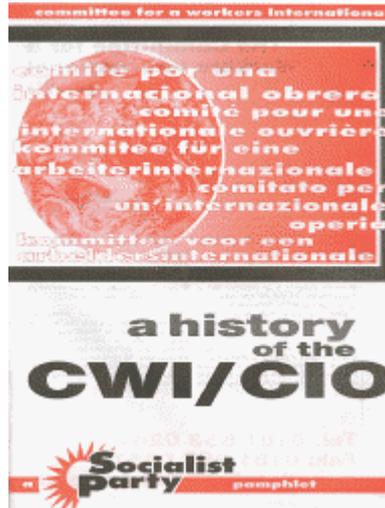


History of the CWI



Introduction

The developing world economic crisis illustrates how the international market dominates the globe. This basic idea of socialism is the reason why all genuine socialist organisations and parties have seen themselves as integral parts of an international movement. While a start to creating a new society can be made in an individual country once its working people have overthrown capitalism, building a fully socialist society is only possible once the world economy has been freed from capitalism's grip.

This is why from the 1840s onwards there have been different attempts to create an international workers' movement. Solidarity is an important part of internationalism, but not the only reason that socialists strive to build an international organisation. A workers' international should also be a political weapon in the fight against imperialism and for a socialist world.

At different times strong international workers' organisations were created but, for different reasons, collapsed. The Labour Party is part of the Socialist International, but this really ceased to be socialist when the majority of its leaders each supported their "own"

ruling classes in the First World War. The Communist International, created in the wave of enthusiasm after the 1917 Russian revolution, decayed and then disappeared as Stalin's clique crushed democratic rights and the idea of an international struggle.

The Socialist Party is the British section of the Committee for a Workers International. The CWI, founded in 1974, defends the tradition of Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism and to create a "World Party of Socialist Revolution", a Fourth International.

Today the CWI has members and supporters working in over 35 countries on every continent.

The CWI's programme and policies are democratically decided at a World Congress, made up of delegates from its national sections. This Congress elects an International Executive Committee (IEC) which decides policies in between the Congresses. The day-to-day work of the CWI is run by the International Secretariat (IS), elected by the IEC and based at the CWI's Centre, which currently is in London.

History of the CWI

The History of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI)

Below is a general account of the development of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) over the last 24 years. It is based on a speech made by Peter Taaffe at a European School of the CWI in July 1997. Valuable comments were also made during the discussion by a number of comrades, some with a long history within the CWI. In particular, Arne

Johansson from Sweden, Angela Bankert from Germany, Francois Bliki from Belgium and many others all made important additional points on the history of the CWI. As far as is possible in a short account, their comments have been incorporated into the text. This is by no means a full account of the work of the CWI over almost two and a half decades. A proper history is eagerly awaited. It is hoped a comrade will be able to undertake this task in the near future.

Foundation - 1974

The CWI was founded at a meeting of 46 comrades from 12 countries in April 1974. This was not the beginning of international work by supporters of the British Militant (now Socialist Party), who were the main initiators for the founding of the CWI. Many efforts were undertaken in the previous ten years to extend the influence of the ideas of the British Militant internationally. Even without a single international contact, Militant always proceeded from an international standpoint. An international is, first of all, ideas, a programme and a perspective. The general ideas are the linchpin of any organisation. From this alone flows the type of organisation that is required. Therefore, the history of the CWI, as with the British Militant, is a history of the ideas of this body, in contrast to the ideas advanced by other rival Marxist organisations.

The need for an international organisation flows from the very development of capitalism itself. The great historical merit of capitalism is that it developed the productive forces, of which the working class is the most important, and bound individual nations together through the world market. Internationalism, as Marx pointed out,

flowed from the very situation created by capitalism, i.e. the creation of the world market and the world working class. This idea is even more important today in the period of globalisation. The linking together of companies, continents and different national economies on a world scale has been taken to an extent never even imagined by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

First International

The first attempt to set up an international was, of course, undertaken by Marx and Engels with the founding of the First International. Marx attempted to bring together in one international organisation the most advanced sections of the working class: French radicals, British trade unionists, and even the Russian anarchists. Great work was undertaken by the First International, culminating in the heroic Paris Commune. Engels pointed out that the International was "intellectually" responsible for the Commune although it had not "lifted a finger" to create it.

This first great attempt of the working class to establish their own state made the bourgeois tremble. They drowned the Commune in blood and conducted a witch-hunt against those who they held

History of the CWI

responsible, above all the leaders and adherents to the First International. But the defeat of the Paris Commune also coincided with an upturn in capitalism and a serious crisis within the First International especially because of the role of the anarchists, led by Bakunin. Marx and Engels led a successful struggle against the ideas of anarchism but, alongside the disruptive activities of the anarchists, the upswing of world capitalism created reformist illusions in those like the British trade union leaders, which led to splits and divisions within the First International. Marx and Engels then drew the conclusion that the First International had done its job, had established the idea of internationalism and of an International in the consciousness of the working class. But they also concluded that, having exhausted this historical mission, it should be wound up after moving its offices to New York.

Second and Third Internationals

The period which followed saw the creation of mass parties of the working class. These parties were mostly influenced by the ideas of Marx and Engels. This process culminated in the foundation of the Second International in 1889. This organisation developed in a generally progressive phase of capitalism. Tens of thousands of working-class people were mobilised by these parties, attracted to the ideas of socialism and given a basic class education. But because of the objective conditions - the steady progress of capitalism in developing the productive forces - this led the leaders of the parties who adhered to the Second International to collaborate with the capitalists, seeking compromises, which became a way of life. In effect, a stratum rose above the working class, with catastrophic consequences, once capitalism's progressive phase had exhausted itself. This was clearly shown

in the onset of the first world war. The overwhelming majority of the leaders of the parties of the Second International supported their own bourgeois in the bloody slaughter of the war.

