Party as the pivot of mass working-class politics directing attention away from workers' struggles; the lack of any 'public face' leading to a decline in recruitment; and routinist methods of work resulting from inadequate leadership "from the EC and the Centre" (the latter at least being controlled by Sean M's supporters, of course) - the authors conclude that:

"To combat these weaknesses, the WSL resolves to focus more of its political energies and resources upon the development of a proletarian cadre, recruited by work conducted (through) the mass organisations of the workers' movement into the work places, estates, and mass activities of the working class. This means that within our broad publications, which should retain their existing format at the present time, we will raise our (programmatic) profile as a distinct Marxist tendency with policies that offer leadership to the working-class men, women, and youth, which we will fight for in a coordinated way through the unions, LP, and other relevant organisations of the oppressed." (WSL IB 48, p. 10 emphasis in the original)

Despite the reference to 'programmatic profile' in the final sentence, it is clear that the focus of the argument is on the balance between different areas of work, on organisational issues, and on the sociological composition of the WSL and the areas in which it worked. Indeed, the proposal to "raise our programmatic profile as a distinct Marxist tendency", in the context of the document as whole and even in the final sentence, was really a pleas for a 'harder' Socialist Organiser, a return to a 1981 Socialist Press without a 'party paper' attribution. This was what the authors of IB 48 in fact produced after their own expulsion in 1984 - Socialist Viewpoint.

The fact remains however that the document argued for an orientation towards the class struggle on the basis of the transitional programme, argued against Sean M's view that the Labour Party was the "pivot" in

terms of the orientation of the WSL, argued against such liquidationist catch-phrases as “stay with the left”, criticised the low profile of the WSL politics in Socialist Organiser and the infrequency of Workers Socialist Review. Its weakness were that it spoke of the Labour Party as a primary and necessary “vehicle” for our intervention in workers’ struggles, only for as high a profile as “possible” taking into account the conditions of “Labour Party legality”, the fact that it argued for “SO” to continue as a forum and not a party paper. It did not link the question of profile to the political content of Sean M’s politics. Where transitional demands were mentioned, it was to reinforce an activist orientation and to fudge their character:

“The concept of the LP as the “vehicle” for transitional demands is completely wrong. Transitional demands as presented by Trotsky in the Transitional Programme are class struggle demands designed to mobilise the masses in a revolutionary direction. They are designed to be the demands of a mass movement making the connection between the everyday problems and everyday struggles and the tasks of social revolution. We aim to make them the demands of strike movements and militants in defence of wages, jobs, democratic rights, etc.” (WSL IB 48, p. 9)

And, earlier in the document, replying to Sean M’s statement that most strikes are “necessarily tied to fighting individual issues”, it is argued that:

“Every class action relates, by its very nature, precisely to the “general level of the running of society” - that is what the transitional programme is all about. That is why Trotsky stressed so much the importance of developing workers through such struggles and the application of our programme under these conditions.” (WSL (IB), 48, p. 6)

The one-sided understanding of the Transitional Programme which we have identified as a weakness of the old WSL runs right through these passages, but it is combined with a political dilution of the character and content of the Programme, so that transitional demands become just “class struggle demands” to “mobilise the masses in a revolutionary direction”. The question of consciousness, of the significance of the workers’ control element in all transitional demands, of the incompatibility of transitional demands with capitalist society, is glossed over. The process of gutting transitional demands of their revolutionary content, making the raising of them dependent on the development of a mass movement, and even of ‘merging’ them into militant trade union demands, which was to characterise Socialist Viewpoint, was well under way.

Alan T. was clearly on the road to the position he expressed at “International’s” October 1986 symposium, that raising transitional demands in the miners’ strike had been very difficult because Scargill had raised the most important demand of all - no pit closures. Inevitably they are reduced to a kind of catalyst role in the objective process of working-class development through the class struggle - moving it “in a revolutionary direction.”

## **Pivot**

The document also had some other erroneous formulations. Despite arguing for transitional demands as an alternative to the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES) it put forward a rightist version of its earlier principled notion of “make the lefts fight” when it called upon the lefts to implement Labour conference policies i.e. implement the AES and for involvement in Socialists for a Labour Victory which was restricted to this line.

Thus the document was by no means a consistently Trotskyist document. The fact of the matter was however that, despite all of the above very serious political flaws, the document did challenge some of Sean M’s most liquidationist proposals in particular the idea that the Labour Party was the “pivot” and it outlined a shift to the class struggle with some inadequate notion of struggling for the transitional programme, of increasing the profile of the WSL in the Labour Party as we have seen.

The faction decided at a caucus meeting to give critical support to Alan T’s document on this basis having failed to get its own document carried. Workers Power rejected this stance and refused to vote for it. However this was a sectarian abstention in the view of the faction. At the same time the IF comrades made clear their differences with the Alan T document on the floor of the conference and explained that they were giving it critical support only. This was felt to be the best way of maximising the chances of a defeat for the Sean M position, providing solidarity with Alan T’s base in its efforts to do the same without being diplomatic on the differences or failing to provide an alternative. In this way the chances of winning Alan T’s base to a consistent position was maximised. If the faction had been responsible for the success of Sean M’s document because it voted down Alan T’s document it would have needlessly marginalised the faction from Alan T’s base.

Thus, as in the Malvinas debate at the Special Conference, the faction may have been guilty of not having been sufficiently organised in the sense of not having had a specific alternative line document, or in the case of the Special conference an alternative resolution. The alternative line nevertheless was expressed in both cases in spite of a certain amount of bumbling incompetence on the part of the inexperienced faction ranks, political obstacles, inertia and manoeuvres from Pete F through almost inadvertent, unplanned mechanisms. The point is that the alternative view did exist; it somehow came through in spite of everything in both cases.

The IT put forward two resolutions to the first half the WSL's national conference, held in February 1983, one on Palestine and one on Ireland. The purpose of these resolutions was to provide an alternative line to the Magamnaites' sectarian hostility to these national struggles. The resolution on Palestine included a call for a Palestinian Trotskyist party and a democratic secular state of Palestine. The resolution on Ireland included the following point:

“We criticise the nationalist and militarist limitations of the IRA and INLA leaderships and counterpose a fight to link the struggle against partition with an all Ireland class movement, under revolutionary socialist leadership, (coupled with a campaign of solidarity within the British labour movement). We do not use the socialist programme on nationalism to avoid taking concrete positions on struggles led by petty bourgeois nationalists.” (“International Tendency resolution on Ireland”, WSL IB 4 February 1983). These were subsequently criticised by Workers Power on the grounds that they supposedly failed to pose the question of an independent Trotskyist programmatic line and specifically because the question of a workers republic was not posed. This was to miss the point for a number of reasons.

Firstly the key issue was to reassert the Trotskyist position in relation to the backsliding of Sean M - the abandonment of the democratic secular state of Palestine and the parallel abandonment of the united Ireland from the right in favour of a federal Ireland and a similar formulation for Palestine as a concession to Zionism and Loyalism respectively. This reassertion was realised in the IT resolutions and it was important that Sean M's position was challenged in this way.

Secondly the Workers Power line on the role of democratic demands was revealed as the seriously flawed and undialectical position that it undoubtedly was and still is. The IF position was later defended in the document by Chris E “In Support of the Slogan of a Secular Democratic State of Palestine”. (WIL IB No 10 October 1983). The Workers Power criticism revealed an inability to go beyond the limitations of formal logic and embrace the dialectical approach employed by Trotsky in a series of articles on China in the 1929-30 period which drew out the lessons of the 1927 Chinese Revolution. In particular they were unable to comprehend the difference between agitational and propaganda slogans and rejected Trotsky's correct use of the term “transitional revolutionary democratic demands” (Trotsky: Writings 1929. p. 149).

Chris E defended the centrality of the slogans of a “secular democratic state of Palestine” and “end partition in Ireland” as agitational transitional revolutionary democratic demands in periods where it is not possible to realise a soviet programme because of an unfavourable balance of forces. Trotsky's central point was that the masses would be unable to comprehend the meaning of demands for a soviet government in such periods because the low level of struggle meant that workers councils were a long way off and this demand did not correspond with the workers' conception of what was possible and realistic. Hence it was necessary to use democratic demands to mobilize them instead. This meant in China that the demand for a “National Assembly” was the central demand.

## **Workers' Government**

This did not mean that Trotskyists should not also raise the demand for Soviets and a workers' government in such periods. It did mean however that they would only have a role as propaganda demands comprehensible only by the vanguard - not the masses as a whole. Trotsky argued however that “the slogan of Soviets as a slogan for the present is adventurism or empty talk” since they would only become agitational when the unfavourable balance of forces, after the 1927 revolution had been defeated, shifted back in favour of the working class.

The debate with Sean M revolved precisely around his rejection of these transitional revolutionary democratic demands from the right as a concession to the “national rights” of the loyalists, Zionists and kelpers. Workers Power were abandoning them from the ultra left. The question of the agitational use of transitional revolutionary democratic demands involves an assessment of the period at any given time in the country where they are to be raised. This is a matter of legitimate assessment and debate. To argue on the other hand as did Workers Power that the use of such agitational slogans, in an unfavourable period, is opportunist and stagiest

unless they are either replaced by or linked to the slogan of a workers republic reveals an inability to understand the dynamics of revolution and the role that transitional revolutionary democratic demands must play in reviving the mass movement in a period of revolutionary ebb-tide. It also demonstrated once again that sectarians are really only opportunists afraid of their own opportunism. The opposition to the notion of “a fight to link the struggle against partition and an all Ireland class movement under revolutionary leadership” in the above IT resolution demonstrated this vividly.

Of course it may be arguable that there were occasions during the last few decades in both Palestine and Ireland where the soviet programme did become agitational. That is not true for most of this period however. The reason the IT resolution on Ireland refers to partition is because it is this and related discrimination and repression questions along with sectional class issues which generally motivate and mobilise the nationalist community in Ireland **not** the conception of a workers republic (alas as yet). It is therefore sectarian to pose this as the central agitational slogan in the present period. It is something which will only be comprehensible by a small minority of the population: the vanguard. The WSL, the WIL, the RIL and the ISG/PD are or were small propaganda organisations and it would be wrong to imagine that they are not. It is also necessary however to put forward a programme for the masses as a whole in the present period: in other words explain what Trotskyists would do if they were the leadership of the working class. It was obvious from the language of the resolution e.g. “We do not use the socialist programme on nationalism to avoid taking concrete positions on struggles led by petty bourgeois nationalists” that it was written in this sense.

At its December 1982 national conference the former International Marxist Group, British section of the USFI, had changed its name to the Socialist League and decided to drop Socialist Challenge in favour of a Labour Party entrust paper, Socialist Action. This represented a victory for the tendencies around John Ross, a right-wing liquidationist and Bob Pennington, a more ‘orthodox’, left-wing liquidationist, over the supporters of the SWP/US around Brian Grogan. Pennington had some informal contact with the old WSL leadership before the WSL/ ICL fusion, and it appears there had been some further contact with Alan T. and John L. (probably independently) around this time. Shortly after the Socialist Action turn, the Socialist League issued a proposal to the WSL for fusion. An element within the WSL, led by Traven, strongly supported the proposal and argued for it at the first half of the WSL national conference.

The arguments of the Traven group were based on the (common) liquidationist perspectives of the two organisations and a loose, quite opportunist unity of the revolutionary left approach. The attitude of Alan T. and John L. seems to have been based on distrust of the USFI and a certain ‘workerist’ sectarianism towards it (Alan T. had denounced the LOR’s attempt to join the Italian section of the USFI as a sectarian turn), together with a feeling that there were enough problems in the WSL (John L. warned a London aggregate against thinking that, because we had so many differences, a few more would not really matter). The reaction of the old ICL leadership was pure national Trotskyist sectarianism: whereas Traven saw the Socialist League’s liquidationism as common ground, Sean M’s supporters saw it as trespassing!!

The response of the IT was to recognise that this was an attempt on the part of the SL to ape the liquidationist project of the WSL. At the same time the Workers Power and the FIT sympathisers within the IT, both of which had sectarian characterisations of the USFI, were attacking strongly the proposed fusion of the Italian LOR with the USFI section, the LCR. The majority of the IT on the other hand were understandably unenthusiastic about the prospect of joining an organisation which was shifting rightwards to emulate the worst aspects of the Sean M project in the Labour Party. Many of them were unconvinced of the viability and realisability of the LOR’s project in relation to the USFI. It is therefore unsurprising that no one in the IT or its sympathising WSL candidate members argued in favour of fusion with the SL. It is also doubtful whether it would have been a practical proposition for the IT at that point to immediately embark on a long-term faction struggle in the SL/USFI given its lack of political coherence.

## **Revolutionary Organisation**

What was needed more than anything else was for it to go through the process of clarification outlined in the faction platform in order to achieve such coherence. Only on the basis of discussing through the issues systematically with the minorities could any hope of coherence be realised. This was impossible during the period of the faction struggle because there was simply not the time or space to conduct the fight against Sean M and systematically examine in detail the issues which divided the IT: it would have been unrealistic to expect otherwise. The existence of the minorities complicated the development of a more positive approach to the SL/USFI. No one wanted to break with the minority comrades because despite the differences there was a genuine

sense of solidarity which developed from the struggle against Sean M. A choice between discussing through the difference with these comrades and joining the SL was a no contest choice: completing a process of clarification and dialogue won hands down and this necessarily meant discussing the faction's strategy in relation to the reconstruction of the FI. It also meant that adopting a policy of fusion with the SL was necessarily deferred.

The problems could not just be wished away and neither could the existence of minorities either. The faction was trying to cope with a vindictive opposition as well as sectarian internal dissent. If the problems of coherence and lack of time had not been the problem that they clearly were then a different approach to the SL/USFI unity proposal might have been appropriate. Retrospectively it is possible to argue that the faction might have missed out on an opportunity to implement TILC's strategy of reconstruction of the FI through a process of struggle within the SL/USFI. Such a view assumes a level of coherence and unity of strategy which was not there. A strategy of struggle within the USFI was a relatively new idea for most IT comrades for which no one - even the TILC sympathisers - were ready. It was very controversial.

The realistic viability of it was questioned. The refusal of the SL to fuse with the Socialist Group later on suggests that the IT comrades were right to doubt its practicality in Britain. Nevertheless it is still arguable that in other circumstances the presentation of an alternative platform for fusion with the SL/USFI would have been a very sharp and political response to the unity proposal from Traven et al.

## **Faction Meetings**

It was not realistically practical however to conjure up an instant platform analysing points of agreement and disagreement with the SL/USFI at short notice. There were only a limited number of faction meetings which it was possible to arrange during the few months of the faction struggle. It has already been noted that at least one weekend was taken up completely with drawing a faction platform for the WSL and arguing it through with the Workers Power sympathisers.

The only alternative would have been to exclude bureaucratically the minorities in the name of instant "coherence" or refuse to discuss and agree on common ground and a programme and timetable for attempting to resolve differences. The faction correctly refused to do this. While an alternative fusion platform might have served to concretise differences with the minorities the faction correctly chose not to approach differences in such an ultimatic "take it or leave it" way. It chose to go through the process of political clarification as outlined in the faction platform as part an attempt to win the comrades to TILC politically.

The April TILC meeting completed the split in TILC. The WSL opposed the inclusion with a vote of the Chilean supporters of TILC and finally walked out (in fact, the WSL delegation walked out in stages), over the resolution from the TAF calling on Alan T. to fight revisionism in the WSL. Members of the IF were subsequently expelled because they would not comply with the National Committee resolution of 2 May which demanded, (inter alia), that they repudiate the written statement of the IF to the other TILC sections calling for a fight against the revisionism of the WSL, that they repudiate the action of the IF members present as observers at the TILC meeting, who refused to accept an instruction from the WSL delegation to leave the room "as a declaration that as far as we were concerned that TILC meeting was over" (that is, that they support the WSL leadership in splitting TILC), and that they "break with the project of the RWL/LOR, who are avowedly out to disrupt the WSL".

The IF had no choice but to reject this resolution making expulsion inevitable. The national Trotskyism was so blatant and the grounds for the WSL's actions so dubious that Alan T. himself has not subsequently referred to them. The WSL did produce a 'version' of events at the subsequent Lutte Ouvriere fete that was so dishonest that it doctored a quotation from the original TILC "Declaration of Intent" (see "Statement of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee", Draft, summer 1983) so as to remove any reference to the original commitment to international democratic centralism.

This was the only attempt at political justification of their split. In subsequent discussion Alan T. has either resorted to slanderous fabrications about the alleged Spartacism of the RWL in particular or has referred to one part of the (supplementary) resolution of the WSL National Committee of 2 May 1983 referring to countermanded subscription cheques of IF members. These methods of argument, ignoring every political issue involved, is symptomatic of the old WSL leadership's desire to bury the whole history of TILC and their own past "Battle for Trotskyism".