The adherents to genuine internationalism were reduced to a handful. Some who may feel that the genuine internationalists today have been enormously weakened by the collapse of Stalinism and the ideological offensive of the bourgeoisie, should ponder the situation of Lenin, Trotsky, Connolly, MacLean, Liebknecht, Luxemburg and other genuine Marxists, in the first world war. At the Zimmerwald conference, which gathered together those who were opposed to the first world war, the old joke went that the delegates could have fitted into two stagecoaches! Yet two years later the Russian revolution exploded, and within nine months of this, the Bolsheviks were in power and the first genuine workers' state had been established. This set in train the ten days that shook the world.

Out of the Russian revolution came the creation, in 1919, of the Third International. If anyone has any doubts of the effects of the Russian revolution, read John Dos Passos's USA. He gives many headlines from the US press about the Russian revolution. Not just the yellow press, whose editors dipped their pens in mad-dog saliva, but also the so-called "responsible and informed" journals of capitalism, like the New York Times, which carried headlines such as, "Lenin Assassinate Trotsky", or "Trotsky Kills Lenin". Even more lurid was the edition which claimed, "Trotsky Kills Lenin in Drunken Brawl". The Hungarian workers attempted to follow their Russian brothers and sisters, as did the German and Italian workers. In fact, the whole of the European working class was striving in this direction. It is not

History of the CWI

possible to go into detail on the causes of the Third International's degeneration. Trotsky traces this out in detail. The main causes were the isolation of the Russian revolution and the development of a privileged strata which usurped political power. The defeat of the German revolution and the later betrayal of the German working class with the coming to power of Hitler consolidated the political counter-revolution carried out by the Stalinist elite.

Fourth International

The political collapse of the Third International led Trotsky to pose the need for a new Fourth International. But the founding conference did not take place until 1938. This was no accident. This step was based upon the perspective developed by Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement of a new world war. As a consequence, Trotsky envisaged a mighty revolutionary wave which would sweep across western Europe. He was absolutely right in this, as the revolutionary events of 1944-47 demonstrated. This began with the Italian revolution of 1943-44 and was followed by the revolutionary events in France and other convulsions throughout Europe. But Trotsky could not have anticipated that Stalinism would come out of the war strengthened and that imperialism would be greatly weakened. As part of this process the Communist parties, which had participated and often led the struggle against Hitler, Mussolini and fascism, increased their mass support. Social democracy was also strengthened. The very power which had been vested in these organisations by an aroused working class allowed their leaders to save capitalism at this crucial historical juncture. Capitalist counter-revolution was carried through, not in an outright military or fascist form, but mainly by "democratic" means. Social democracy

and Stalinism, and the mass parties which based themselves on these ideas, saved capitalism in Western Europe in this period and, in effect, laid the political preconditions for the beginning of the upswing of world capitalism in the post-1945 situation.

After Trotsky

As with all Trotskyists, we trace our roots back to Trotsky himself. We in Britain, however, came from the Workers International League (WIL), set up in 1937, and the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), formed in 1944. We believe that the analysis of this party and its leaders, like Ted Grant, Jock Haston and others, was more accurate than the perspectives of others. They anticipated the development of deformed workers' states in Eastern Europe and China, in particular. The leadership of the "Fourth International", Ernest Mandel, Michael Raptis (Pablo), Pierre Frank and others, believed that this phenomenon - the creation of deformed workers' states - was an impossibility. Faced with reality, however, they did a somersault. Then they went to the other extreme and Tito, in Yugoslavia, became an "unconscious Trotskyist" as did Mao Zedong.

Of course, the leaders of the RCP made mistakes. There is no such a thing as an infallible leadership. Ted Grant, for instance, originally characterised the regimes in Eastern Europe, such as Poland or Czechoslovakia, as "state capitalist". But he checked himself, re-examined the works of the great teachers, such as Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, and came out with a correct evaluation of the situation of these states. Tony Cliff, on the other hand, maintained, and still maintains, the doctrine of state capitalism.

The leaders of the RCP also made the mistake, in our opinion, of entering the

History of the CWI

Labour Party in 1949-50. The majority, led by Grant and Haston, correctly argued that the conditions were not there for successful entry into the Labour Party. The Labour government of 1945 was actually carrying out reforms, the creation of the welfare state, etc, and there was the beginnings of the world economic upswing. It would have been more correct to have remained as an independent party with the majority of the efforts of the Trotskyists, at that stage, directed towards industry. But the capitulation of Jock Haston led to the disintegration of the majority and, in effect, the capitulation of Ted Grant to the wrong policy of Gerry Healy for entry into the Labour Party. However, because of the beginning of the post war boom, even a powerful Marxist organisation would have been undermined. The objective situation in this period and for the foreseeable future, was favourable both for reformism and Stalinism.

USFI Congress 1965

My generation entered the scene at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s. I joined our organisation in 1960. We had a base amongst workers in Liverpool and there was also a base amongst a very promising layer of students who joined our organisation at Sussex University. We were, at this stage, part of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI). We had been forced into a very unprincipled fusion with Mandel's organisation in Britain, the Internationalist Group, later the International Marxist Group (IMG), in mid-1964. The old, rather self-mocking, slogan of the Trotskyists at that time was, "unhappy with fusions, happy with splits". And sure enough within six months - towards the end of 1964 - because the amalgamation had taken place on an unprincipled basis, there was a split. In order to clarify the situation of a split organisation with two

distinct groupings, Ted Grant and myself attended the Congress of the USFI in 1965. Our arguments for continuing to be recognised as the only official British section of USFI were rejected. This decision was in the tradition, unfortunately, of the leaders of this organisation who preferred pliant followers able to carry out their line, rather than genuine collaborators, even with serious political differences. Our tradition has always been to try and argue out differences politically. The tone for the USFI was set by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the United States. James Cannon was an able workers' leader but possessed certain Zinovievist, that is manoeuvrist, traits. An honest approach towards the different sections of the USFI was foreign to this leadership.

The Congress of the USFI took place in the Taunus Mountains, in Germany, in November/December 1965. We submitted alternative documents and amendments to those of the leadership. We had differences on the character of modern capitalism and economic perspectives. We maintained, I believe correctly, that Mandel's ideas were neo-Keynesian in content. We also differed with them on perspectives for the Common Market, as the European Union was called at that stage. The USFI leadership clearly thought that European capitalism was at the point of "take-off", that capitalism would be able to unify Europe. We also differed with them on the analysis of the colonial and semi-colonial world. We were in support of the national liberation struggle, even under bourgeois leadership, but without in any way giving a shadow of political support to the leadership of these movements. The US SWP, which was then part of the USFI leadership, believed that Castro was more or less carrying out the tasks of genuine Trotskyism at that stage. There was no need, according to this

History of the CWI

organisation, for a political revolution in Cuba, i.e. the creation of soviets, the election of officials, the right of recall, etc. On the other hand, in the course of the conference deliberations we managed to extract from the leadership a difference between Mandel, on the one side, and the US SWP, on the other, in relation to China and Mao Zedong. When we questioned Mandel about a formula in their document about the need for an "anti-bureaucratic movement" in China, he admitted that the US SWP believed that a political revolution was necessary but that Mandel, Maitan and Frank believed that it was not. In general, however, despite the fact that our documents were the only real opposition at the congress, our ideas were not addressed and hardly referred to.

Refuting our arguments, Mandel & Co. recognised two sympathising groups of the USFI in Britain, ourselves and the IMG. This was completely unprecedented in the history of the Trotskyist movement. While there are examples of an official section and sympathetic groups being accepted, there was no precedent for an official section to be de-recognised or put on a par with a "sympathising" group. In our book this was a form of expulsion, moreover, one undertaken in an underhand and dishonest fashion. We decided that the time had arrived when we must turn our backs on this organisation and the squabbling sects who described themselves as "Trotskyist".

Out of the USFI

We tried to follow the advice of Marx and Engels to their followers in Germany in the 1870s. Writing to Babel, one of the leaders of what later became the mass Social Democratic Party of Germany, Engels commented, in 1873: "It is easy to pay too much

attention to one's rival and to get into the habit of always thinking about him first. But both the General Association of German Workers and the Social Democratic Workers Party together still only form a very small minority of the German working class. Our view, which we have found confirmed by long practice, is that the correct tactics and propaganda is not to draw away a few individuals and members here and there from one's opponent, but to work on the great mass which still remains apathetic. The primitive force of a single individual who we ourselves attracted from the crude mass is more than ten Lassallian renegades, who always bring the seeds of their false tendencies into the party with them." (The Lassallians were the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle who founded the General Association of German Workers in 1863.)

Marx commented earlier, in 1868: "The sects see the justification for its existence and its 'point of honour' - not in what it has in common [emphasised by Marx] with the class movement but in the particular shibboleth which distinguishes it from it."

We decided to face up in Britain, Germany, Ireland, Sweden and elsewhere to the task of reaching those workers, particularly young workers, who had an interest in left politics and could be won to a Marxist and Trotskyist position. There were many very good comrades in the small Trotskyist groups, many who were raw revolutionary material, but the opportunities of transforming them into rounded-out Marxists were squandered by the mistakes of the leadership of these groups.

Guerrillism and the USFI

We had fundamental differences with the USFI's approach on the role of

History of the CWI

students in the revolution, and particularly on guerrillaism. Their position on guerrillaism resulted in the destruction of many potentially fine revolutionary fighters. It is not a question of ex post facto criticisms but, at the time when the USFI was engaged in sectarian adventures in Latin America and elsewhere, we polemicised against them. In January 1972, for instance, when it was revealed that there was a split between the mainly European sections of the USFI and the followers of the US SWP, we utilised the opportunity in internal material to explain our position to our comrades and to theoretically inoculate them against the ideas of Mandel and others.