## **Guilt-by-National-Association**

The allegations of 'Spartacism' on one level represented a sort of anti-american, guilt-by-national-association amalgam, pandering to and bordering on, inter-imperialist chauvinism. In addition, since the pre-fusion WSL and ex-ICL both had definite cult-like overtones around a central male leader the allegations of cultism were somewhat hypocritical. It was nevertheless true that there were problems of cultism in the RWL (as in most left organisations to one degree or another). This was something to be struggled against. Within certain limits however it was not necessarily a big deal and could not be a criterion for characterising an organisation politically or a legitimate excuse by the WSL to break from RWL. The problem got worse over subsequent years however and eventually led to undemocratic practices in the RWL which made continued struggle impossible. (This led to the split in the RWL and ITC in 1991).

In the meantime the ex-ICL leadership were attempting to repress the IT in the branches. A scurrilous document was written by one ICL membership who had been sent down from the Glasgow branch to Leicester to look for dirt on them. Charges were laid against an IT comrade in Liverpool in relation to a trivial breach of discipline in which he had inadvertently revealed to Militant, during the course of a political argument, that the position of the ex-ICL leadership in relation to registration of entrust groups in the Labour Party was similar to Militant's line. That is, to cooperate with the register instead of refusing to register as the pre-fusion WSL comrades and the IT were advocating.

This was a minor breach of discipline, but it was hardly the crime of the century. This led to a witch-hunt at the second half of the WSL conference against both the Leicester branch and the Liverpool comrade in which the more rabid ex-ICL members were arguing for them to be excluded from the conference. This was eventually rejected by the majority at the conference after a long series of heated wrangles however. This was indicative of the repressive atmosphere of witch-hunt in the organisation. Sean M wrote a witch-hunting document in the Internal Bulletin which suggested that the IT was the "RWL Tendency" and implying that it was a hostile, disloyal entry operation.

The atmosphere of witch-hunt in the organisation was designed to demoralise and drive out the IT comrades. Unsurprisingly some IT comrades were less than enthusiastic about the prospect of remaining in such a rotten, right wing sect for a further extended period of time. It was becoming increasingly clear that they were not going to be allowed to by the witch-hunting and repression from the ex-ICL leadership. In fact a split in a relatively short period of time was inevitable. Given the WSL's national Trotskyist intention to break with TILC, its rapid degeneration, numerical decline and fragmentation, it was not possible to continue to work within that organisation for any length of time. There was also a legitimate concern on the part of the membership that serious work in the broader vanguard was continually frustrated by membership of the WSL. In all internal faction work a trade-off has to be made between the struggle within the political organisation and work in the broader vanguard which is often obstructed by that work. It would be sectarian not to be concerned about this dilemma.

## **Serious Commitment**

The Leicester branches and the left of the Nottingham branch had been built through a serious commitment to youth work, women's work and black work and involvement in a wide range of struggles - not just trade union and Labour Party work which were the sum total of practical work in most WSL branches. They did however suffer like the rest of the organisation from a lack of systematic education and development of the membership and this particularly affected newer and young comrades. On the other hand the very fact that these comrades had taken the stance they had taken in joining the IT/IF and struggling around the issues which had emerged testified to the fact that they had a reasonable grasp of at least some politics.

Nevertheless it is true that some individuals became extremely alienated from the organisation and had to be persuaded not to be goaded into a premature split by the ex-ICL leadership provocations. This was successfully done and not one member broke ranks by resigning. After the Workers Power comrades resigned at the second half of the WSL conference in April there was a noticeable air of disappointment coming from the ex-ICL members as the IF comrades re-entered the hall after a caucus meeting to retake their seats - their expectations of a split by the IF following on from the Workers Power split were cruelly dashed! The IF remained for the remainder of the conference and four members of the faction were elected to the NC on the faction platform (Pete F, Helen F, Sue E and Neil J).

No decision was taken to split at any time prior to the April TILC meeting although for some comrades, particularly the youth, it was clear that they regarded their position in the organisation as being untenable and it was clearly only a matter of time before they would resign. They were only persuaded not to do so by the collective pressure of the faction. It was implicitly recognised that it was not possible however to keep a group of youth hanging around indefinitely in an organisation which was clearly frustrating their every political action.

The IF had great difficulty for example in persuading some youth with very little money to pay up their dues in order to get into the second half of the WSL conference. The solution of paying by check and then re-neging on it after the conference was a not particularly acceptable way of dealing with the question. But the fact that the youth were persuaded to attend despite their alienated state and through this subterfuge were persuaded to carry through a struggle at the conference, without resigning like Workers Power in the middle of the conference when the battle was still being fought, demonstrated a positive attitude towards completing the political struggle.

It was clear that at the April TILC conference after the WSL conference Sean M and possibly Alan T would break with TILC and most and most IF comrades recognised that this would probably be the occasion for a provocation on the part of Sean M to expel the IF from the WSL. It was therefore wholly unremarkable that some IF comrades openly discussed the likelihood of such a development at the IF caucus meeting at the WSL conference or elsewhere or that they discussed subsequently how to respond to it in advance of the TILC meeting. The political nature and internal regime of the WSL had degenerated to the point where the position of the faction was untenable. Prior to the TILC meeting shortly after the April WSL conference Pete F drew up an "Open Letter to the TILC comrades from the Internationalist Faction in the Workers Socialist League" without it being collectively endorsed or even seen by most members of the IF (which did not meet between the April SSL conference and the April TILC meeting). It included the following:

"At the time of the December TILC conference the revisionism and political crisis of the WSL was apparent (not least in the positions of the ex-ICL leadership on imperialism, permanent revolution, Ireland, Stalinism, and social democracy), but this had not been codified in the adoption of a series of political perspectives for the organisation. At our National Conference last weekend, however, the political degeneration of the WSL reached a new qualitative level in the adoption of a series of political perspectives for the organisation based on the revisionist politics of the Sean M leadership.... The WSL leadership has already given notice of its factional, disruptive intentions by its attempt to cobble up its own pseudo-international faction on the politics of the Matgamna leadership. ...[The] fight against revisionism is now a life or death struggle for the TILC itself, since its majority section has capitulated to the revisionism of Sean M, who now infects the very heart of TILC in the WSL-based TILC Secretariat."

There is not one word here explicitly criticising the old-WSL leadership. Sean M is the only person mentioned by name. There is simply the implication that the old-WSL leadership had been weak in not fighting Sean M. If the statement needed to be issued, its real audience was clearly in the WSL, since the TILC delegations needed no convincing and the call in the conclusion for the removal of the revisionists from the TILC Secretariat was already an agreed position of the IF, LOR, and RWL, so this was a serious weakness. To put a demand on Alan T. to fight ICL revisionism and defend TILC was tactically correct, but to make no criticism, in a statement such as the "Open Letter", of the old-WSL leadership's politics and method was a political mistake.

## **Polarised**

Having struggled in a special conference six months earlier and two WSL conferences in the space of three months with little response from the membership, the IF did not prioritise continued struggle in the WSL or Class Fighter as it was clear that the blocs within the organisation were polarised and cut and dried fairly solidly. Even in the youth organisation the factional lines were drawn sharply as a result of previous struggle and polarisation of the membership meant that the middle ground was negligible. However more could have done than was done to orient to and win elements of the WSL periphery.

The key things in the post-split period were to implement the programme and timetable on an international level of political clarification outlined in the faction platform, to engage the organisation in an area of activity without collapsing into a mini-mass party approach - this was particularly important for the youth whose activity had been frustrated by the months of factional struggle. In the meantime it was necessary to avoid the temptation to set up an organisation before political coherence within the group had been achieved. A failure to try and sort out or, at the very least, express, acknowledge, and initiate an on-going consciously organised discus-

sion of the problems before establishing an organisation and a paper was bound to lead to the informal expression of the differences within the organisation in a destructive and chaotic way. This the proto-WIL and the TILC as a whole refused to do.

## 7. The experience of the WIL

The workers international League was set up in the summer of 1983. An initial mood of euphoria lasted no more than two or three months. It was in this mood of getting down to real work that the WIL immediately set up a far larger number of commissions than any organisation of 35 could possibly manage to maintain (inevitably most of them never really functioned). In part, of course, this represented a healthy impulse of youth comrades to intervene in real struggles, but it represented a continuation of the one-sided "mass" orientation of the old WSL as well. This could have been corrected, given a leadership that was attempting to overcome those contradictions and to clarify the membership through a firm but patient fight for the perspectives of TILC against sectarian as some in the WIL.

Instead, the leadership compounded the problem, avoiding any struggle on sectarianism, continuing the methods which held back the political development of rank-and-file comrades in Leicester and Nottingham and using activism to hold the organisation together. Thus, the proposal from Chris E. at the first post-suspension national aggregate that the group should set itself a period of internal debate and clarification so as to decide its future perspectives, was brushed aside, receiving no support from any quarter. If not exactly in the form proposed by Chris E., the WIL needed to concentrate at this stage on a debate on the crucial issues unresolved by the faction struggle in the WSL - a balance sheet of the old and fused WSL, the question of the Fourth International, and the perspectives of TILC, and its overall perspectives for Britain, including the method and tactics of a very small group.

Chris E.'s proposal recognised that there was a great deal of confusion and important differences on these issues. Given the past history of the IT/IF such a process combined with serious attention to the Marxist education of the rank and file was the only way the WIL could have developed positively. For this reason cdes. Sue E and Chris E, who had not been present at the meeting which decided to launch the WIL, refused to join the WIL and wrote to the comrades to explain that they thought that they were making a big mistaken setting up an organisation before attempting to achieve political coherence. The existence of the FIT sympathiser Mike J and two ex-FIT Chileans with an extremely sectarian characterisation of the USFI as being "counter-revolutionary" was bound to create political problems for an organisation such as TILC which was in the process of trying to address itself positively to reconstructing the FI. This had no effect however. After some months and no response Sue E and Chris E reversed their decision and joined the organisation against their better judgement in order to help clarify issues as best they could.

### Workers International News

The alternative from Colin Morrow was to launch a paper, Workers International News (WIN). Initially this was presented as a trial issue, rather than a regular publication. However, the national aggregate at the end of August, by when the problems within the WIL should have been far clearer, decided that the paper should become a regular monthly. It is not that launching a paper was a mistake in itself. A group with thirty-five members and a strong local base in the east Midlands was capable of producing a regular journal and should have had such a perspective. The problem was that the paper was a substitute for the theoretical and political development of the WIL, and consequently there was no discussion on the role and character of the paper. Though it was, on balance, a promising example of revolutionary journalism, it reflected the outlook of the IT/IF/WIL in its very marked, one-sided activist emphasis. This was brought out in the "Who We Are" statement in the first issue of the paper, which combined this with a quite open sectarianism expressed in the one-sided way it attacked the WSL's liquidationist orientation to the Labour Party:

"We are a group of revolutionary socialists, some of us active for twenty years, who have been in the past in a variety of left groups in Britain. Until recently, most of us were members of the Workers Socialist League (WSL), a group which, like many others, focuses its main attention on debating with and trying to change the Labour Party. We rejected that view of politics. In the WSL we fought to defend a specific view of revolutionary politics, one that sees the working class and its day-to-day struggles as central to the development of socialism and sees Marxism as the weapon of real working-class politics. Above all, we stressed the internationalist character of working-class struggle. In our view, the struggles of women and men work-

ers in Britain and Europe are the same, common class struggles as those of the millions of other workers throughout the world....

We are, therefore, consistent anti-imperialists. We support the struggles of black workers in South Africa against the reactionary apartheid/ police regime; of the workers and peasants in El Salvador, Chile, and throughout Latin America against the military juntas and their imperialist backers; of the Palestinian masses against the racist, Zionist state of Israel; of women, blacks, and gays fighting the special oppression (which is fostered and cultivated by the capitalist state to divide workers amongst themselves.)

In every conflict we side with the oppressed against the bosses, the bankers, and their military apparatus. From each of these struggles we draw our confidence and our understanding of the immediate tasks of workers and students in the struggle for working-class power. But, above all, from these we draw what we believe is the inescapable conclusion that the answer to all these problems facing workers lies not in reforming this or that bit of the system, but in workers revolution....

As the Internationalist Faction in the WSL we fought to preserve this revolutionary internationalist view and to convince others that the issues facing workers were (not) the debates in the Labour Party but the real living issues of closures, cuts, bad housing, unemployment, falling living standards, racial attacks, police harassment, and the oppression in capitalist [sic] of women, blacks, and gays. That these were the questions any serious socialist in the Labour Party would be tackling. And that the solution to these lay not in some backroom discussion club but out on the council estates, in the hospitals, and nurseries threatened with closure, fighting for the class interests of workers. Only from these struggles will a real working-class leadership, made up of not just loyal trade union militants but tireless class fighters, conscious of their goal, be built.

A leadership... capable of creating a directly accountable workers' government against the bosses to smash their power. Regrettably, such a revolutionary perspective was not welcomed within the WSL. In May of this year we were expelled by the WSL leadership as the rest of the WSL members prepared to trek off to preach support for Labour's ineffectual "socialist" policies. Internationally, however, we gained a better response. The groups affiliated to the Trotskyist Internationalist Liaison Committee supported our fight for an unambiguous working-class revolutionary perspective, and we have now joined their ranks.... And, finally, introducing the paper: We also feel that you will feel that you have something to contribute, that WIN is a paper you could write for because it isn't full of university-style lectures...." ("The WIL - Who We Are", Workers International News no. 1, September 1983, p. 8)

It has been necessary to quote this statement at considerable length because it encapsulates some of the problems which the WIL inherited from the old-WSL left wing, derived from its one-sided 'mass' line on the role of the Transitional Programme. This problem had also been expressed in the IT platform with its talk of a paper addressing "the problems faced by these militants, in a language they can understand, providing an explanation and an understanding of their experience". It demonstrates very clearly indeed some of the dangers of this whole approach. The agitational approach, the emphasis on their experience and their language note the implicit anti-intellectualism of the comments about 'backroom discussion clubs' and 'university-style lectures' means in practice avoiding 'difficult' issues.

The most glaring aspect of the statement is its attitude to the history of TILC and its internal struggle. In fact, the Fourth International and Trotskyism (except in the title of TILC) are not mentioned at all. Despite the talk of 'internationalism', the actual international struggle the IT/IF had been involved in was simply ignored. There was not a mention of international democratic centralism. The struggle in TILC is reduced to support for the Internationalist Faction (by implication, for the activist, economist, and sectarian sentiments in the statement). The message is driven home in the most misleading fashion, by the remark that "We have now joined their ranks".

Quite amazingly, the list of examples of international struggles the WIL supports contains no reference to Ireland, and, despite the talk of being 'consistent anti-imperialists' there was no mention of the Malvinas War. Moreover, there is not one word anywhere about Stalinism, either in relation to the deformed and degenerated workers' movement and national liberation struggles in the capitalist world, or the specific disputes in the WSL. The serious dangers of economism come out clearly in two respects. Firstly, with regard to special oppression, there is a seriously misleading, narrow and one-sided account of its origin and role.

The emphasis on the capitalist state ignores the role of capitalist society as a whole and the needs of the capitalist system of production (it is understandable that a brief statement could not say anything about the pre-

capitalist origins of special oppression) and thus concludes that special oppression is simply a device to divide the working class. This is worthy of Socialist Worker. So, too, is the second and more fundamental consequence of economism: three times the statement repeats the revisionist view, roundly attacked by Lenin in *What Is to Be Done*, that revolutionary Marxism is derived from the experience of the class struggle. The fifth paragraph states, first, that our understanding of immediate tasks (not to mention our ‘confidence’) is drawn from the struggles of the masses and, second, that our understanding of the need for proletarian revolution comes from these struggles. The idea that our confidence is derived from the experience of struggles contains more than a hint of the “forward movement of the working classes” - and presumably from the experience of defeats and retreats we draw our demoralisation!! The eighth paragraph (the seventh quoted) compounds the previous statements with the declaration that revolutionary working-class leadership can only be built “from these struggles”.

## **An Accommodation**

Of course, the WIL ‘knew’ that the position that Marxism comes from the experience of the working class is incorrect. The WIL leadership did not ‘hold’ this revisionist view. But their practice and outlook, their failure to tackle and resolve the contradictory character of the old-WSL and the roots of its degeneration (the latter done only in the most general and empiricist fashion) compelled them to give expression to such views. It was objectively, and to some extent consciously, an accommodation to the present level of consciousness of workers. It expressed the gap in the WIL between the ‘intellectual leadership’ and the ‘practical workers’ and the role of the former in perpetuating that gap.