The main proponent of guerrillaism, at least publicly, was Livio Maitan. We will give just a few quotes from a document, written in 1972, of our criticisms of his position:

"Of lesser importance but still necessary is the arming of ourselves against the ideas of the different sects. The Bulletin has already carried criticisms of different tendencies in this country. This short piece is to familiarise the comrades with the present evolution of the United Secretariat [USFI], the organisation which we were expelled from in 1965. Internal documents of [the USFI] have come into our possession which reveal a split between the mainly European sections of the USFI and the followers of the American SWP. The issue around which both tendencies have polarised is that of guerrilla war (but it doesn't stop there) and the attitude which their organisation has taken towards it. This is of particular interest to our tendency as it was one of the questions which we attempted to raise at their 1965 World Conference and which was dealt with at length in our document of the Colonial Revolution presented to that Congress and rejected without discussion. (See

our document on the Colonial Revolution and the Report of the Congress):

"Maitan gives a number of quotes from the great Marxist teachers. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky are transformed in Maitan's hands from the masters of scientific socialism into guerrilla romantics who anticipated Guevara, Debray and their ilk as proponents of the idea of peasant based guerrilla operations. Thus, in a reply to earlier SWP criticism, Maitan has torn out of context extracts from Engels, Marx and Lenin in order to demonstrate the validity of guerrilla war! He quotes, for example, from Engels's Introduction to Marx's Class Struggle in France, which refers to insurrection as an "art". Engels was dealing with the problems of a proletarian uprising in the cities! Where the great teachers of Marxism have supported guerrilla warfare, it has only been as an auxiliary to the movement of the working class in the cities. Maitan's attempt to utilise articles by Lenin on guerrilla war in 1906 are a complete distortion. He makes Lenin appear more as a theoretician of the Social Revolutionaries, in looking towards guerrilla war and the peasant movement as the most important factor in the situation at that time, than of the Bolsheviks. In reality, the Bolshevik Party had fought a relentless theoretical battle against precisely these ideas, insisting on the prime role of the industrial proletariat, while giving every support to the peasant movements in the countryside and attempting to bring it under the influence of the proletariat.

"Trotsky elaborated this idea in his work on the Permanent Revolution and elaborated in numerous articles on the incapacity of the peasantry, because of its social position, its lack of cohesiveness, etc, to plan any independent role in the Revolution;

History of the CWI

either it supports the proletariat, as in the Russian Revolution, or the bourgeoisie.

"Lenin did support guerrilla war in 1906, as an auxiliary when he considered the Revolution was on the upswing. Later, when it was obvious that an ebb had set in, Lenin opposed the continuation of guerrilla war, as he did the faction of Boycottists amongst the Bolsheviks who opposed any participation in the Tsarist Duma and the possibility of even limited legal work. He would have condemned as a slander those who, because of these articles, would have accused him of propounding the theory of guerrilla war as outlined by Maitan.

"The position is even worse in the case of Trotsky: "On the question more specifically of rural guerrilla warfare, Trotsky grasped the importance of armed peasant detachments in the Second Chinese Revolution." (USFI International Information Bulletin, January 1968, page 13). The impression is given that Trotsky greeted the peasant guerrilla war in China enthusiastically and uncritically. In reality, as the following extracts from Trotsky will show, he warned that because of the predominantly peasant social basis of the Chinese "Red" Army, it could come into collision with the proletariat if it defeated Chiang Kai-shek and entered the cities:

"It is one thing when the Communist Party, firmly resting upon the flower of the urban proletariat, strives through the workers to lead the peasant war. It is an altogether different thing when a few thousand or even tens of thousands of revolutionists assume the leadership of the peasant war and are in reality Communists or take the name without having serious support from the proletariat. This is precisely the situation in China. This acts to augment

in the extreme, the danger of conflicts between the workers and the armed peasants... Isn't it possible that things may turn out so that all this capital will be directed at a certain moment against the workers?... The peasantry, even when armed, is incapable of conducting an independent policy." (Peasant War in China, September 1932)

"As we know, the "Red" Army did shoot down those workers who rose in support of it in the cities. Because of the impasse of Chinese society, the Chinese Stalinists were able to use the peasant army to manoeuvre between the classes and construct a state in the image of Moscow. (See Colonial Revolution document)

"And as if it were written for today, Trotsky answered the "guerrillaist" arguments... when he remarked in passing: "The Russian Narodniks ("Populists") used to accuse the Russian Marxists of "ignoring" the peasantry, of not carrying out work in the villages, etc. To this the Marxists replied: "We will arouse and organise the advanced workers and through the workers we shall arouse the peasants." Such in general, is the only conceivable road for the proletarian party."

"Not once are these fundamental principles of Marxism posed, i.e. of the social role of the working class, organised in large scale industry, being the only class capable of developing the necessary cohesion and consciousness to carry through the tasks of socialist revolution.

"On the contrary, having bent to the mood of the rural guerrillaism reflected within their own ranks, it is only one step removed from hailing the latest outbreak of urban guerrilla war as a step forward: "We also envisaged the possibility of essentially urban guerrilla warfare and armed struggle." (USFI

History of the CWI

International Information Bulletin, page 17)

"One of the ideas fought for almost from the conception of the Marxist movement against the anarchists and terrorists has been that of mass action by the proletariat as the main lever for the social revolution. No self-sacrificing individual or small group armed with bomb and pistol, is able to bring about the downfall of the capitalist system. On the contrary, individual terror can bring down a wave of repression on the whole labour movement, as has been the case in a whole series of countries, of Latin America and of Quebec recently...

"Hansen, on behalf of the SWP in replying to the arguments of Maitan and Mandel, gives a crushing indictment of the present open "guerrillaist" orientation of the majority in his own international organisation. Many correct points are made against the majority with which we would... agree.

"But Hansen's criticisms are at the same time levelled at the positions which he and the SWP held only yesterday and which they have not completely abandoned.

"Many of the ideas and even the formulations relating to the role of guerrilla war and by implication the peasantry are borrowed from our documents presented at the 1965 World Congress.

"If the SWP now claim that they have consistently held this position they would have to explain why they opposed our document presented to the World Congress where a clear Marxist perspective is given in relation to developments in the colonial and semi-colonial world. Ours was the only position which started out from the fundamental ideas of Marxism, the primacy of the working class and the

need for the Marxist cadres to root themselves amongst the proletariat.

"In fact the pro-Castro and hence pro-guerrillaist orientation is one of the themes of Hansen's document. He quotes with approval the earlier reunification document in 1963 which founded the present United Secretariat: "Guerrilla warfare under a leadership that becomes committed to carrying the revolution through to a conclusion, can play a decisive role in undermining and precipitating the downfall of a colonial and semi-colonial power. This is one of the main lessons to be drawn from experience since the end of the second world war. It must be consciously incorporated into the strategy of building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries."

"There is no attempt, as we have done in our material, to first of all lay down the main strategy of Marxist tendencies in these countries of first concentrating the small forces available amongst the industrial workers while, of course, giving every assistance to armed action by the peasants and attempting to tie in these movements together with that of the organised workers. The "experiences" referred to are those of Cuba, Algeria, etc, i.e. of the methods of rural guerrilla warfare...

"Perhaps the most pertinent point in all the documents is that made by Hansen against Maitan: "One of the items in the evolution of comrade Maitan's thinking might have been the internal developments in the Italian section of the Fourth International at that time when, if I am informed correctly, the bulk of the youth were lost to a Maoist current"! (USFI International Information Bulletin, page 22)

"This statement alone is a complete vindication of the criticisms we made at the time of the 1965 Congress and in

History of the CWI

our document on The Sino-Soviet Dispute and the Colonial Revolution [written by Ted Grant]. We warned them: "No concessions can be made to the degenerate nationalism of all wings of Stalinism... Those comrades who dream of an 'easier' approach are deluding themselves. Nor is it possible to imagine an opportunist approach on "current", "modern" lines will succeed, while the revolutionary approach is left for the bedroom. "Why should any cadres in the Russian wing, or the Chinese wing, approach the Fourth International unless it has something to offer? What have we to offer at this stage except the theories of the masters, reinforced and enriched by the experience of the last decades?" (Colonial Revolution, pages 25-26)

"The pro-Chinese position of the whole of the USFI not only failed to win over sections of the CPs becoming critical of Moscow but on the contrary resulted in the going over of a section of the Italian

USFI youth to Maoism! They preferred the real Maoists!"

This position of the USFI did untold damage in Latin America. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands, tens of thousands, of young people and workers in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and elsewhere who were initially attracted to Trotskyism, were led into the blind alley of guerrillaism by the leaders of the USFI. They had a similar position of uncritical support for the Provisional IRA in Ireland. Needless to say, their position as political attorneys for different guerrillaist leaders did not result in any substantial gains for their organisation. On the contrary, as we see above, it led at a certain stage to the recruitment of potential supporters for Trotskyism to go over to these guerrillaist movements. The USFI destroyed many potentially important revolutionary fighters.

Towards New Layers and the Labour Party

We considered that our main task in the period of the 1970s and also later, was to turn decisively towards the proletariat, especially to the new layers. In Britain, as we have detailed in our book, *The Rise of Militant*, we concentrated our work in the Labour Party and, particularly, in the youth wing of the Labour Party. We had to skilfully adapt to this milieu but we never hid our ideas. Indeed, it became a standing joke amongst our opponents that a Militant supporter would immediately be recognised by the allegedly exaggerated hand movements but, above all, if they mentioned that they stood on the basis of the ideas of

"Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky". This did not stop our "Marxist" opponents, who were usually located outside of the organised labour movement, from criticising us for "opportunism". While we gave critical support to the left, particularly the Benn movement in the 1980s, we always defended our own independent position.

Could the same be said for those "revolutionary purists" who did not sully their hands within the mass organisations of the working class? The followers of Mandel, in a number of countries, opportunistically cuddled up to different left reformists and in the

History of the CWI

process watered down their programme. No such criticism could be made of the supporters of Militant (now the Socialist Party) in Britain. We built a solid base amongst the youth, particularly in the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS). Ninety per cent of our efforts were concentrated in this field. It was not just the youth comrades, but the older comrades who participated and played a role in educating the new layer of youth who were moving towards Marxism. We won a majority in the LPYS in 1970, as we have explained elsewhere, later taking all the positions on the National Committee. This probably went a bit far but the LPYS NC members were actually elected at regional conferences. Experience had shown that unless the Marxists won the NC position in a region, the Labour Party bureaucracy would hamper, undermine and frustrate the attempts of the youth movement in that area to engage in any genuine mass work. In the future, however, where we are engaged in mass work, in general it would not be appropriate for us, even where we have an overwhelming majority, to take all the positions in the movement.

We were tolerated in the Labour Party at this stage. One of the reasons for this was the genuine rank-and-file democracy which existed in the party. Also we were energetic, most of the comrades were youth, had very good ideas, etc. A wing of the bureaucracy undoubtedly believed that the youthful supporters of Militant would, as previous generations had done, move to the right as they got older. However, these "Trotskyists" did grow up but, to the horror of the right wing, they continued to defend their ideas and some of them even became MPs. They were not the kind of MPs that the right and the bureaucracy had anticipated. The 1980s was a very successful period for the Marxists in Britain, as we have

explained in *The Rise of Militant*. At one stage our membership rose to 8,000. Three MPs - all known Trotskyists - were elected and made a marvellous contribution to the struggles of the British working class.

Of course, the ruling class hated us and put enormous pressure on the Labour bureaucracy to weaken us and drive us out of the party. As is well known, a series of expulsions ensued in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, this did not prevent us from reaching out to workers who were engaged in struggle. Alongside of the Liverpool battle, we gained invaluable experience in leading the mass movement around the poll tax. We defeated this measure and, in the process, brought down Thatcher.