The comments on the Labour Party show, as does most of the statement, that telling half the truth is a way of stating something that is totally misleading. Once again most of these comments could have come from the pages of Socialist Worker. We are told that the “debates in the Labour Party” are not the real issues for workers but “closures, cuts,...”, etc., as though the Labour Party is not only too real an issue for the working class, as though it does not pervade its response to all the “real, living issues”, as though the Labour Party does not have organic links with the working class established over nearly a century.

Again, it is not that the WIL held SWP-type positions on the Labour Party; the IT/IF had produced Colin Morrow’s document, “On the Labour Party”, and the WIL held a full session on the Labour Party and Labour Party work at its summer school in July. The problem was rather that its adherence to the economist aspects of the old-WSL politics involved a de facto sectarian abstentionist approach to the Labour Party. The result was that in practice the WIL did not get beyond the old WSL’s confused positions on the Labour Party, a situation which contained the dangers not only of sectarianism but of a relapse into liquidationism.

Inevitably, given this outlook, major political issues were overlooked and there was no reference to theoretical work - a fairly general problem of the WIL which was reflected in the overwhelmingly agitational character of all four issues of Workers International News. Since reference has been made to Lenin’s struggle against economism, it is worth quoting his remarks on these questions with reference to the party press:

“We have before us two publishers’ announcements. One, ‘The Programme of the Periodical Organ of the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad - (Rabochoye Dyelo)’ (reprint from no. 1 of (Rabochey Dyelo), and the other, the ‘Announcement of the Resumption of the Publications of the Emancipation of Labour Group’. Both are dated 1899, when the “crisis of Marxism” had long been under discussion. And what do we find? We seek in vain in the first announcement for any reference to this phenomenon, or a definite statement of the position the new organ intends to adopt on this question. Not a word is said about theoretical work and the urgent tasks that now confront it.... The other announcement, on the contrary, points first of all to the declining interest in theory in recent years, imperatively demands “vigilant attention to the theoretical aspect of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat”, and calls for “ruthless criticism of the Bernsteinian and other anti-revolutionary tendencies” in our movement.” (Lenin, *What Is to Be Done*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 5, 1977, p. 368)

Of course, it may be argued, more theoretical material could have been produced through another medium such as a magazine or a series of pamphlets, given the limited size of the paper. That would not in any way justify the political character of the “Who We Are” statement.

But, in any case, the WIL at no point produced or considered other mediums for more theoretical material, nor was it reasonable for a group of that size at that stage in its development to do both. What we are con-

cerned with is the whole orientation and character of the WIL, the political choices it was making and the reasons for them.

The an accommodation and confusion on the Labour Party was in fact illustrated elsewhere in the first issue of Workers International News. It emerged in the editing of TG's article on the general election, "Historic Defeat for Labour". The title itself is a little misleading, labelling a single electoral defeat as a 'historic defeat'. The article argues that "Labour faces a crisis of historic proportions", which is somewhat different. Further, following a discussion in the London branch of the WIL it was clear to the author that this point, the difference between an electoral defeat for the Labour Party and a major defeat for the working class in action needed to be made clear. This point was conveyed to Colin Morrow, but the result was a new opening paragraph starting with the bald statement that "the election defeat of the Labour Party was not a defeat for the working class", without any clarification.

The article presents the WIL's correct analysis that the electoral defeat had undermined the bureaucrats' ability to use the electoral illusions of Labourism among the most class-conscious workers to hold back struggles, at the very point at which the Tories had to build on their electoral success to secure sharp victories over the major sections of the working class in action and to implement the as yet unused anti-union laws brought in between 1979 and 1983. This analysis was unique to the WIL at the time: thus the article in WIN points out that:

"It was no coincidence that a list of pit closures was announced within days of the election. The government wants a showdown with the NUM as a symbolic front line of the trade unions."

However, the headline and opening sentence create the impression that the article as whole is writing off the Labour Party. And there is no sufficiently clear argument in the body of the article to refute this impression, which is further compounded by the ambiguous editing of the penultimate paragraph. In its original form, this paragraph had presented a statement, in very general terms only, on the need for an anti-capitalist struggle by socialists in the Labour Party. This was changed in the editing by the alteration of the opening sentence to read:

**Socialists in and out of the Labour Party** will only do that [develop policies for the coming struggles] when they challenge the very right of the capitalists to make a profit. (Emphasis added)

The bolded phrase introduced a question mark over the future significance of the Labour Party and the importance of work in the Labour Party.

The point of this discussion is not, of course, to debate who did what to whose article, but to indicate the very real problems, confusion, and sectarianism over the Labour Party. This was illustrated even more importantly by the front-page article in the same issue, on the Labour Party leadership election. This article opposes giving critical support to the Labour left candidate, Eric Heffer, and takes an abstentionist position. The important point is not whether the WIL should or should not have given tactical, critical support to Heffer. It is the extreme confusion in the WIL on this issue and the totally sectarian character of the arguments against supporting Heffer.

"...he is trying to exploit the popularity of the left's democracy campaign **to further his own flagging career**. ...He does not represent anything **which goes beyond the limitations of social democracy and on this basis we do not give him our support**. Clearly the race for the Labour leadership **is a careerist race** and it's a distraction from the real race, the one to end capitalist exploitation. None of the candidates has any solution to the crisis of capitalism. Led by any of them, the Labour Party would fight **on a capitalist programme and not even begin to break out of that framework**." (Emphasis added)

The criticisms of Heffer are correct, and it was important that they should have been made, but not as reasons for refusing critical support. The bolded passages are arguments against ever giving critical support to reformist politicians in any circumstances.

The basis for the line of abstention in the leadership election was the one-sided analysis of the Labour left which had emerged in internal discussions in the WIL, including especially the confused discussion at the aggregate which took this particular decision. The article is correct in recognising that the Labour left had suffered major set-backs and had accommodated to right-wing witch-hunting and electoralism through 1982 and 1983. And it is also correct in opposing the general view of most of the liquidationist currents that there would be a significant revival of the left in the wake of the election defeat and a sharp struggle against an increased witch-hunt. But the majority of the WIL It overstated the extent and speed of the rout of the Labour left and

as a result discounted the need for any witch-hunt in the Labour Party. It thus concluded that Heffer's campaign had no significance as a focus of left resistance to the bureaucrats lining up behind Kinnock to begin the necessarily slow process of dismantling the constitutional and policy gains of the left reformists between 1979 and 1981.

It is no surprise that Workers Power were to accuse us of writing off the Labour Party as a force in the working class!! Of course, the WIL had not done that, but its confusion, a direct product of the crisis of the WSL, was increasingly finding expression in such sectarian tendencies. The dangers of these tendencies were quite correctly exposed in a document written by Dale A. and AS, "For a Change of Line on the Labour Leadership Elections", which points out the opportunist implications of the sectarian reasons for refusing to support Heffer. Noting that the WIL and the (WIN) article recognise that it was right to support Benn for deputy leader, critically, in 1981, the authors point out:

"If comrades read the paragraph in the (WIN) article, they will see that it heavily implies that Benn did go beyond social democracy in some sense. We cannot accept this." (Dale A. and AS, "For a Change of Line on the Labour Leadership Elections", WIL Internal Bulletin, 7, September 1983)

However, the liquidationist dangers of the state of confusion were also demonstrated by the subsequent evolution of some of those who were most strongly opposed to both articles in WIN, no. 1 (Dale A., AM, Mike J., later joined to some extent by NJ), who tended to have a mechanical view of the relationship between the Labour Party and the working class, carried over from the confused positions of the old-WSL rather than the politics of the ICL. They tended to see electoral defeats and victories for the Labour Party as defeats and victories for the working class in a sort of automatic, linear relationship. Consequently they moved back to seeing the Labour Party and LPYS as, in practice, the principal focus and arena for the political work of Trotskyists.

They showed this by their support at the December WIL conference for a resolution stating that the LPYS should be the focus of the group's youth work, the evolution of the later rump WIL of Dale A. and Mike J. around Red Youth, Mike J.'s decision to join Militant, and the interventions of AM in the discussions following the split in the WRP. This was the other side of a totally undialectical method from their extreme sectarianism on the issue of the Fourth International. This was demonstrated by their view that the USFI is counter-revolutionary and their fundamental hostility to the perspectives of TILC.

This issue had been present from the origin of the Internationalist Tendency and had never been properly addressed. It was in fact to become the central explosive issue in the WIL. The failure of the WIL leadership to take up a serious struggle against this sectarianism was a crucial factor in the organisation's rapid disintegration.

The position was initially advanced by Mike J. and was shared by Jan H. and a number of supporters in the Odense branch of the Danish TAF (which was effectively split into Copenhagen and Odense groups around this issue by the summer of 1983). During the summer and autumn, Mike J., supported by the Chilean comrade, Ricardo S., won over a number of youth comrades, including Dale A. and AM. The positions of this group were derived from the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. This group (now dissolved and not to be confused with the FIT/US, one of the US sympathising sections of the USFI) was never, despite its name, an international democratic centralist tendency.

It was a federation of national sections which had split from the Lambertists early in 1979. Apart from the Workers League of Palestine (within which there was, in any case, a tendency which supported the political positions of TILC), these were all in Latin America. The principal groups were the POR/Masas (POR/Lora) of Bolivia and Political Obrera (now Partido Obrero) of Argentina. The FIT had engaged in some discussions with TILC up to and even during the Malvinas conflict. The WSL had sabotaged these discussions (for example, the proposal for a joint discussion bulletin) in order to contain the 'internal' dispute over the war.

### **National-Sectarian Trotskyism**

The FIT was clearly on the left of those international tendencies identifying with Trotskyism. The POR/Masas has a history of national-sectarian Trotskyism but has genuine and important roots in the Bolivian working class established over a long period. Both the POR/Masas and the PO are relatively sizeable organisations. The involvement in mass struggles has tended to counterbalance sectarian tendencies (for example, on the USFI) and the development of potentially opportunist positions (for example, the line that the anti-imperialist united front should include the parties of the national bourgeoisie). Thus PO in particular has continued to play overall a positive and healthy role in the Argentine class struggle. These points must be borne in mind

when describing the group headed by Mike J. and Dale A. What this current identified with was purely and simply the sectarian positions of the FIT.

During the first two or three months of the WIL's existence (from the split to the TILC summer school), as during the life of the IT/IF, there was virtually no internal debate on these questions. Only Chris E. challenged Mike J.'s line. Mike J. attacked the Italian LOR and their proposed fusion with the USFI group, the LCR, during an informal discussion with Chris E. in Liverpool in May 1983. Mike J. was embracing more and more strongly the sectarianism exemplified by the FIT's characterisation of the USFI as being counter-revolutionary. Chris E. defended the LOR, but was unable to shift him politically. A political argument ensued which was never subsequently resolved. This more than anything reinforced Chris E.'s view that political coherence had to be established before establishing an organisation. While this had been impossible during the factional struggle, it was now both possible and essential to sort out these questions before making any lasting organisational proposals.

Colin Morrow, who was aware of the problems and dangers of this sectarianism avoided any struggle. He treated it on a 'liberal' basis as one of a number of issues to be looked at eventually. Thus, while Mike J. circulated FIT material in the WIL, Morrow agreed to a meeting, open to all members, with a representative of PO in Europe, without informing TILC. Of course, it was perfectly proper for Mike J. to be able to circulate FIT material, argue FIT positions, and get the leadership to organise meetings to discuss these issues. That was not the problem. The problem was political: the WIL leadership as a whole did not examine or discuss these questions (there was never one single discussion of these positions on the WIL National Committee), there was no attempt to fight this sectarianism and fight for the perspectives of TILC. Colin Morrow, **who was at this time secretary of TILC**, cultivated a 'soft', rather opportunist relationship with Mike J., giving members the clear impression that the dispute in Merseyside was a personality clash. He did not inform TILC of the discussions with the PO representative.

Inevitably this blew up in the face of the leadership, seriously confusing a totally unprepared membership. The scene was the 1983 TILC summer school and the immediate occasion for the explosion was the LOR's proposal for fusion with the LCR as a TILC tendency. At the National Committee meeting on the first night of the summer school Ricardo S. launched a strong attack on the fusion proposal. The project of LOR entry into the LCR had in fact been explained by Franco Grisolia at the 1982 WSL summer school but had never been discussed in the IT/IF/WIL. The LOR national aggregate of September 1982 had adopted a resolution on fusion with the LCR as a TILC faction which stated clearly:

“By joining the LCR we aim at developing, in the process of building the LCR, a political fight for its regeneration against centrist revisionism, with the objective of acquiring leadership of the same organisation and of bringing it to join the international organisation of consistent Trotskyism.” (Documents of the Discussion between LOR and LCR/USFI on Fusion Perspective)

In its approaches to the LCR, the LOR had been completely clear in its assessments of the LCR and the USFI and in presenting them-selves as a section of TILC and explaining the TILC's analysis of the crisis of the Fourth International - hence the resistance of the LCR to the LOR proposal and the initial breakdown of talks (it took the LOR two and a half years to effect their fusion with the LCR). The opposition to the fusion on the WIL National Committee seized on one phrase in the LOR's October 1982 letter to the LCR national committee: the 'positive role' of the LCR. The actual passage reads as follows:

“...Such a proposal should be understood in the sense of the LOR joining the LCR as a faction, maintaining its own character of section of TILC. The reason for such a decision is to be identified in our recognition of the positive role the LCR is playing in the class struggle, as well as of the potentialities the construction of LCR as a Trotskyist organisation implies for the common aim, that is, building a revolutionary Marxist workers' party. Our own organisation came to this assessment on the basis of overall political evaluation of LCR activities in the present situation of the workers' movement, beyond any occasional tactical disagreements or agreements. This of course does not rule out a series of political differences on the national field nor major differences we have with the USFI sections...”

In the December 1982 letter to the LCR the LOR uncompromisingly describes the USFI as: “...an unstable bloc of two factions, each semi-independently carrying out its own quite distinct politics.” (Documents of the Discussion between LOR and LCR/USFI on Fusion Perspective)

The pro-FIT element seized on this single phrase because it was their only 'evidence' of alleged liquidationism (they were in fact opposed to entry into the USFI per se). However, it illustrated their own sectarianism,

their failure to recognise the highly contradictory character of the crisis of the Fourth International, let alone to look at the specific situation in Italy and the development of the LCR there. However, Colin Morrow found himself totally isolated, thanks to his own refusal to struggle on this issue. The entire WIL National Committee apart from him supported Ricardo S. in opposing the LOR fusion proposal: this would have committed the WIL delegation at the TILC meeting (due immediately after the summer school) to voting against the fusion.

At last Colin Morrow recognised the need to act on this question. He argued for and got a meeting of the National Committee with the leadership of the LOR and then got the agreement of a majority to convene another National Committee meeting to re-discuss the issue of the Italian fusion proposal. This meeting reversed the earlier decision. This led to a dispute with one NC members alleging that he had not been informed of the NC meeting which reversed the decision which was never resolved. This led to a third NC meeting which reverted to the original line of opposing the LOR-LCR fusion.

This crisis affected the whole summer school, combining with - in fact, closely linked with - the lack of attention to political education and development of the group as whole, which, left the majority of WIL members feeling unprepared and confused. There was a clear sense among some of the younger members in particular that their education was being sacrificed to abstract debates on remote issues between intellectual leaders who were indifferent to their needs. This was expressed after the summer school in a motion to the National Committee from the Nottingham branch.

“...That the TILC summer school did not fulfil its educational role. We believe steps must be taken immediately to remedy what has happened. This must involve full discussion within the branches and on the National Committee to ensure that in future TILC summer schools concern themselves with comrades’ education.... In the meantime, we would like to discuss the possibility of an educational school.” (Handwritten motion, apparently never circulated or minuted.

The summer school, the response to it and the crisis over the Italian fusion proposal indicated in a very explosive fashion that the attempt to hold together the WIL on the basis of activity and personal relationships was doomed as all such attempts are eventually. Only a sharp turn to a serious and thorough examination of the major questions at issue, internationally and nationally, in preparation for the WIL’s first national conference and the democratic-centralist transformation of TILC could have enabled the WIL to overcome this crisis and allowed it to develop politically - if the leadership had waged a struggle for the perspectives of TILC and if, (at the same time and just as essential), there had been a sharp turn to educational work in the WIL, focused in the first instance around these issues. This, of course, would have meant a struggle to - would in fact have been the way to - resolve the contradictions inherited from the old WSL and the confusions created by its degeneration which lay behind the immediate problems of the WIL.

## **Pro-FIT Sectarianism**

This did not happen. The immediate issue of the WIL’s attitude to the Italian fusion proposal out of the way, the leadership resorted to the same methods to keep the WIL going that had caused the explosion - hence the decision to make Workers International News a monthly. There was no attempt by the leadership to take up the issues behind the ‘fusion dispute’ or to fight the growing danger of pro-FIT sectarianism. Colin Morrow produced nothing on the issue. The only attempt to examine the issue and defend the perspectives of TILC were two documents produced by Chris E.: “Towards a Strategy for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International” (WIL Internal Bulletin, no. 7, undated [apparently September 1983: there were two WIL Internal Bulletins numbered 7: the one that does not contain this document is dated September 1983] and “Clarification of the Position of the LOR on the reconstruction of the FI and the LCR Issue” (WIL Internal Bulletin, no. 1, October 1983)

The first of these documents was the best defence of TILC produced in writing during the independent existence of the WIL. It represented the first attempt to characterise the various factions of the FI introducing the term “centrism of Trotskyist origin” to characterise the majority of these factions. This was counterposed to the sectarianism of the FIT which characterised them as counter-revolutionary. This led to a further refinement of terminology in subsequent discussions.

SWP/US, SWP/GB, and Militant Tendency are all centrist, and they all have a Trotskyist origin, but it would be a mistake to describe them as Trotskyist-centrist. More important, this lumping together of different forms of centrism contains the danger of a certain element of sectarianism by failing to recognise the very important distinctions between the relationship of Trotskyist-centrists to the Trotskyist programme, compared

with centrists who simply happen to have a ‘Trotskyist ancestry’. It is these distinctions that make the ‘Trotskyist-centrist’ tendencies particularly important to the struggle for the regeneration of the Fourth International on an international scale, whereas particular centrist organisations (regardless of ‘ancestry’) may be of importance, even requiring entry work, in particular countries at particular times, for example, Militant in Britain (‘of Trotskyist origin’) and Proletarian Democracy in Italy (not ‘of Trotskyist origin’). There is some sign of this danger in the one-sided emphasis in the document’s conclusion on work in the mass movements.

“...If we remember that Trotsky advocated retaining the perspective of reforming the Comintern even after the adoption by the Sixth Congress of the utterly bankrupt programme of the Stalinists in 1928, on the grounds that an important section of the proletarian vanguard remained in its ranks, which had not yet been able to witness the test of events applied to the politics of that programme; we can see that the present fragmented FI exhibits neither the correct programme, the democratic internal regime, nor the proletarian social composition which might act as a lever on the hardened centrist leadership cliques in certain crisis situations in the class struggle. In that circumstance, the perspective of seeing our own role as a faction of the minuscule and largely petty-bourgeois scattered fragments of the degenerated FI is to be unduly preoccupied with these, often irrelevant, forces at the expense, possibly, of work in the mass organisations of the class (trade unions, workplaces, and reformist/Stalinist parties). If localised, opportunities for useful faction work in the fragments of the FI present themselves, as would appear to be the case in Italy in the LCR, then there need be no problem. But the fact that the fragmented FI is nothing like a mass workers’ organisation means that seeing our role as primarily being a faction of it is not justified. We cannot rule out occasional faction work; we are not, however, justified in subordinating our strategic tasks of building an independent revolutionary organisation to the tactics of generalised faction or entry work in what are petty-bourgeois centrist organisations of Trotskyist origin.”

There is a false counterposition here which derives from the weaknesses in the WSL’s approach to the question of the regeneration of the Fourth International, which we earlier noted “The Transitional Programme in Today’s Class Struggle”. The position argued here seems to reflect the one-sidedness of the old WSL’s ‘mass orientation’ at the expense of the winning and consolidation of the political vanguard. It is true that tactical considerations, for example, entry work, must be subordinated to the strategy of ‘building an independent revolutionary organisation’, both in the sense that it means the struggle to regenerate the Fourth International, as a general goal, and in the sense that it refers to the construction of an international tendency of consistent Trotskyist as crucial to that struggle to achieve that goal. However, this cannot be done just through the exemplary work of consistent Trotskyists in the mass organisations, by ‘working round’ the Trotskyist-centrist grouping which actually attract the most politically advanced elements on a world scale and which, without the intervention of consistent Trotskyists, become part of the crisis of proletarian leaderships, their oppositional struggles isolated within national confines.

## **The Fragmented Fourth International**

Then the author was compelled to remark: It might seem from the above that the demand for a ‘new’, ‘fifth’, International is being argued. This does not follow at all. But the only reason given is that, because it has not established a mass base, the fragmented Fourth International has not had the opportunity to turn counter-revolutionary, by and large, that is, it remains centrist, and has not therefore been seen to betray by the working class (as the Second and Third Internationals were). This is, of course, a very important aspect of the situation which makes the strategy of reconstructing and regenerating the Fourth International correct, but it is only an aspect. There could be circumstances where the strategy would be obsolete because there was nothing to reconstruct and regenerate. The danger of this analysis is that it can reduce the strategy of TILC to proclaiming and waiting and, in effect, seeing direct recruitment to TILC as the process of reconstruction.

The second document, based on a close examination of the GBL’s 1976 document “A First Balance Sheet of the Discussion Held between the iSt and the GBL for the FI” and its earlier, in the original form “Theses on the Reconstruction of the FI and the Tasks of Bolshevik-Leninists”, moves closer to a more dialectical view of the interrelation between work in mass organisations and the struggle with those forces identifying with the Trotskyist programme, though in its concluding paragraph still appearing to stress the local peculiarity of the Italian situation.

What is not stressed is that in the process of fighting the centrist distortions of Trotskyism and winning the political vanguard to consistent Trotskyism, factional struggle is not a peculiarity but is a ‘normal’ weapon, likely to be necessary in many countries, that this is not counterposed to work in the mass organisations even at

points where we may be engaged in factional struggle. The role of the Italian ITC comrades now, in the unions, in the left Stalinist movement in the Stalinist union federation, in strike movements, etc., while being in the AQI, and the use of that work as a weapon in their factional struggle illustrates this point very clearly) - and further, that factional struggle of the international organisation of consistent Trotskyists as a whole in one of Trotskyist-centrist international groupings is not ruled out on principle in advance.

Nevertheless, the production of these documents, the opposition to the anti-TILC sectarians, which they represented, and the development within (or rather, between them) was an important positive development in the WIL, an attempt to take forward the perspectives of the TILC. And it must be remembered also that at this point the distinction involved in the term Trotskyist-centrist, though certainly implicit, had not yet been given the precise written formulation it received in the ITC founding document, "The Crisis of the Fourth International and the Tasks of the Consistent Trotskyists". They were the only attempt of its sort. The second document was the only reply to the crude sectarianism, selective and misrepresented quotation, and sheer panic-mongering of the document by AM, Mike J., and Ricardo S., "A Critique of the LOR-LCR Fusion".

The panic-mongering was an appeal to the sectarian tendencies among the rank and file embittered by the WSL fusion:

"The destruction of the WSL was a tragedy, let us learn something from that.... let us not follow the same route.... "(AM, Mike J., and Ricardo S., "A Critique of the LOR-LCR Fusion" (WIL Internal Bulletin no. 7 [the other no. 7], September 1983)

In the process TILC was abandoned, the inadequacy of its basic perspectives and analysis 'proved' by the destruction of the WSL. The authors claimed that the Faction Platform legitimised their sectarianism.

"Inasmuch as the LOR and the RWL claim that this orientation (the fusion proposal) is in fact a logical application of the concepts already elaborate in the foundation documents of TILC, we can only agree. But... it only strengthens our view that the whole of the TILC experience and concept need a fundamental re-evaluation (as indicated in the IF Platform) in the light of its failure to develop beyond a shadowy existence."

By a re-evaluation the authors were not talking about a serious Marxist balance sheet of the situation which is what the majority of the supporters of the Faction Platform intended including a willingness to listen to and consider any rational criticisms of TILC by minorities in the faction.

The extreme sectarianism of the view that Pabloism is counter-revolutionary was unlikely to win many adherents, but the document of Evington, "On the 'World Trotskyist movement and the LOR/LCR Fusion'" (WIL (Internal Bulletin), no. 7, September 1983) represented a more general sectarianism, based on a very simplistic view of the "world Trotskyist movement" debate and the dangers of liquidationism. On his part this reflected not pro-FIT influence but a background in the national-sectarian ICL and an eventual, though short-lived, gravitation to Workers Power, the other sectarian pressure on the WIL. And precisely at this point when a real fight against sectarianism and internal clarification of the positions of TILC were so necessary, Colin Morrow, supported particularly by Tony G., introduced further confusion with the proposal to open talks with Workers Power. This was despite the fact that in response to earlier Workers Power pressure the WIL had decided only three months previously not to hold talks until the WIL had held a conference and clarified its positions. Morrow simply argued:

"While our decision... was legitimate, it would be unprincipled for us to delay such discussions beyond the scheduled date of our conference." (Resolution on Talks with Workers Power, 26 September 1983)

The logic was that if the WIL decided that more time was needed for its own clarification it was therefore the proper thing to do to start talks with Workers Power - even though the WIL did not have agreed positions on several of the major items proposed (for example, very obviously, the Fourth International). The motivation was one of conjunctural agreement on specific issues in Britain. Workers Power is the group closest to us in Britain. This was borne out once again by our mutual positions on the shooting down of the Korean airliner. And, once again, in what was supposed to be the period leading to the democratic-centralist transformation of TILC, this proposal was made without any reference to TILC.

Of course it was, and is, important to engage the Workers Power/LRCI in discussions, as a general principle, but the manner and timing of this proposal (which was heavily amended to provide for the WIL National Committee to make an assessment of Workers Power) was another source of confusion and distraction in the two months leading to the December national conference.

## Positive Developments in the WIL

On the other hand it is important to stress that there were important positive developments in the WIL during this period. It is particularly important to stress this since, of necessity, more space has had to be spent on an examination of the weaknesses and problems from which the WIL suffered because of its failure to resolve the contradictions of the old WSL. However, they remained contradictions, and positive developments were made by the leadership also. The disastrous experience of the December national conference was not inevitable, and even after that the collapse of the WIL was not inevitable.

Important steps were taken toward producing a comprehensive British perspectives document, based on a thorough re-examination of the post war class struggle. This, in fact, involved important progress on examining the economist objectivism of the old WSL. Colin Morrow played the crucial role in this work, producing three documents (all undated and none contained in numbered Internal Bulletins, but produced and circulated during mid- and late 1983): "The Economic Crisis and Crisis in the Unions" (two parts); "Theses on British Perspectives"; and a handwritten, cyclostyled document on the post war economy (the title of which is missing because of a duplicating error). Significant progress was also made on tackling the Labour Party question and the question of Labour Party work, though this was by no means resolved.

Valuable work was done on Stalinism, analysing the lessons of Poland, 1980-1981, for the program of political revolution. Mike J.'s contribution at the TILC summer school and his document were a starting point (WIL (Internal Bulletin), no. 7, September 1983). These were discussed and developed by the London branch (see London branch's amendments, circulated separately). The December 1983 WIL national conference adopted Mike J.'s document, including the London branch's amendments. Less extensive but also valuable discussions began around Colin Morrow's "Theses on Afghanistan" (WIL Internal Bulletin, no. 7, September 1983). (The RIL's own first national conference adopted both documents.) And of course there were Chris E.'s contributions on the Italian fusion as well as his document on the democratic secular state of Palestine slogan referred to above.

There were significant omissions, though. Despite the vital role of the youth and the specially oppressed in the development of the IT/IF/WIL, the excellent work done around the Newham Campaign, the fact that the Black Commission was one of the very few WIL commissions that functioned at all, and the continuing commitment to unemployed work and MJ's central role in this national scale - despite all this, there was no internal de-bate in the organisation as a whole on the special oppression issues and no internal bulletins on these questions, though there was a clear need to develop the work begun in the Internationalist Tendency. These omissions obviously reflected the serious problems in the method of the WIL which we have discussed above. The WIL's first national conference thus met in this very contradictory situation, with a large section of the membership feeling quite alienated. One particular incident on the eve of the conference was to prove especially inflammatory and indicated a whole number of outstanding political problems. This was the back-page article in WIN, no. 4, "Sinn Fein Turns Left." This was a confused article written by a young Leicester comrade with no assistance or discussion from the leadership, which was centred in Leicester - inevitably the writer absented himself from the conference. This reflected the diplomatic relationship which Pete F and the editorial board had with this comrade.

This made the Nottingham youth comrades in particular more convinced than ever that the paper was an uncon-trolled, unaccountable weapon in the hands of Colin Morrow and a group of confidantes - which in a real sense it was. The attitude of some of the older comrades was to see the demands being raised over the control of the paper as disruptive and provocative and pre-venting them from getting on with the real business of the conference.

The attack on the 'Sinn Fein Turns Left' article by some of the youth was partly a reaction to the incorrect politics in the article; it was also a reaction to Pete F's manipulative methods in relation to control of the paper which was designed to exclude some of the youth. They were using the issue to 'have a go at Morrow'. In carrying through this attack on both the article and Pete F however, some of the youth fell into the opposite pitfall of sectarianism towards the republican movement. Thus Dale A reacted with hostility to Nick D's suggestion that Irish Trotskyists would need to find ways of orienting towards developments within Republicanism.

## Real Dangers of Disorientation

A chance incident intensified this political confusion, indicating the very real dangers of disorientation. On the Saturday afternoon of the conference, an IRA bomb exploded at Harrods. The next day Terri M. put a mo-

tion to the conference which relapsed into a Matgamnaite attitude, calling for condemnation of civilian bombings as our first responsibility. This reflected Terri M's political inexperience. This was supported however by Neil J who had previously polemicised against Matgmana's line on bombings strongly in a WSL IB and had the political experience to know what the issues were. The IF line on Republican bombings had always been clear on this question i.e. opposed to moralistic condemnations.

Other signs of disorientation during the conference were the motion on youth work from NJ, reversing the IT/IF position by arguing for the LPYS to be the focus of youth work (a position not previously raised or discussed in the WIL) and a motion on the Warrington union-busting dispute which was both somewhat opportunist in its 'one-day-general-strike' demand and somewhat adventurist in proposing that members should call for immediate strikes in their workplaces. All these proposals were defeated. Throughout the conference the positions of TILC were carried. In particular, the sectarianism of the pro-FIT current on centrism was defeated. This was not in fact in a scheduled debate on the Fourth International and TILC - there wasn't one!! - but in a resolution on the Malvinas War written by Mike J. Mike introduced the notion of "counter-revolutionary centrism" into this text. This was successfully amended by Chris E., Tony G. and Colin Morrow

Despite this the WIL first national conference was dominated by frustration on the part of the youth, particularly the Nottingham youth, at the manipulative way Pete F and his confidantes based in Leicester had produced the paper on the basis of excluding them from any real input. This involved questions of democratic centralism in which there were erroneous conceptions on the part of both the youth and Pete F group. The youth proposed a whole series of unworkable resolutions which would have made the production of the paper impossible. They demonstrated a lack of understanding of what democratic centralism was about. It would have led to a situation of "permanent assembly". The actions thus far of the Pete F editorial board had also demonstrated a manoeuvrist hostility to the youth which undermined in practice the spirit of democratic centralist.

Mike J was attempting to play on this discontent of the youth while adapting to, rather than challenging, some of their errors e.g. he supported the LPYS centred youth work of Dale A and was diplomatically ambivalent in relation to the wrong positions of Neil and Terri M on the question of Republican bombings. In this way a bloc was constructed for the elections to the National Committee. The main motivation of the youth was to marginalise Pete F's supporters and influence on the National Committee even though many of them had voted for the same line as Pete F in the conference. The key political issues in relation to the earlier discussion on characterising and reconstructing the FI played no part in the voting of the youth.

This was why the voting for the National Committee gave a majority to those who had been in the political minority on every vote in the conference. From the point of view of the youth it was a vote of no confidence in people seen as too closely associated with a leadership that the youth comrades felt they could not trust even where they agreed with their politics.

## **Original Decision**

The conference confirmed the view that the original decision to establish the organisation had been mistaken because there was no political coherence in the organisation. The programme of systematic discussion necessary to achieve it, outlined in the faction platform, had not been implemented by either the ex-IF comrades or TILC. The willingness of the TILC-sympathisers in the IF and the WIL to go through a process of non-sectarian dialogue with the minority comrades had not been reciprocated. The Workers Power comrades had split at the first opportunity and the pro and ex-FIT comrades had lost no opportunity to denigrate and undermine the non-sectarian attempts of the TILC to politically regenerate and reconstruct the FI. There was also a regression towards the very right wing Matgamnaite positions, which the IT had been set up to struggle against, on the part of some of the youth. This had culminated in the election of a leadership on the basis of an unprincipled and politically incoherent bloc. There were consequently no grounds for the continuation of the organisation on its current basis.