Painstaking Work

The development of the British section has always run alongside the growth of the CWI. But it would be a mistake to see the CWI as a mere adjunct of the work that we did in Britain. The CWI has a separate identity. It was impossible to replicate exactly the experience of the British Marxists in every country even in Western Europe. Painstaking discussions ensued with comrades in different countries in elaborating different and varying strategies and tactics to enhance the profile, numbers and effectiveness of the supporters and members of the CWI. As explained above, even when we were restricted to the small island of Britain, we always had an international outlook. We never took a purely British position but always proceeded from an international analysis, only then examining how the situation in Britain fitted in with this. We were always on the lookout for international contacts. Many of the international contacts that we made appeared to be purely "accidental". But these "accidents" were related to the changes in the objective

History of the CWI

situation which was affecting the working class and their organisations.

Ireland

A dramatic growth in our international contacts was itself related, in the early part of the 1970s, to the big changes that were underway in the mass, traditional organisations of the working class. But the first extension of our influence came in Ireland. We recruited a young student in Britain who then went back to Northern Ireland on the eve of the explosive Civil Rights movement in the late 1960s. He, in turn, made contact with a new generation of youth, both Catholic and Protestant, around the Northern Ireland Labour Party in the city of Derry. I was invited to visit the North of Ireland in 1969. I arrived just a week before the explosive, almost revolutionary, events in Derry of August 1969. I was able to make contact and discuss with a number of young socialists at that time: John Throne, Bernadette Devlin (now McAlliskey), Cathy Harkin, Gerry Lynch and many others. We built a very important position, at that stage, amongst both Catholic and Protestant youth through the Derry Young Socialists. Later on, through our work at Sussex University, we recruited Peter Hadden who went back to Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, and has played a decisive role in our section in the North and throughout Ireland in this period. Following these discussions I travelled south and met a group of youth who were members of the Southern Ireland Labour Party in Dublin. Unfortunately, most of them who proclaimed to be Marxists were absolutely unfitted for the task of building a powerful Marxist organisation. Nevertheless our work in the North of Ireland did, later on, lead to the establishment of an important presence in the South. This, in turn, led to the recruitment of what is now the

leadership of the Irish section, comrades such as Dermot Connolly and Joe Higgins, who is now a Socialist Party TD.

IUSY

At this stage, we did not just work through the different youth organisations in Europe but also in the international organisation of the social democratic youth, the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY). We came up against a youthful but extremely hardened group of careerists who had been groomed as future leaders of the mass social democratic parties. Their main aim was to occupy the plush offices and limousines of ministers in future social democratic governments. We represented a mortal threat to them. Compared to the Labour bureaucracy in Britain, these creatures were a much more vicious breed. Nevertheless, our young comrades attended every meeting, no matter how daunting or boring the task in confronting these young careerists, in the hope of turning up useful potential socialist and revolutionary fighters.

This paid off in 1972 when two of our comrades, Peter Doyle and Andy Bevan, were sent to the conference of the Social Democratic Youth in Sweden. There they met Arne Johansson and Anders Hjelm who were immediately recognised as kindred spirits of the British young socialists. Arne comments:

"The visit of the two representatives of the British Militant came just at the right time. There was a radicalisation amongst the social democratic youth in Sweden, with growing opposition towards the bureaucracy. At this stage we were part of a left faction within the Social Democratic Youth. We were well known, so much so that a social democratic bureaucrat even pointed out

History of the CWI

the British young socialists to us and said that our ideas were similar to theirs and that we should "discuss with them". This we did on the evening of the congress and found that we had a lot in common.

"We were concentrated in the city of Umea in the north of Sweden, in a loose left/Marxist discussion group. Without a doubt, unless we would have met Militant at this time, this organisation would have completely disintegrated. We were not politically homogenous. Nor was it preordained that we would automatically join Militant or what became the CWI. In fact, the representatives of the USFI, in the form of Pierre Frank, made determined efforts to win us. He travelled to Umea to address a meeting of our student group. I asked him if he knew of the British Militant. His riposte was short and brutal: "They are completely impotent."

"Roger Silverman, on behalf of the British Militant visited Sweden, engaged in very thorough discussions with us and helped to consolidate us on the political positions of the British comrades. We took steps to organise a serious Marxist force but one which was very, very small at that stage. On the other hand, the Swedish Social Democratic Youth was a large organisation and the bureaucracy had learned from the experience of Britain. They, therefore, very quickly moved to expel us from the SSU but this did not mean we were completely debarred from the party - you could be expelled from the SSU while still retaining membership of the social democracy. Nevertheless, the "loose left" in Umea and elsewhere disintegrated, although we won some very good comrades to our organisation.

"Undoubtedly, the 1970s was a difficult time for the Swedish Marxists and only

by digging in and establishing firm roots, along with serious international contact, was it possible for us to survive this period. In effect, we could not pursue effective entry work as most of our forces were outside the SSU and, subsequently, outside the Social Democratic Party. In the creation of our organisation, we had to combat not just the ideas of reformism but the false ideas of the Mandelites in Sweden. Their attitude was that the revolutionary students were the new vanguard of the working class and they adopted an extremely sectarian attitude to anyone who did not agree with them. Only by correctly analysing the situation were we able to survive and to make serious progress in the course of the 1980s."