At the end of December Pete F produced a document exposing the unprincipled nature of the leadership majority bloc and the politically right-ward character of the motions on youth work and IRA bombings from Nottingham and stating the importance of democratic centralism. It did not however accept any responsibility for his own conduct which was not exactly in the spirit of democratic centralism either. ("An Unprincipled Bloc." WIL Internal Bulletin 1984 No. 1). It is worth quoting this short document in full to give something of the atmosphere of the organisation at the time and what the TILC sympathisers were up against:

## “An Unprincipled Bloc”

The first conference of the WIL, held last weekend, brought to a head a crisis which has been looming in the organisation since the summer. That it did not take a clearly political character is a reflection of the nature of the problem. For what we are dealing with is indeed, as Chris E put it, ‘a festering cancer’.

It would be a mistake for comrades to dismiss Chris’s statement as being merely a moment of anger or as subjectivism. In making the statement Chris was above all demanding that comrades come clean on the differences. His frustration was a product of the fact that the ‘festering cancer’ in our ranks is in fact an unprincipled bloc based on apolitical factionalism. The purpose of this short document is to demonstrate this.

Cde. Mike J, on the first day of the conference, referred to a ‘trend’ in the organisation of which he was one part. Unfortunately this so-called ‘trend’ has done little to present itself in clear political terms to members. Despite Mike J’s constant droning on about the need to draw a ‘balance sheet’ and clarify his positions he has made an excellent job of making his own position unclear. In fact over the past six months he has changed his position with all the dexterity of a card sharp.

Since it is so dear to his heart let us take an example the question of Pabloism. In July at TILC Mike J was specifically asked if he characterised the USFI as ‘counter-revolutionary’. His reply - it’s in the minutes - was NO. But for comrades who think ‘no’ means **no** there was a surprise to come. For, in September Mike J and coproduced their document on the LOR/LCR fusion in which the USFI was denounced as ‘objectively counter-revolutionary’. Cdes. Mike J and Salva (ex-member of Chilean FIT) defended this view at the November TILC meeting. But in December... lo and behold a new document from them specifically on the FI managed to not mention this crucial point! Instead the USFI are referred to as ‘centrists’. Perhaps cde. Mike J should get a job as a quick change artist!

We find the same light mindedness on political characterisations in the case of the resolution drafted by Mike J on the Malvinas. In his original, a whole paragraph was devoted to attacking Sean M’s line as ‘pro-imperialist’ (i.e. counter-revolutionary). Now presumably, since Mike J wrote it, that was his position. But when this was challenged at the conference by a totally different analysis, which characterised Sean M as a centrist and social pacifist (not social chauvinist), the ever principled cde. Mike J accepted the amendments. So, we are left with a difficult question. Either cde. Mike J does not know what he thinks or, more probably, he does not care to defend what he thinks! Certainly he offered no explanation for his **wrong** characterisations.

This political zig-zagging must, of course, make life very difficult for the supporters of Mike J’s ‘trend’. Either it means they simply support whatever twists and turns he makes or else we must assume that they all have excellent crystal balls. Cde. Dale A for example has pronounced himself a supporter of Mike J’s positions. The question is **which ones?** The Mike J line on the USec in July, the September re-think or the present retreat into silence? Perhaps cde. Dale A has also, simultaneously, been changing his line. But on the Malvinas resolution there is no doubt that Dale has got himself up a gum tree. If he supported the original resolution why did he not defend it? On the other hand if he disagreed with the resolution and supported the amendment why had he not himself--since he is no novice--criticised the **wrong** formulations on ‘pro-imperialist’ and challenged the idea that centrism is counter-revolutionary? The answer of course is that such tolerance of political zig-zags is the hall-mark of factionalism and the unprincipled bloc.

Of course, Mike J is equally willing to give tactical support to the political shifts of others, notably some of our youth comrades. That was blatantly clear on both youth work and Ireland. In the WSL we fought sharply against the Ashworth/Thwaites line of ‘build the YS and turn it out to working class youth’ But when it was raised anew in the WIL by cdes. Dale A/Neil J /Sharpe then the trend leader cde. Mike J discretely forgot his objections and tactfully retreated into silence. Minor details like political principles clearly do not deter our fashionable little ‘trend’.

So again, on Ireland, when the Nottingham cdes. presented a resolution which in its essentials reverted back to the WSL line (sectarianism towards the Republican movement, capitulation to chauvinism on bombings) what did Mike J give us? ‘Unlike Pete I think this generally a very good resolution.’

In any serious organisation this maverick abandonment of previous positions and unprincipled factionalism would be treated with the contempt it deserves. That we are talking here about a supposed ‘leading’ member of the WIL simply makes it a sick joke. The responsibility of NC members confronted by what is a serious rightward shift among a layer of our youth should be to fight against that, and to try to root their politics more firmly. Instead Mike J simply cynically latches on to it. What we face with a number of youth comrades is not

their political development but their virtual political collapse. Cde. Mike J , by attempting to provide a left cover for this rightward drift, has compounded this collapse. That is why he is unwilling and unable to fight for even basic organisational norms.

But let us return to the so-called 'trend'. Perhaps what cde. Mike J means by this is simply the impulse to hitch up with FIT. Certainly we can all be grateful to him for finally spelling this out in his and Ricardo's document on the FI although their contributions at the November TILC left little to the imagination. But in that case we have a right to ask another question of the oh so principled anti-liquidationist Mike J.... **Have you informed your supporters that in the Argentine elections the PO front organisation, 'Workers Party' approached one of the smaller bourgeois parties (the Intransigent Party) asking them to form an electoral bloc?**

In September Mike J scurried around accusing the TAF (Copenhagen) cdes. of wanting to join the USec... He spread this rumour, in fact a lie, liberally around the WIL. In July and August Mike J was also accusing the LOR or all sorts of liquidationist crimes. But he has not been so hasty when it comes to denouncing the **popular frontism** of the PO in Argentina! Presumably, for the 'trend' popular frontism is the acceptable face of liquidationism.

Finally since it was the only 'issue' that the 'trend' raised, let us look at the question of leadership and accountability. To begin with it is worth noting that Lenin and the Bolsheviks denounced as anarchism the notion of an organisation based on the notion of a 'permanent assembly' and fought instead for the role of leadership, both in the class and in the Party. As cde. Tony G said at the conference we clearly have a number of comrades who reject Bolshevik norms and agitate for those of anarcho-syndicalism.

But it worth asking: are the comrades really interested in accountability? The answer is demonstrably no! Cde. Dale is convenor of the youth commission. But he evidently does not feel himself bound to explain the inadequacy of our intervention at the Class Fighter conference. He does not feel it necessary to raise Neil J's role in this by leaving our resolutions in a telephone box and a launderette (perhaps they both see this as some new form of mass work). In fact the comrade is not even called to account for absenting himself from the second day of the conference! Not a word have we had on any of this. This is not to suggest that we need an inquisition , but simply to suggest that we do need an honest **political** accounting. This means making all our comrades accountable for their work not just one or two against whom the Mike J/Dale A bloc wish to factionalise. It also means we are in a position to correct errors in the future, and facilitate comrades political development.

But in fact Dale A etc. vehemently resist any form of accountability. The proposition from the Treasurer that certain comrades clear their substantial debts is denounced as a manoeuvre, as a personal attack, or, if need be, 'Leicester bureaucracy'. The concept of leadership which these comrades will now introduce onto the NC will no doubt be fascinating spectacle. Certainly it is unlikely to involve any pressure on sectarian abstentionists like Mike J to get involved in the class struggle. The fact that for fifteen weeks he has avoided going anywhere near the NGA dispute in Warrington, that he is not a member of a trade union or the Labour Party, and he is not involved in any ongoing work among the unemployed will be glossed over in the interests of preserving the rotten, unprincipled bloc which has been created.

However it is worth pointing out that part of the ABC of revolutionary work in the trade unions is that when you take a step you have already assessed the likely responses. The cdes. might usefully spend the holiday period examining their next move, since the options open to them are likely to be few and far between."

While this accurately expresses how the majority of TILC sympathisers saw the problem it does not address itself to the problem of the manipulative conduct which Pete F had used in relation to some youth. One problem was that the older comrades did not have a clear enough understanding of the fact that personal conduct oppressive to specially oppressed people, including youth, was a political question to which the organisation should address itself. There was consequently a tendency to put the complaints of the youth down to 'personal' antipathies which were of no political consequence. There was tendency on the part of some of the older comrades to not confront strongly enough Pete F 's oppressive conduct. This was linked to a sense of helplessness to do anything in relation to this on the part of comrades living outside Leicester. This contributed to' rather than helped to solve, the problems of the organisation. The net result of these was an atmosphere of mutual contempt and mistrust.

This document was replied to by Alex O. and AS, two youth comrades in Leicester who had voted as part of the majority in the conference. They pointed out what the actual decisions had been and challenged those who said that the WIL was finished politically to give their political alternatives. They rightly pointed these out

as liquidating into individual activity in the Labour movement, joining Workers Power, or becoming "a small group of like-minded thinkers" making occasional interventions in specific areas - a policy which "consciously excludes the majority of WIL members". They concluded:

"Comrade Morrow makes a serious and fair political point in his document about the leadership not being allowed to lead. This is undoubtedly true but is due to a number of factors including our lack of constitution and any organisational norms and the inevitable leadership paranoia and distrust legacy from the old WSL - we are sure this will continue even towards the so-called "New Leadership", but the leadership has to earn the trust of the membership and this is not done by berating them." (Alex O. and AS, "Is There a Future for WIL?", WIL Internal Bulletin, 1984, no. 1, January 1984)

Faced with this debacle, the TILC sympathisers, having exhausted all the possibilities, as they saw it, of dialogue and the resolution of the political differences with the minorities in the IF/WIL, caucused and drew up a platform which demarcated the political positions of the TILC from the other opposed positions which had emerged during the past months. They announced they were establishing themselves on the basis of this platform--a split. The only thing left to do was to regroup what was left from the debacle around a clear and coherent platform to try to break with the apolitical factionalism.

A group of eleven members, only two youth among them, left the WIL in January 1984. The London members Tony G. and Nick Ds. opposed the split (supported by the Turkish comrade, Kemal, in general, but he was by this time increasingly withdrawing from political involvement), but they went along with it. This indicated a certain lack of commitment to their position of opposing the split. If it was so important not to split and remain in the WIL, why did they not carry this out--there was no organisational discipline to prevent them from doing so? Their decision not to go back into the WIL reflected the reality of the situation which was that, while every effort had been made to draw out the differences with Mike J and the ex-FIT comrades, their response had been to duck and dive, fudge and obfuscate.

The resolution on the Malvinas had been consciously moved by Chris E in order to clarify the issues on characterisations by selecting the recent struggle against the ICL leadership--something which was familiar to all the comrades in the WIL, particularly the youth, unlike past events connected to the USFI which were more remote. The object of the exercise was a pedagogical one: to get the WIL to examine and characterise the ex-ICL leadership's actions during the Malvinas war. That seemed to be the best way to expose the sectarianism of the FIT through a recent, familiar concrete episode. Pete F's document shows the negative result of this attempt. The TILC sympathisers were by now, absolutely sick of this nonsense. Whatever else might be said of them they couldn't be accused of not trying to clarify the issues. Their patience had now evaporated however.

They formed the Workers International Review Group as the British section of the TILC. Unfortunately for them the RWL were not interested in establishing a British section of the TILC on a clear political basis, but papering over the cracks and trying to pretend that the election of an unprincipled bloc, on the basis of apolitical factionalism was unimportant. The TILC sympathisers were accused by Leland S, who was in charge of the RWL international relations, of splitting because they did not get a majority on the NC--a fatuous attempt to trivialise the political motives of the comrades who had remained loyal to the TILC. To recognise and respect the political authority of a majority on a clear political basis was one thing --if the TILC sympathisers had done this there would have been grounds for criticism.

But to refuse to recognise a majority composed of an unprincipled bloc based on apolitical factionalism was totally different. This the TILC sympathisers were not prepared to do. The elected leadership did not reflect the leadership in any meaningful, proportionate or representative way. Leland S did not wish to acknowledge this reality.

### **On the Basis of Cult Relationships.**

Behind this response lay the objective of establishing an RWL satellite group in Britain with a leadership composed of pliable individuals selected by the RWL on the basis of cult relationships. One of these chosen individuals, as luck would have it for the RWL, was Alex O who wound up on the wrong side of the split in the WIL. This was unimportant to Leland S. Politics came a long way behind the need to establish a client group that would do his bidding. The last thing he wanted was a group of independent-minded comrades who would talk back and argue with him if they thought he was wrong.

The RWL had already attempted to undermine the leadership of the WIL during the Summer when a row erupted over who should represent the WIL at the RWL conference in the US. The person selected by the

WIL, Morag S, a young Asian woman, was Pete F's partner. She had been selected by the WIL leadership in a perfectly legitimate way. There was a feeling amongst the youth and particularly Alex. O, nevertheless, that she had been selected because Pete F had managed to 'swing it for her' because she was his partner. This may have been Pete F's motive, but it certainly was not the motive of the WSL leadership generally who had genuinely selected her on her merits.

The RWL then complicated matters further when they subsequently declared that Morag was not acceptable and announced that they had selected Alex O instead on the grounds that they were paying the fare and they therefore would decide who went! This had not exactly helped the TILC sympathisers win adherents and it had been a god-send to their political opponents in the WIL the pro and ex- FIT people who had a field day during the resulting row.

Irrespective of the rights and wrongs of the motives of Pete F in her selection, the fact remained that Morag had been the leadership's legitimate choice. This had disastrous effects on the morale of Morag S, but the RWL seemed unconcerned even when this was pointed out to them. Their only concern seemed to be to appease the vindictive demands of Alex O who was becoming the RWL's main client in the WIL. The RWL would not back down. The eventual compromise was that Alex O would represent the WIL at the RWL conference. Morag would visit the US at a subsequent date. When she did, she complained she had been ostracised and left to her own devices for much of the time. She subsequently left politics.

### Trivialise

In order to prise Alex O away from the rump after the split it was necessary for Leland S to trivialise the issues involved in the split and distance himself from the majority of the TILC sympathisers in order to ingratiate himself with his client. This led him to present a distorted picture of what occurred at the WIL conference and the reasons behind the split to other TILC sections. This led in turn to the Italian comrades proposing a resolution at the Easter TILC meeting which had obviously been prepared **in advance** of the meeting, before they heard the British TILC sympathisers account of what had occurred, characterising the split as 'unprincipled'. This led to a walk out of the meeting by one of the British TILC sympathisers in protest.

It was therefore wholly un-surprising, given their conduct towards TILC's own supporters in Britain, that many of the comrades became demoralised and voted with their feet, deciding to occupy themselves with something more productive like Irish solidarity work, women's work or trade unions as independents. Not only had the British TILC supporters non-sectarian approach to the political minorities in the IF/WIL been thrown back in their faces. Their own international co-thinkers in the RWL had also adopted a similar attitude i.e. to carve out a satellite group made up of their selected, pliable clients among the Leicester/Nottingham youth. The fact that these individuals had split from the group of British TILC supporters was a mere technical problem to the RWL. At the 1984 Summer School in Leicester (which preceded the ITC founding conference) Neil J was openly critical and hostile towards the politics of the British TILC supporters yet he was feted and flattered by the RWL members present. However, even the RWL's philosopher's stone, a plane ticket to Detroit, did not on this occasion turn base metal into gold and he parted company with the ITC.

Alex O was a different matter altogether. Not one of the most politically developed of the layer of youth recruited in Leicester, although the most temperamental, his political assets in the eyes of the RWL were that he was a black gay youth and that he had a good vocal (and not always unjustified) distrust of Pete F, which he then extended to all perceived white middle class male intellectuals. The RWL had its man! He and Tony G were nominated as the British representatives of the IEC of the ITC - by the RWL! Alex O was still out of the British ITC group but this was soon taken care of. Alex O constituted one half of a largely fictitious and ludicrously mis-named "Tendency for Political Clarification". By establishing a "Liaison Committee" consisting of Tony G and Alex O the RWL attempted the present the founding of the RIL as some sort of fusion process. Thus by sleight of hand, the RWL had its nominee back in the British section without too much loss of face on his part. This relatively raw youth was then promoted beyond his abilities onto the leading body of the RIL and ITC, to the benefit neither of him or the organisation.

His RWL patrons ensured he remained there for the next eight years at least. This was despite his singular organisational incompetence, and his politics, which, despite TG's diligent tutoring in the basic texts, never substantially developed beyond opportunist gay-male activism and sectarian pseudo-Trotskyist sloganising. Only a handful of other comrades, who didn't know how to give up, remained willing to build a TILC/ITC British section alongside these clients against their better judgement.