Germany

We had a similar, although different, situation in Germany. I had met a German comrade at the LPYS conference in 1971. He was soon recruited to our organisation and, in turn, attracted a layer of youth who travelled into our ranks. But if in Sweden we had arrived just in time, as Arne commented, this was not perhaps the case in Germany. Angela Bankert comments: "The CWI came a bit late to Germany. The radicalisation of the youth was well under way. This was reflected in the youth wing of the social democracy, the Jusos. Unfortunately, it was not genuine Marxism, in the form of our ideas and organisation, which successfully intervened in this situation, but Stalinist-influenced organisations."

In a different historical context of sharp crisis, of a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation, this position in Germany could have been fateful, as had been the case in the past in other countries. For instance, in Spain in the 1930s, the "Trotskyists" refused Trotsky's advice to enter the Spanish young socialists. But the Stalinists were

History of the CWI

not so "pure". They entered and won virtually the whole of the socialist youth which not only strengthened the Spanish Communist Party but resulted in the lost opportunity for Trotskyism to establish a mass base. The consequence was the isolation of the Trotskyists and the defeat of the Spanish revolution. Angela comments: "We intervened, with our very small forces at the beginning, just when this radical wave was beginning to recede. Nevertheless, there was a very keen audience for our ideas. At regional conferences of the Jusos and the party, with sometimes 300 people present, we could usually sell about 150 papers."

Belgium

The Belgian section of the CWI was founded in 1974 again by "accident". Roger Silverman was on his way back to Britain and missed the boat from Belgium to Britain and was, therefore, compelled to stay overnight. He therefore looked up a contact from an LPYS conference and from this original introduction, a group of youth active within the Belgian social democracy came towards us and were eventually won over politically to our ideas.

François Bliki, who has participated in the Belgian section of the CWI almost since its inception, comments:

"If we would have been in touch with the CWI prior to the 1970s, it is no exaggeration to say that we would now be the largest section in the whole of the CWI, perhaps exceeding the numbers in the British section. There was tremendous turmoil within the workers' movement in the early 1970s. This was reflected in the social democracy with the shift towards the left, particularly by the youth. The biggest Trotskyist current at that stage was around Ernest Mandel's organisation, which refused to involve itself in this struggle within the

social democracy. We were very young and inexperienced but, nevertheless, we had a big impact right from the beginning. In 1986 we organised a mass movement of 26,000 students in 25 different towns in Belgium. It was organised under the name of our organisation because the Belgian Young Socialists would not let us use their name. We made significant gains through the work we conducted within the social democracy.

"From an historical point of view, this work was entirely justified. But of course, conditions change. The split with the Grant group in 1992 was also felt in Belgium. This resulted in 32 comrades remaining with the majority and 30 with the minority. This minority merely repeated ideas from the past which were quite adequate for their time but had become completely outmoded by the change in the situation. Whereas they have stagnated, we have undergone a big growth. Now we have over 100 and they have 20, largely older, comrades with a stagnant membership.

"In 1995, there was a split from the Mandel group with the best of the comrades coming towards and joining our organisation. At that stage, the SI [the Belgian group linked to the British SWP] had 34 members. They actually approached the ex-Mandel group, led by a comrade who is now with us, but there was no question of him joining this organisation rather than us. Then in 1997, at a national meeting with 21 present, the London-based leadership of the SWP tried to impose their international "party line" [although not implemented in Britain] which meant that the members of the Belgian SI would have to enter and submerge themselves into the social democracy. This is against the background where the conditions for work within the social democracy no longer exist for a serious Marxist tendency. We approached them

History of the CWI

and had discussions with the 13 who voted against [it was a majority] and, subsequently, the majority of these comrades joined us. It was the comrades who left the Mandel group earlier, and who had been approached by the SI to join them, who now went and participated in persuading the Belgian SI to join our organisation."

April 1974 - CWI and Greece

By 1974 it was clear that the conditions were ripe to take the initiative in forming a properly structured international organisation. Big movements took place throughout Europe. The CWI was founded at a conference in London on 20/21 April 1974. Four days later, on 25 April, the Portuguese revolution exploded and we immediately intervened. Similar upheavals were to take place in Greece and Cyprus soon afterwards, and the Franco dictatorship was on its last legs in Spain.

The history of our International is one of ideas, of an attempt to work out the most effective strategy and tactics for the building of the forces of Marxism. With a small organisation it is always a question of concentrating all, or most, of your forces at the "point of attack". At that stage - the early 1970s - for us, that was clearly within the mass organisations which still retained the overwhelming support of the proletariat. In one case, Greece, we predicted the need to work in mass organisations even before they had been formally created. Almost as soon as the military junta had been overthrown in Greece in July 1974, our organisation outlined the perspective for the development of a mass socialist party. We argued that this inevitably arose from the situation following the overthrow of the junta, that would open the floodgates for the mass participation in politics which would inevitably take a new form to

that which existed prior to the military coup in 1967. The new generation, in particular, was looking for a revolutionary road but was repelled by the parties which still clung to Stalinism. We identified the figure who would probably lead such a party - Andreas Papandreou. He had evolved from the leader of the "left" in the liberal bourgeois party, the Centre Union, prior to the seizure of power by the colonels into a radicalised socialistic opponent of the junta. And very quickly after he returned from exile, in September 1974, Papandreou took steps to organise a socialist party, PASOK, which rapidly attracted big layers of the youth and working class who were looking for a revolutionary alternative. Our ability to intervene in Greece arose from another "accidental" encounter with a Greek comrade in Britain. I happened to be speaking at an LPYS meeting in the west of London soon after the junta had seized power and a Greek comrade, a playwright who spoke little English, immediately identified us as "Trotskyist". This comrade participated in the fringes of our organisation over a period of years. When he returned to Greece in 1973, and tried to re-enter Britain he was excluded by the authorities. This rather repressive measure against him turned out to be very fortuitous for us. He was there when the junta was overthrown and immediately made contact with a group of Trotskyists who had played a heroic role in the struggle against the dictatorship. He urged us to visit Greece, which we did shortly afterwards. At the end of 1974, I was able to win this group and another group to the CWI. The first group was led by Nicos Redoundos. Nicos still plays a vital role in Xekinima, our Greek organisation. Also, as we have explained elsewhere, we won a very important group of young socialists in Cyprus. Comrades Doros and Andros