## TILC Sympathisers

The remaining WIL had an equally rapid decline, dominated by the pro-FIT group. Though still the official section of TILC (the WIRG members regarded themselves as TILC sympathisers), only Alex O was in real contact with TILC. By the end of February, a group of five comrades set up the Tendency for Political Clarification, not on a definite political platform but with the aim of getting political differences discussed openly and cutting through the confusion. This tendency, disoriented by the experiences of the past two years, quickly fell victim to the sectarian recruiting methods of Workers Power, who took the majority of its members (but did not retain any of them).

Thus the ITC founding conference in Leicester in July 1984 agreed a procedure for the unification of the British supporters of the ITC into a single section. And incidents around and in the international conference - the attempt by a WIRG member to keep Alex O.'s report of the miners' contingent on the gay pride march out of the Leicester miners' support group newsletter, and Morrow's attempts to defend this action indicated a certain syndicalist deprioritisation of special oppression issues on the part of a working class comrade and a typically diplomatic failure to confront this on the part of Pete F. The procedure as laid down in fact was rapidly out of date, as it became irrelevant even to talk of distinct groups, but in November the meeting took place which formed the RIL as the British section of the ITC.

## 7. In Conclusion

The summary statement agreed at the founding meeting on 18 November 1984 and printed in (Revolutionary Internationalist), no. 1, December 1984, which was actually based on the Statement of Demarcation drawn up by the WIRG in the previous January, was a generally correct and principled statement of Trotskyist politics against both liquidationist/opportunist and sectarian distortions and a firm declaration of the perspectives of the International Trotskyist Committee. It included the basic elements of analysis and perspectives on the British situation which had been developed over the previous year and a half, and were to form the basis of the RIL's perspectives. There were still signs of the old sectarianism in the formulation of the sections on the Labour Party and the fact there was no specific critique of economism, despite its implied importance in the analysis of the situation in Britain.

The problems did not go away however. The cultist problems persisted. Comrades who did not fit into the patron-client relationship were marginalised and ostracised by the RWL. The RIL was a satellite of the RWL from the moment of its formation to the split in 1991. It was to the credit of those comrades who were subjected to this uncomradely and non-communist conduct that they did not allow this to stop them from working in political solidarity with the TILC/ITC and its political project of the political regeneration and reconstruction of the Fourth International. That is until the accentuation of the cultist dimension of the RWL led to blatantly undemocratic practices in 1991 and made continued membership untenable.

Those comrades who struggled for political clarity throughout the struggles described in this balance sheet were the same ones who finally broke with the cultist sectarianism of the RIL/ITC and helped to establish the International Trotskyist Opposition to continue the positive aspects of the ITC's work in the USFI in an atmosphere refreshingly free of the patronage and sycophancy which characterised the internal regime of the RIL/ITC.

## Appendix 1

### Draft Statement of Political Demarcation December 29th 1983

Original draft by Chris Edwards. This amended draft submitted by: CE, SE, TG, JG, HF, K, PF.

1. The primary concern of revolutionaries is intervention in the class struggle where we test out and develop our ideas in practice. We therefore reject the methods of petty intrigue, non-political subjectivism, petty bourgeois individualism, hidebound armchair scholasticism, opportunist and unprincipled combinationism and all other traits of the circle mentality, which sees politics as divorced from activity in the class struggle and as secondary to non-political, organisational and personal considerations or to bleating about the 'regime'.

2. We support the view that the FI collapsed into centrism in 1951. But we reject the view that this meant the FI became subsequently "dead for the purpose of revolution" or that a "new programme" was necessary, or that a "new fifth international" was necessary, separate from a reconstituted international bureau of the FI based on a re-affirmation and an updating of the Transitional Programme. Similarly, we reject the view that the

International Committee was the 'continuity' of Trotskyism, while giving critical support to the IC's struggle against Pabloism in 1953.

3. We characterise the USFI, FI(CIR), IWL etc. as centrists. The characterisation of such forces is made on the basis of their actual programme and practice in the class struggle, and with regard to their relationship to the camps of the proletariat or class enemy. We support the characterisation of Pabloism, whether it be the USFI or Matgamaism, as social pacifists in the recent Malvinas war. Such positions and practice is consistent with their character of being a right-ward moving centrist faction in the camp of the proletariat. We therefore reject the philistine concept that if a formation abandons the programme of Trotskyism it automatically enters the camp of the class enemy, it becomes 'counter-revolutionary'. We fully support the resolution on the Malvinas adopted at the December Conference of the WIL.

4 We support the tactic of the anti-imperialist united front as a bloc with the poor peasantry and petty bourgeoisie (i.e. the national revolutionary forces which base themselves in the masses in a revolutionary fashion against the national bourgeoisie). We reject the opportunist use of the AIUF as a bloc with the bourgeois nationalists. This opportunist use of the AIUF, drawing on the correct premise that the national bourgeoisie are a 'semi-ruling, semi-oppressed class' (Trotsky) comes to the wholly incorrect conclusion that they can be an anti-imperialist force. In the event of a conflict between bourgeois nationalism and a wing of imperialism (as opposed to imperialism in general, which bourgeois nationalism always evades) we support a policy of "March separately, strike together" in the conflict against imperialism (e.g. Malvinas War) while denouncing the national bourgeoisie at the same time as part of a consistent campaign to overthrow it at the earliest possible opportunity. We therefore reject the view that the slogans 'down with Galtieri' or 'neither Thatcher nor Galtieri' were pro-imperialist in Argentina and regard the failure of revolutionaries to raise such slogans as a capitulation to imperialism.

5. We support the demands of the democratic, republican programme to the extent that in the period of reaction our soviet programme is unrealisable owing to an unfavourable balance of forces. Thus, we support the agitational demands for 'A United Ireland', 'Abolish the Partition of Ireland' and a 'Democratic Secular State of Palestine'. We reject the view that the dictatorship of the proletariat must be counterposed to such slogans in a non-revolutionary situation. At the same time, we reject the slogan of 'The Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry' as meaning a regime separate from the dictatorship of the proletariat in a non-revolutionary period

6. Opposition to condemnation of IRA bombing campaigns in the press of Trotskyists in the oppressed countries. For maximum support for the armed struggle of the colonial peoples' liberation fighters against the chauvinism of the oppressor country. Our criticism of the strategy of the petty bourgeois nationalism must be subordinate to the need to give support in the publication of Trotskyists in the oppressor nation to the extent that such criticism must detract from or undermine the unequivocal character of our support for their anti-imperialist struggle in times of chauvinist hysteria. Hence we support the resolution on Ireland presented by the IF at the WSL conference and reaffirmed at the WIL December conference. Similarly, and for the same reasons, we reject the slogans of 'Down with Galtieri' or 'Neither Thatcher nor Galtieri' in Britain at the time of the Malvinas war as an adaptation to imperialist chauvinism.

7. Opposition to the revisionist view that the reformist parties, or their youth sections, are a necessary vehicle for the work of Trotskyists as reformist party cretinism. Support for the independence of Trotskyist parties, both politically and organisationally .

8. Rejection of the view that the election of a reformist government is a 'victory for the working class' as a gross embellishment of counter-revolutionary reformisms. This one-sided analysis (in fact the identical twin of Thornett's equally impressionistic concept of the 'forward movement' of the working class) in practice abandons the basic Marxist thesis that 'being determines consciousness'. 'Being' cannot be glibly confined to how the reformists do in elections, it contains much, much more. It contains not only the day to day experience of the workers, but also their previous ideas. It is therefore obvious that consciousness itself must be extremely contradictory in its development. Simple logic of the cause and effect type is helpless to even begin to understand this contradictory process of development of the class struggle. We develop a revolutionary Marxist understanding of the working class action precisely by rejecting the bourgeois notion which equates 'politics' and 'class struggle' with the form of parliamentarism.

9. We seek to develop a revolutionary leadership among the advanced layers of the working class and specially oppressed equally (women, people of colour, youth unemployed). We recognise that forging these layers

together for a common purpose will be crucial for the social revolution. We reject the view that the independent organisations of the specially oppressed are outside the labour movement. The self organisation of the specially oppressed expressed the unique relationship with the specially oppressed, as a result of their double oppression, have with the bourgeois state, and therefore with the revolutionary tasks of the working class.

10. We reject the view that the formation of an international democratic centralist tendency can be postponed until a finished programme has been worked out by isolated national groups. We support the method of Trotsky in establishing the ILO on the basis of a list of short thesis (11 points) in 1933, which were a rough outline of the intended programme and provisional agreements.

11. We defend the LOR majority line of insistence that any entry into the USFI Italian section must be on the basis of a faction linked to the TILC. We do not, in formalistic fashion, rule out the possibility of individual entry into the LCR in certain circumstances (as for example with Trotsky's advised to the British left oppositionists on entry into the left-centrist ILP), but merely question the practical advisability and wisdom in taking such a step in the present circumstances where a secret, unofficial faction would be seen as a manoeuvre by a hostile and suspicious Pabloite leadership with its apparatus well organised and fully intact. This is doubly the case given that unlike the ILP the LOR does not have a substantial (i.e.; thousands) working class membership.

We equally reject the view that every TILC section must enter the USEC and declare our solidarity with the LOR's long held view that tactical 'flexibility' must be based on concrete assessments of the developments in a given country at a given period of time. This is in line with the TILC resolution on the LOR/LCR fusion.

12 We declare our solidarity with TILC, recognised that it passed the test of the Malvinas and seek to form a democratic centralist internationalist tendency politically united by a further development and clarification of the Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle, the 9 points - Programmatic Basis and Declaration of Intent.

13. On the basis of the above we hereby declare our political demarcation from all those who we regard as opposed to the method and politics outlined above, and our decision to free ourselves from those who in practice have demonstrated their opposition to turning Marxism into the class struggle. The first conference of the WIL - intended to be the founding conference—demonstrated there was not the basis in terms of political agreement for a common organisation. We regard the points outlined above as the fundamental basis for developing a healthy Workers International League over the coming period. They are consistent with the political line presented by us in the struggle against the centrism in the WSL. We ask comrades to seriously consider them and to carefully assess where they see WIL going.

## Appendix 2

### **TAF (Denmark) Statement on the Malvinas (undated)**

We in the TAF disagree with SM and MT about what imperialism is. SO itself in its columns, points out correct facts which illustrates the nature of Argentina as a country subordinate to imperialism, and maintains correctly that the British fleet is imperialist. But at the same time SM and MT deny that the conflict has an anti-imperialist content on the part of Argentina. Apparently they believe that Argentina is also imperialist, or "nearly" imperialist. So uses expressions such as Argentina is not a "typical" third world oppressed country, and that Galtieri has "mini-colonialist" motives (SO 83 reply to IWL). Likewise the comparison of nationalism in Britain and Argentina points in the same direction. Such masking of the scientific Marxist concepts of the theory of imperialism have to take place in order to serve the self-determination line, but in the bargain theoretical clarity is junked and replaced by self-invented concepts, as expressions of theoretical formlessness.

For SM and MT the real problem with Thatcher's war is that it doesn't benefit the islanders (and costs human life). Therefore it becomes necessary to write about the right of self-determination; "Supporting rights does not mean supporting every action that is supposed to defend those rights". And "By the very nature of the British state Thatcher's fleet acts in the interests of Tory and the British ruling class prestige". "Any benefit to the islanders is doubtful and strictly incidental". Therefore, according to SO, a class struggle against Thatcher's war must be waged in Britain. But SM and MT know as well as we that it is a question of settlers in the Malvinas. Since when has it been Trotskyist policy to support imperialism's settlers? Nevertheless when British imperialism doesn't defend these settlers effectively SM and MT will mobilise the working class to do the work of imperialism.

With self-determination as the axis, SM and MT's claimed class struggle viewpoint becomes an empty shell raised above the class struggle. It is detached from the real task of leading the class in Argentina in an anti-imperialist struggle, to strike a blow against imperialism, the Bonapartist junta, and the Argentine bourgeoisie all at once. The main orientation in Argentina must be : "COUNTER-ATTACK IMPERIALISM ON ALL FRONTS"; Support for the re-conquest of the Malvinas, and the war against British imperialism; Expropriation of all imperialist property without compensation; Stop the payment of the debt to the imperialist banks and governments; The burden of the crisis must be paid by the imperialists. In this manner the masses can be prepared for overthrowing the junta and bourgeoisie in Argentina.

It involves of course, no support for the junta, but struggle for an independent revolutionary programme. On the contrary it must mean a constant attack on the junta for not carrying out an anti-imperialist struggle, and for the independent organisation and struggle of the workers. The false starting point of SM and MT has led them to stand things on their heads in a two phase theory: First the Argentine working class overthrow the junta, once that is done Argentina can get the right to the Malvinas.

The working class in Argentina can't win over the Bonapartist junta and its own bourgeoisie without anti-imperialist struggle, precisely because Argentina is dominated by imperialism. SM and MT with their self-determination viewpoint on the Malvinas question, stand as a hindrance to building the bridge our Transitional Programme talks about - namely the bridge between the consciousness of the oppressed masses and the actual problems, and the necessary tasks of making the revolution.

### Appendix 3

#### **RWL (US) Statement on the British/American Military Confrontation over the Malvinas, 23 July 1982**

[The following is an amended version of the LOR's Secretariat's Majority Statement, submitted to the TILC Conference on 9 April. The RWL/US strongly supported this resolution at the April 1982 Conference. This amended version represents a somewhat fuller statement of the RWL's position on the Malvinas conflict as of the April TILC Conference. The RWL submits it to the 23 July meeting of the present TILC Conference simply as a record of the RWL's views.]

1. The British-Argentine conflict over the Malvinas can be understood in the context of Argentina's historic and military claim to these remnants of the British colonial empire, from their original seizure by Britain in 1883 to the present day; and on the basis of the fundamental, clear-cut distinction between imperialist and oppressed countries.

2. Clearly Galtieri's move in ordering the occupation of these islands by Argentina forces on 2 April should be understood as an attempt to divert rising resistance to his regime to some form of 'national unity' behind the military junta's seizure of the Malvinas. In particular, Galtieri was searching for a means of diverting and containing the mounting waves of struggle of the powerful Argentine labour movement, whose militant class spirit cannot be broken by the system of terror maintained by the brutal military regimes which have ruled Argentina since the Videla coup of 24 March 1976.

3. Moreover Argentina claim to the Malvinas/Falkland Islands is undeniably part of the overall historic Argentine national demands. In the conflict over the islands between Argentina and Britain, control over natural resources in the overall region of the island is sought, on the one hand by an oppressed country and, on the other hand by a major imperialist power.

4. Moreover the sending by Thatcher of the Royal Navy to the region, regardless of Galtieri's diversionary motives and the vicious reactionary and repressive character of his regime, created an actual military confrontation between imperialist Britain and oppressed Argentina, with Britain defending militarily a portion, however small, of its historic plundering system. 5. Even if this conflict does not exceed the present circumscribed extent - a British attempt at militarily intimidating Argentina into surrendering the Malvinas, without having to engage in actual fighting\* - and even if the present situation does not grow over into a regular war by Britain against Argentina, revolutionaries must not waver in defending the interests, however misrepresented by a given regime, of an oppressed country in military conflict with imperialism.

6. This of course does not confer an anti-imperialist character on the bloody junta, which in fact appears to have deluded itself that it could exploit its friendly relationship with the US imperialists to prevent an effective counter-reaction by Britain to the Argentine seizure of the Malvinas. But even Galtieri's ambition to be US im-

perialism's hangman in Latin America, the questionable value of the Malvinas in and of themselves to either belligerent, and the possibility of a Galtieri sell out of more vital Argentine interests in exchange for the Malvinas, do not alter the duty of revolutionary Marxists to stand with an oppressed country in military with an imperialist power.

7. In order to unmask the essential demagogic and sham character of the Argentine junta's anti-imperialist gesture and in order to expose the utter incapacity of such a regime to wage an effective anti-imperialist struggle of any kind, Trotskyists should call and fight for unconditional defence of Argentina in the present conflict with Britain. They should call on the Argentine working class to wage the struggle against Britain with their own, proletarian means, linking this struggle with their struggle to overthrow Galtieri. Trotskyists should fight to develop the mass mobilisation against Britain into a mass revolutionary movement aimed at placing the prosecution of the anti-imperialist struggle completely in the hands of the anti-imperialist masses themselves - specifically under the leadership of the independent organisations of the working class. While participating in the common Argentine war effort, Trotskyists must offer no truce to the junta, whose reactionary, treacherous and fundamentally pro-imperialist character must be relentlessly exposed.

In this connection, Trotskyists should advance independent slogans, such as the expropriation of the British and other imperialist property in Argentina, workers' control of expropriated resources, full democratic and unlimited trade union rights, trade union control of military training, and independent workers militias to fight imperialist threats. The progressive raising of these and other slogans must be tailored to actual developments but the overall thrust of our campaign should be that only a revolutionary workers' government could achieve the sort of mobilisation of the Argentine masses and win the sort of support from the anti-imperialist masses of the rest of Latin America which could win a secure a genuine victory against imperialism.

8. The basic Trotskyist position on the British-Argentine conflict over the Malvinas is, then, revolutionary defeatism on the British side, revolutionary defencism on the Argentine side.

9. Any considerations regarding the current population of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands (the "Falkland Islanders") cannot alter this basis position since any claim to their democratic rights must be subordinate to the overriding necessity of defending an oppressed nation in military conflict with an against the imperialist nation. Trotskyists should oppose any abuse or oppression of these Britons. But Trotskyists must recognise that the "Falkland Islanders do not seek self-determination but rather the preservation of British imperialist rule over the islands, in reality as a colony. Since it is impossible to separate the exercise of any "right to self-determination" of this population from the preservation of British imperialist control over the Malvinas, Trotskyists must recognise that opposition the British imperialist role in this conflict in incompatible with support for such claims of any "right to self-determination" for the "Falkland Islanders, even setting aside the minuscule size of this community, the absurdity of it possessing the capacity for and independent capitalist - or collectivized—economy, and the impossibility of the survival of an Argentine- exclusionist British settlement on the Malvinas except under the colonial protection of Britain or some other imperialist power capable of preventing Argentine settlement, by open or implicit threat of arms.

\*The RWL statement, although dated 23 July 1982, is described as "a somewhat fuller statement of the RWL's position on the Malvinas conflict as of the April TILC conference".

## Appendix 4

### **Resolution on the Falklands War 28/8/82 Carolan, Collins, Fraser, Gardiner, Hill, Kendall, Kinnell, Parkinson, Wolf. (Matgamna led majority of WSL)**

1. A Marxist attitude to a war must start from an assessment of which classes are waging the war and for what objectives. On the basis of that assessment we determine our line not as supervisors of the historic process but as militant advocates of the class struggle. Where a war, even under bourgeois leadership, is about an issue like self-determination for an oppressed nation - an issue which is a necessary part of the liberation of the working class - the working class should support the war while maintaining complete independence and the fight to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

When wars under bourgeois leaderships are about no such progressive cause, class struggle politics demands a defeatist stance - i.e. denunciation of the war, continuation of the class struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie while clearly accepting that this will make defeat more likely in the war. Where a war between bourgeoisies has no progressive content on either side, we must fight for the defeat of both sides - i.e. against the war and for the defeat of both bourgeoisies by working class action. In all cases we fight for working class

fraternisation. We do not disrupt the international unity of the working class, setting one national section to slaughter another, casually or out of deference to the right of the bourgeoisie to rule as it likes. Where a war has a progressive content we fight for working class unity on the basis of support for the progressive demands of the progressive side.

As the 1920 Theses of the Comintern on the National and Colonial Question, a basic document of our movement, put it; "...the entire policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based primarily on bring together the proletariat and working class of all nations and countries for the common revolutionary overthrow of the landowners and the bourgeoisie. For only such united action will ensure victory over colonialism, without which it is impossible to abolish national oppression and inequality of rights".

2. Britain's war over the Falklands/Malvinas was designed to preserve a relic of empire and shore up the prestige of British imperialism. A defeatist stand toward Britain's was therefore the no. 1 campaigning priority for Marxists in Britain. Instead of assisting the Tories in their crisis by 'patriotic' support for the government the British labour movement should have used the crisis to hasten Thatcher's overthrow in the interests of the working class, and given all material and political support to the Argentinian workers in the struggle for democratic and trade union rights and for the establishment of a genuine anti-imperialist workers' government in Argentina. We repudiate any legitimacy of British territorial rights in the Falklands and any legitimacy in related British claims to resources in Antarctica.

3. But the pretext on which the Argentinian junta embarked upon the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas was equally contrived. In taking its action the juntas acted not against imperialism, but in a populist ploy designed to divert and unite the Argentinian masses behind the Generals' own repressive rule. In doing so the Argentinian dictators trampled over the rights of the Falkland inhabitants, who in themselves oppress and threaten no one and should have the right to decide their own future. Such action did nothing to build anti-imperialist consciousness in the Argentinian working class, but rather sought to generate chauvinism and 'national unity'. We did not support this action and called for the withdrawal of Argentineans troops. In its seizure of the Falklands/Malvinas, designed to boost its position at home and in the region, the Argentineans regime miscalculated about the British reaction and the US response to the British reaction. Galtieri's invasion did not liberate anyone from colonialism or imperialism. It did not lessen the burden of imperialist exploitation, or improve the conditions for the fight against it, for a single Argentineans worker. It embroiled the Argentineans people in a war in which they could not hope to win anything of significance, a disastrous war in a false and reactionary cause.

4. On both sides the war was reactionary. The job of Marxists in both Britain and Argentina was to oppose the war, to counterpose international working class unity, and to continue the class struggle for the overthrow of both the Tories and the military regime. 5. Support for the right of the Falkland Islanders - a distinct historic, ethnic, linguistic and geographic community 400 hundred miles from Argentina to determine their own future is axiomatic for Leninists in the given aconditions, where that community exploited no other community, threatened no other community and was not used as, and was not likely to be used as, a base for imperialist control of another community. The Falklanders' right to self-determination cannot be invalidated by a desire by them to adhere to the now-imperialist state that spawned the Falkland community. That desire to adhere to Britain could only invalidate their right to self-determination only if adherence had direct imperialist/colonialist consequence for Argentina or some other country, whose right to resist these consequences would (because of their size etc.) outweigh the rights of the islanders. Only then would the pro-imperialist views of the islanders lead to them playing an imperialist role. Nothing like that was actually involved. The agency for imperialist domination of Argentina is the Argentineans state not the islands or any base in the islands. To use a definition of the islanders as "pro-imperialist" against their right to self-determination is to introduce inappropriate political categories and criteria, different from those which properly apply. The Falkland Islanders are British. That is what determines their attitude, not any pro-imperialist views they may have. The WSL is not in favour of the subjugation of a population because it has such views or because of their origins. The ethnic tidying up of the globe is no part of the international socialist revolution. Support for the Falklands' rights does not necessarily mean any support for military action to enforce those rights. In the actual situation, with Britain an imperialist power, we reject and oppose the British military action. We look to the international working class, and especially the Argentineans labour movement, to secure the Falklanders' rights. Such a consistent democratic policy is the only basis for international working class unity, and especially for the unity of the British and Argentine working class (which has to be our central concern) in this dispute.

6. The WSL conducted itself as an internationalist and revolutionary proletarian organisation during the British/Argentine war. We raised a variant of the famous slogan of Liebknecht and Luxemburg: 'The enemy is at home' and called on the working class to actively hinder the British ruling class prosecution of the war by industrial action. We conducted internationalist working class propaganda against the socialist-chauvinist labour leaders, while attempting to maintain a dialogue with the pacific labour left (that is with those in the working class who listen to the Left leaders) on the question.

It is no necessary part of the proletarian internationalist opposition to the war of an imperialist government to side with their opponents. Our response to the fact that it was for the British ruling class a war for authority and prestige was our defeatism; positive support for Argentina, could, for communists, only be grounded in positive working class reasons for such support. Marxists reject the primitive rebels' approach that puts a plus everywhere that the bourgeoisie puts a minus. We must judge events from an independent working class viewpoint.

We side with our ruling class enemies in particular conflicts if the struggle serves our politics - e.g. in a national liberation struggle, even under the leadership of a Chiang Kai Shek. But in no way could the policy of the Argentineans proletariat be deduced as a mere negative imprint of the policy of the British bourgeoisie. The tendency justifies the pro-Argentineans policy with the view that "a victory [for Argentina] would quite likely mean the downfall of Thatcher... [And] the British have a far more important international role [than Argentina] as a primary carrier and protector of imperialism.

This means that the nature of the British regime is a question of immediate international importance..." (IB 7 p.16); conversely [Argentine] withdrawal... would result in another Tory government with a massive majority... it would be an event of world significance..." (tendency document p.8). The idea that Argentineans workers' policy should be decided by what is worse for the British bourgeoisie - that the British revolution has priority and the Argentineans revolution should be subordinate to it - is British nationalist and utterly to be rejected as a basis for determining proletarian politics in Argentina.

7. Argentina is far more developed than most non-imperialist countries; it is a fully bourgeois state and it possesses political independence. It also occupies a subordinate rank within the imperialist world economy. This subordination, however, in no way gives any progressive character to the Argentineans bourgeoisie. The Argentineans bourgeoisie is not a progressive force, but the major agency for imperialist domination of the Argentineans working class and an assistant for imperialist domination throughout Latin America. It has moreover its own predatory ambitions. For the Argentineans working class 'the main enemy is at home'. Quite apart from its foreign connections it is the class that directly exploits them. We reject as un-Marxist assessments of Argentina's situation such as this: "Argentina is economically, militarily and politically dominated by imperialism - not by its own national bourgeoisie but in particular by the US imperialists. The whole basis of the economy is subject to the international market over which Argentina has no influence, let alone control and dominance" (IB 7, p.2).

We reject the counterposing the Argentine bourgeoisie to imperialism, and the measuring of Argentina's situation by comparison with a situation where a country would escape the international market (which in a capitalist world it can never do). Every country is more or less dominated by the world economy. No country has control over it - now not even the US colossus which was supreme after World War 2. This situation cannot be changed by war between the weaker bourgeoisie and the stronger. No such wars, but the international revolution, can change it.

The communist answer to colonial, semi-colonial and military domination is national liberation struggle; as to the domination of the weaker by the strong in the world market and the pauperisation of particular regions, within capitalist nations, our answer is the proletarian revolution. We reject the notion of an anti-imperialist united front for Argentina ( a version of the block of classes central to Menshevism and Stalinism, motivated

on the grounds that the Argentineans bourgeoisie is an oppressed class in relation to imperialism.) We reject the notion that the Argentineans bourgeoisie can play any progressive role either within Argentina, where it is our mortal class enemy, or against imperialism, into which it is deeply integrated. 8. In the war over the (maybe strategically important) Falkland Islands there was no conflict over military bases or possible future military bases of a character to give socialists the option or the duty to favour one of the contestants. Argentina and Britain are in the same imperialist camp. Britain was literally within months of scrapping the naval apparatus that made the re-invasion of the Falklands possible. (But because of the internal crisis in Argentina the junta could not wait).

On the other hand, the Argentina junta had been negotiating with the USA, South Africa, and Britain to set up a South Atlantic Treaty organisation to police the area (as Argentina helped to police El Salvador by sending troops). The expert commentators are largely agreed that this would have led to US bases on the Falklands. That is, had Argentina got hold of the Falklands without falling out with US imperialism, it would have speeded up the work of replacing the decrepit and militarily insignificant British military presence of the dominant imperialist power. The Falklands are maybe strategically important; but neither side in the war would have taken them away from imperialism. Argentina is part of the imperialist system. Its war with Britain does not place it outside that system.

9. There is no sense in which the conflict has an economic anti-imperialist dimension. British property in Argentina, not to speak of the property of other imperialist powers, was left alone during the war. The Argentineans state did not even propose to take the Falkland Island Company from Coalite. Better Argentineans claims on Antarctica from the Falklands would most likely have led to US exploitation of the Antarctic, with Argentina as a conduit. This is the concrete meaning of the subordinate position of the Argentina vis-a-vis the US and imperialism. Conversely, one of the major reasons why Britain has been trying to give the Falklands to Argentina is that a stable political settlement is pre-condition for the viability of the big investments necessary for the capitalist exploitation of the areas resources. The exploitation would have to be joint exploitation, one set of terms or another. The war was not about whether the resources should belong to imperialism or not. The Argentineans bourgeoisie cannot be conterposed to imperialism. And imperialism cannot be identified solely with Britain (conversely, anti-imperialism cannot necessarily be identified with an anti-British stance). The British/Argentine war was a war within the network of imperialism and its clients. The Argentine regime went to war, not for anti-imperialist reasons, but to strengthen its political position at home. They did not wait to win the Falklands by negotiations because of their domestic crisis. And thus they aborted the process of reaching agreement with Britain.

10. The Argentine working class should never subordinate its own class struggle to estimates of the “international balance of forces” between different bourgeoisies. The view that “whatever the implications of that for the Argentineans or British proletariat, we have to base our position on the implications of the international struggle against imperialism first (IB 7, p.7) is anti-Marxist.

The assessment according to which British victory was a major blow for imperialism is incomplete. The British bourgeoisie certainly was strengthened by victory politically and in its prestige. But these gains may well prove shallow and temporary. (indeed, the continued class struggle has already proved them shallow and temporary), and the British bourgeoisie has gained nothing material - like new military strength, new spheres of influence, or new possessions. The Argentineans regime, on the other hand, has certainly been weakened by defeat. The result is a blow against imperialist and capitalist control in Latin America. Workers in each country can act as internationalists only by fighting their own bourgeoisies, not by acting as makeweights for international bloc politics. For Argentine socialists to support their rulers’ predatory war on the basis of the estimate that the British bourgeoisie’s predatory war was worse, would violate that principle.

11. We emphatically reject the notion that the socialist working class can orientate in world politics, and particularly in conflicts between politically independent capitalist states like Britain and Argentina, by constructing a view of the world in terms of two camps, modelled on the division of the world between the degenerated and deformed workers’ states and the capitalist states: ‘We have to determine our politics according to the basic class camps, not on conjunctural events... the class camp into which Argentina fits in a war against imperialism...’ (IB 7, p.4) Between the USSR and similar states, and the capitalist states, there is a basic historical class distinction, despite the savage anti-working class rule of the totalitarian elite. No such gap exists between capitalist states.

The bourgeois foreign policy of the rulers of Argentina, even when it is expressed in acts of war, can in sense change their class camp. Even should the bourgeoisie of such state be in alliance with a healthy workers state, the task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie would be the central task of the proletariat of the capitalist state - a task never to be subordinate to international diplomatic, military, or balance-of-forces considerations. This was a central teaching of the Communist International, and it was not finally repudiated even by the Stalinists until 1935. Thereafter the notion that bourgeois forces that allied with the USSR thereby crossed the historic class divide and thereby joined the camp of progress was the ideological basis of Stalinism to legitimise policies of class betrayal and popular frontism. We reject as un-Marxist, and brand as ‘international popular frontism’, the view that the Argentine bourgeoisie and their state became part of the ‘class camp’ of the working class because of their conflict with Britain or during their war with Britain for possession of the Falkland islands.

12. Support for chauvinist war could not be justified on the basis that it could be the first stage in the development towards militant anti-imperialist struggle. Nor could the war be defined as anti-imperialist by reading an assessment backward from the scenario of a hoped-for anti-imperialist development. The scenario lacks the first link: a real national liberation content to the war. A Marxist policy must be based on the realities of the actual war, not on hypothetical speculations or wishful thinking about hoped-for strategic outcomes. Argentine workers had no interest in the armed occupation of the Falklands against the wishes of the population; they should have pursued the class struggle regardless of their rulers' ability to maintain the occupation; and it was none of their concern to protect the Argentine bourgeoisie against the humiliation it would suffer from being unable to maintain the occupation. These points should have been the basis of the Marxist policy on Argentina. The tactical ways of expressing this position should of course be very flexible (following the methods according to which Trotskyists developed the 'proletarian military policy' as a tactical expression of the defeatist policy in World War 2). It would be the job of Marxists in Argentina to seek to develop the genuine anti-imperialist elements in the confused national reaction of Argentine workers, with demands such as arming the workers, expropriation of imperialist property, and seizure of factories. While making their own views on the war clear, they should sought to develop common class actions with workers who confusedly saw Argentina's war as 'anti-imperialist' but wanted to go further in anti-imperialism.

13. A change in our fundamental attitude to the war could only be justified in a change in the fundamental political content of the war - i.e. so that it was no longer a war restricted to the Falklands/Malvinas issue. If Britain's objectives had shifted so that the war had become fundamentally about an attempt by Britain to make Argentina a colony or a semi-colony, then Marxists should have sided with Argentina's national independence. But that did not happen. It was always very unlikely that it would happen. [This motion was LOST by two votes out of approximately 170 delegates against the motion below at the WSL Special Conference]

## Appendix 5

### **Resolution on the Falklands War 28/8/82 Carolan, Collins, Fraser, Gardiner, Hill, Kendall, Kinnell, Parkinson, Wolf. (Matgamna led majority of WSL)**

1. A Marxist attitude to a war must start from an assessment of which classes are waging the war and for what objectives. On the basis of that assessment we determine our line not as supervisors of the historic process but as militant advocates of the class struggle. Where a war, even under bourgeois leadership, is about an issue like self-determination for an oppressed nation - an issue which is a necessary part of the liberation of the working class - the working class should support the war while maintaining complete independence and the fight to overthrow the bourgeoisie. When wars under bourgeois leaderships are about no such progressive cause, class struggle politics demands a defeatist stance - i.e. denunciation of the war, continuation of the class struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie while clearly accepting that this will make defeat more likely in the war. Where a war between bourgeoisies has no progressive content on either side, we must fight for the defeat of both sides - i.e. against the war and for the defeat of both bourgeoisies by working class action. In all cases we fight for working class fraternisation. We do not disrupt the international unity of the working class, setting one national section to slaughter another, casually or out of deference to the right of the bourgeoisie to rule as it likes. Where a war has a progressive content we fight for working class unity on the basis of support for the progressive demands of the progressive side. As the 1920 Theses of the Comintern on the National and Colonial Question, a basic document of our movement, put it; "...the entire policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based primarily on bring together the proletariat and working class of all nations and countries for the common revolutionary overthrow of the landowners and the bourgeoisie. For only such united action will ensure victory over colonialism, without which it is impossible to abolish national oppression and inequality of rights".

2. Britain's war over the Falklands/Malvinas was designed to preserve a relic of empire and shore up the prestige of British imperialism. A defeatist stand toward Britain's was therefore the no. 1 campaigning priority for Marxists in Britain. Instead of assisting the Tories in their crisis by 'patriotic' support for the government the British labour movement should have used the crisis to hasten Thatcher's overthrow in the interests of the working class, and given all material and political support to the Argentineans workers in the struggle for democratic and trade union rights and for the establishment of a genuine anti-imperialist workers' government in Argentina. We repudiate any legitimacy of British territorial rights in the Falklands and any legitimacy in related British claims to resources in Antarctica.

3. But the pretext on which the Argentineans junta embarked upon the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas was equally contrived. In taking its action the juntas acted not against imperialism, but in a populist ploy designed to divert and unite the Argentineans masses behind the Generals' own repressive rule. In doing so the Argentineans dictators trampled over the rights of the Falkland inhabitants, who in themselves oppress and threaten no one and should have the right to decide their own future. Such action did nothing to build anti-imperialist consciousness in the Argentineans working class, but rather sought to generate chauvinism and 'national unity'. We did not support this action and called for the withdrawal of Argentineans troops. In its seizure of the Falklands/Malvinas, designed to boost its position at home and in the region, the Argentineans regime miscalculated about the British reaction and the US response to the British reaction. Galtieri's invasion did not liberate anyone from colonialism or imperialism. It did not lessen the burden of imperialist exploitation, or improve the conditions for the fight against it, for a single Argentineans worker. It embroiled the Argentineans people in a war in which they could not hope to win anything of significance, a disastrous war in a false and reactionary cause.

4. On both sides the war was reactionary. The job of Marxists in both Britain and Argentina was to oppose the war, to counterpose international working class unity, and to continue the class struggle for the overthrow of both the Tories and the military regime.

5. Support for the right of the Falkland Islanders - a distinct historic, ethnic, linguistic and geographic community 400 hundred miles from Argentina to determine their own future is axiomatic for Leninists in the given conditions, where that community exploited no other community, threatened no other community and was not used as, and was not likely to be used as, a base for imperialist control of another community. The Falklanders' right to self-determination cannot be invalidated by a desire by them to adhere to the now-imperialist state that spawned the Falkland community. That desire to adhere to Britain could only invalidate their right to self-determination only if adherence had direct imperialist/colonialist consequence for Argentina or some other country, whose right to resist these consequences would (because of their size etc.) outweigh the rights of the islanders. Only then would the pro-imperialist views of the islanders lead to them playing an imperialist role. Nothing like that was actually involved. The agency for imperialist domination of Argentina is the Argentineans state not the islands or any base in the islands. To use a definition of the islanders as "pro-imperialist" against their right to self-determination is to introduce inappropriate political categories and criteria, different from those which properly apply. The Falkland Islanders are British. That is what determines their attitude, not any pro-imperialist views they may have. The WSL is not in favour of the subjugation of a population because it has such views or because of their origins. The ethnic tidying up of the globe is no part of the international socialist revolution.

Support for the Falklands' rights does not necessarily mean any support for military action to enforce those rights. In the actual situation, with Britain an imperialist power, we reject and oppose the British military action. We look to the international working class, and especially the Argentineans labour movement, to secure the Falklanders' rights. Such a consistent democratic policy is the only basis for international working class unity, and especially for the unity of the British and Argentine working class (which has to be our central concern) in this dispute. 6. The WSL conducted itself as an internationalist and revolutionary proletarian organisation during the British/Argentine war. We raised a variant of the famous slogan of Liebknecht and Luxemburg: 'The enemy is at home' and called on the working class to actively hinder the British ruling class prosecution of the war by industrial action. We conducted internationalist working class propaganda against the socialist-chauvinist labour leaders, while attempting to maintain a dialogue with the pacific labour left (that is with those in the working class who listen to the Left leaders) on the question. It is no necessary part of the proletarian internationalist opposition to the war of an imperialist government to side with their opponents. Our response to the fact that it was for the British ruling class a war for authority and prestige was our defeatism; positive support for Argentina, could, for communists, only be grounded in positive working class reasons for such support.

Marxists reject the primitive rebels' approach that puts a plus everywhere that the bourgeoisie puts a minus. We must judge events from an independent working class viewpoint. We side with our ruling class enemies in particular conflicts if the struggle serves our politics - e.g. in a national liberation struggle, even under the leadership of a Chiang Kai Shek. But in no way could the policy of the Argentineans proletariat be deduced as a mere negative imprint of the policy of the British bourgeoisie. The tendency justifies the pro-Argentineans policy with the view that "a victory [for Argentina] would quite likely mean the downfall of Thatcher... [And] the British have a far more important international role [than Argentina] as a primary carrier and protector of im-

perialism. This means that the nature of the British regime is a question of immediate international importance..." (IB 7 p.16); conversely [Argentine] withdrawal... would result in another Tory government with a massive majority... it would be an event of world significance..." (tendency document p.8). The idea that Argentineans workers' policy should be decided by what is worse for the British bourgeoisie - that the British revolution has priority and the Argentineans revolution should be subordinate to it - is British nationalist and utterly to be rejected as a basis for determining proletarian politics in Argentina.

7. Argentina is far more developed than most non-imperialist countries; it is a fully bourgeois state and it possesses political independence. It also occupies a subordinate rank within the imperialist world economy. This subordination, however, in no way gives any progressive character to the Argentineans bourgeoisie. The Argentineans bourgeoisie is not a progressive force, but the major agency for imperialist domination of the Argentineans working class and an assistant for imperialist domination throughout Latin America. It has moreover its own predatory ambitions. For the Argentineans working class 'the main enemy is at home'. Quite apart from its foreign connections it is the class that directly exploits them. We reject as un-Marxist assessments of Argentina's situation such as this: "Argentina is economically, militarily and politically dominated by imperialism - not by its own national bourgeoisie but in particular by the US imperialists. The whole basis of the economy is subject to the international market over which Argentina has no influence, let alone control and dominance" (IB 7, p.2).

We reject the counterposing the Argentine bourgeoisie to imperialism, and the measuring of Argentina's situation by comparison with a situation where a country would escape the international market (which in a capitalist world it can never do). Every country is more or less dominated by the world economy. No country has control over it - now not even the US colossus which was supreme after World War 2. This situation cannot be changed by war between the weaker bourgeoisie and the stronger. No such wars, but the international revolution, can change it.

The communist answer to colonial, semi-colonial and military domination is national liberation struggle; as to the domination of the weaker by the strong in the world market and the pauperisation of particular regions, within capitalist nations, our answer is the proletarian revolution. We reject the notion of an anti-imperialist united front for Argentina ( a version of the block of classes central to Menshevism and Stalinism, motivated on the grounds that the Argentinean bourgeoisie is an oppressed class in relation to imperialism.) We reject the notion that the Argentineans bourgeoisie can play any progressive role either within Argentina, where it is our mortal class enemy, or against imperialism, into which it is deeply integrated.

8. In the war over the (maybe strategically important) Falkland Islands there was no conflict over military bases or possible future military bases of a character to give socialists the option or the duty to favour one of the contestants. Argentina and Britain are in the same imperialist camp. Britain was literally within months of scrapping the naval apparatus that made the re-invasion of the Falklands possible. (But because of the internal crisis in Argentina the junta could not wait).

On the other hand, the Argentina junta had been negotiating with the USA, South Africa, and Britain to set up a South Atlantic Treaty organisation to police the area (as Argentina helped to police El Salvador by sending troops). The expert commentators are largely agreed that this would have led to US bases on the Falklands. That is, had Argentina got hold of the Falklands without falling out with US imperialism, it would have speeded up the work of replacing the decrepit and militarily insignificant British military presence of the dominant imperialist power. The Falklands are maybe strategically important; but neither side in the war would have taken them away from imperialism. Argentina is part of the imperialist system. Its war with Britain does not place it outside that system.

9. There is no sense in which the conflict has an economic anti-imperialist dimension. British property in Argentina, not to speak of the property of other imperialist powers, was left alone during the war. The Argentineans state did not even propose to take the Falkland Island Company from Coalite. Better Argentineans claims on Antarctica from the Falklands would most likely have led to US exploitation of the Antarctic, with Argentina as a conduit. This is the concrete meaning of the subordinate position of the Argentina vis-a-vis the US and imperialism. Conversely, one of the major reasons why Britain has been trying to give the Falklands to Argentina is that a stable political settlement is pre-condition for the viability of the big investments necessary for the capitalist exploitation of the areas resources.

The exploitation would have to be joint exploitation, one set of terms or another. The war was not about whether the resources should belong to imperialism or not. The Argentineans bourgeoisie cannot be conter-

posed to imperialism. And imperialism cannot be identified solely with Britain (conversely, anti-imperialism cannot necessarily be identified with an anti-British stance). The British/Argentine war was a war within the network of imperialism and its clients.

The Argentine regime went to war, not for anti-imperialist reasons, but to strengthen its political position at home. They did not wait to win the Falklands by negotiations because of their domestic crisis. And thus they aborted the process of reaching agreement with Britain. 10. The Argentine working class should never subordinate its own class struggle to estimates of the “international balance of forces’ between different bourgeoisies. The view that “whatever the implications of that for the Argentineans or British proletariat, we have to base our position on the implications of the international struggle against imperialism first (IB 7, p.7) is anti-Marxist.

The assessment according to which British victory was a major blow for imperialism is incomplete. The British bourgeoisie certainly was strengthened by victory politically and in its prestige. But these gains may well prove shallow and temporary. (indeed, the continued class struggle has already proved them shallow and temporary), and the British bourgeoisie has gained nothing material - like new military strength, new spheres of influence, or new possessions.

The Argentineans regime, on the other hand, has certainly been weakened by defeat. The result is a blow against imperialist and capitalist control in Latin America. Workers in each country can act as internationalists only by fighting their own bourgeoisies, not by acting as makeweights for international bloc politics. For Argentine socialists to support their rulers’ predatory war on the basis of the estimate that the British bourgeoisie’s predatory war was worse, would violate that principle.

11. We emphatically reject the notion that the socialist working class can orientate in world politics, and particularly in conflicts between politically independent capitalist states like Britain and Argentina, by constructing a view of the world in terms of two camps, modelled on the division of the world between the degenerated and deformed workers’ states and the capitalist states: ‘We have to determine our politics according to the basic class camps, not on conjunctural events... the class camp into which Argentina fits in a war against imperialism...’ (IB 7, p.4) Between the USSR and similar states, and the capitalist states, there is a basic historical class distinction, despite the savage anti-working class rule of the totalitarian elite. No such gap exists between capitalist states. The bourgeois foreign policy of the rulers of Argentina, even when it is expressed in acts of war, can in sense change their class camp. Even should the bourgeoisie of such state be in alliance with a healthy workers state, the task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie would be the central task of the proletariat of the capitalist state - a task never to be subordinate to international diplomatic, military, or balance-of-forces considerations. This was a central teaching of the Communist International, and it was not finally repudiated even by the Stalinists until 1935. Thereafter the notion that bourgeois forces that allied with the USSR thereby crossed the historic class divide and thereby joined the camp of progress was the ideological basis of Stalinism to legitimise policies of class betrayal and popular frontism. We reject as un-Marxist, and brand as ‘international popular frontism’, the view that the Argentine bourgeoisie and their state became part of the ‘class camp’ of the working class because of their conflict with Britain or during their war with Britain for possession of the Falkland Islands.

12. Support for chauvinist war could not be justified on the basis that it could be the first stage in the development towards militant anti-imperialist struggle. Nor could the war be defined as anti-imperialist by reading an assessment backward from the scenario of a hoped-for anti-imperialist development. The scenario lacks the first link: a real national liberation content to the war. A Marxist policy must be based on the realities of the actual war, not on hypothetical speculations or wishful thinking about hoped-for strategic outcomes. Argentine workers had no interest in the armed occupation of the Falklands against the wishes of the population; they should have pursued the class struggle regardless of their rulers’ ability to maintain the occupation; and it was none of their concern to protect the Argentine bourgeoisie against the humiliation it would suffer from being unable to maintain the occupation. These points should have been the basis of the Marxist policy on Argentina. The tactical ways of expressing this position should of course be very flexible (following the methods according to which Trotskyists developed the ‘proletarian military policy’ as a tactical expression of the defeatist policy in World War 2). It would be the job of Marxists in Argentina to seek to develop the genuine anti-imperialist elements in the confused national reaction of Argentine workers, with demands such as arming the workers, expropriation of imperialist property, and seizure of factories. While making their own views on the war clear, they should sought to develop common class actions with workers who confusedly saw Argentina’s war as ‘anti-imperialist’ but wanted to go further in anti-imperialism.

13. A change in our fundamental attitude to the war could only be justified in a change in the fundamental political content of the war - i.e. so that it was no longer a war restricted to the Falklands/Malvinas issue. If Britain's objectives had shifted so that the war had become fundamentally about an attempt by Britain to make Argentina a colony or a semi-colony, then Marxists should have sided with Argentina's national independence. But that did not happen. It was always very unlikely that it would happen. [This motion was LOST by two votes out of approximately 170 delegates against the motion below at the WSL Special Conference]

## Appendix 6

### TILC Resolution on the Falkland Islands 12/4/82

1. The Falkland Islands are a relic of British imperialism to the sovereignty of which the British ruling class has no legitimate claim, and which in the recent past it has even tried to relinquish to Argentina. Since that point it has become clear that the islands themselves and the adjacent area of Antarctica seem certain to be rich in oil and minerals, offering a substantial material incentive for British imperialist to maintain their territorial claims - or at least to exchange them only for a guaranteed share of the possible mineral pickings.

2. We repudiate any legitimacy of British territorial claims in the Falklands or any legitimacy in related British claims to resources in Antarctica.

3. We call for the immediate recall of the British battle fleet, and campaign against any military action or war over the Falklands, which can only be designed to preserve a relic of empire and shore up the prestige of British imperialism. Any such war could only have reactionary consequences in the form of loss of life and a chauvinistic fervour in both the Argentineans and British working classes.

4. But the pretext on which the Argentine junta has embarked on the war is equally contrived. In taking its action the junta has acted not against imperialism, but in a populist ploy designed to divert and unite the Argentine masses behind the Generals' own repressive rule.

5. In doing so the Argentine dictators have trampled upon the rights of the Falkland inhabitants, who in themselves oppress and threaten no one and should have the right to decide their own future. Such action does nothing to build anti-imperialist consciousness in the Argentine working class, but rather seeks to generate chauvinism and 'national unity'. We do not support this action and call for the withdrawal of Argentine troops.

6. We condemn the jingoism of most British Labour leaders and call for labour movement action against the war through public agitation and through blacking military supplies.

7. While recognising that the present conflict is restricted to the Falkland issue, in the event of a full-scale war between Britain and Argentina we would be unequivocally for the defence of Argentina. Despite the leftist rhetoric of the labour leaders about the 'fascist' nature of the junta - with whom they traded happily while in government - such a war would not be a war for democracy but a war for imperialist authority.

8. In any event we call on the British and international working class to render all possible assistance to the Argentine workers in their struggle against the Galtieri dictatorship, for the establishment of a genuine anti-imperialist workers' government in Argentina. Instead of assisting the Tories in their crisis by 'patriotic' support for the government, the British labour movement should be using the crisis to hasten Thatcher's overthrow in the interests of the working class, and giving all material and political support to the Argentine workers in the fight for democratic and trade union rights. For WSL, TAF. Against LOR, RWL. Abstained: Turkish group. (The Australian comrades were unable to attend the TILC meeting).