History of the CWI

remain in our organisation and still play an important role. From the original group who joined us, Andros is now active in the leadership of the Greek organisation. We were able to carry through the fusion of the two groups in Greece which, for a period, worked quite effectively. Unfortunately, this unity did not last but, nevertheless, our organisation rose, at one stage, to a membership of 750. Moreover, it played quite a decisive role in the developments of the left in PASOK over a very important historical period. Now PASOK, alongside many of the other traditional parties of Western Europe, is in the process of abandoning its class base and, therefore, the task in Greece is to work as an independent organisation.

Portuguese Revolution

The CWI, right from its inception, was extremely energetic in intervening in any serious workers' movement. For instance, as soon as the Portuguese revolution broke out, both Bob Labi and Roger Silverman were on the streets of Lisbon distributing material hailing the revolution and outlining the perspective of what we considered was the likely development of events. For us it was not just a question of correct ideas but of ideas linked to action and intervention. A similar and very successful approach was adopted in relation to Spain. We have outlined in our book how we intervened in the Spanish situation. What is not generally realised is that there were many attempts to establish contact with Marxists and revolutionaries but they were not successful until we came across serious forces in 1974. Lynn Walsh, at a later stage, was also sent to see whether the CWI could make headway in Portugal. We then looked on any international contact, as we do today, as gold dust to be carefully nurtured and developed

with the hope that this would lead on to much greater possibilities later on.

We called our international organisation the Committee for a Workers International for very good reasons. There were a number of "Internationals", all of whom maintained that they were "The" International. We did not want to go down this road. We, therefore, called ourselves a "Committee", for a future mass International. We used the word "Workers" because we wished to emphasise the central role of the proletariat, in contradistinction to others who based themselves on the peasantry, guerrillaist ideas or the students, as the "detonators" of the revolution.

Sri Lanka and India

And it was not just in Europe, where our main base was, that we began to have success. We had a very important Sri Lankan contact in London who was in touch with a big left opposition that was developing within the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP). This was the largest Trotskyist party in the world, with a great revolutionary tradition, but whose leadership had moved in an opportunist direction by joining the popular fronts with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) after 1964. Through this Sri Lankan comrade, we made contact with this organisation led by Siritunga Jayasuriya (Siri), Vasudeva Nanayaika (Vasu), and Vickremabahu Karunaratne (Bahu). Accordingly, Ted Grant made a visit to Sri Lanka in 1976 which led to closer political relations with these comrades. He also made a visit to India to a much looser group of Marxists who had come into contact with us. I subsequently visited Sri Lanka in 1977 and the tendency led by Siri, Vasu and Bahu were won to the CWI, bringing with them a significant group of workers numbering hundreds. In effect, all the best trade union leaders

History of the CWI

who were in the LSSP came over to this trend which constituted itself, after they were formally expelled from the LSSP, as the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP).

I also made a visit to India with Bahu after I visited Sri Lanka in April 1977. The discussions that we had with a group of "Marxists", based in Bangalore, proved to be completely abortive. This grouping of pseudo-intellectuals were welded into their armchairs, contemplating their navels

even more than Buddha himself. We immediately turned our backs on them but, fortunately, made contacts with members of the former-Maoist mass Communist Party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) - the CPI(M). From the contacts we made in these discussions with very good, active workers in the unions and the CPI(M), we established the first basis of our Indian organisation. Roger Silverman subsequently made many visits to India and at one stage lived for quite a long period of time in the sub-continent.

First International School

After two years of the CWI's existence we organised, in 1976, an International school in the city of Ulm in West Germany. We made spectacular efforts in Britain to get as many comrades as possible to this school. We bought an old battered bus to travel to the school. This ancient vehicle trundled to the European continent, much to the astonishment of the population of the different countries that it visited. Upon our return to Britain we promptly sold the bus. The gathering in Ulm was partly a school and partly a conference of the cadres that we had managed to assemble around the banner of the CWI. Apart from the countries mentioned earlier, there were many others in which we had loose contacts or groups that were moving towards the CWI. One such group was in Cyprus, of comrades who played a key role at the time of the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974. They played a quite heroic part in taking up arms against the Turkish invaders through the youth wing of the socialist party, EDEK.

Expelled from Social Democracy

While in Britain we had great latitude for work within the Labour Party throughout the 1970s and most of the

1980s, this was not at all the case with comrades in other countries. The social democratic bureaucracies in the countries of Western Europe had learnt from the experience of Britain. Very quickly in Sweden and Spain, our comrades, almost as soon as they formed distinct and significant groupings, were faced in the mid-1970s with a witch-hunt and expulsions. This did not prevent them from playing an important part in the struggles of the workers and the youth in their own countries. In Britain, we had successfully launched a school students' strike in 1985 against the establishment of slave labour through the YTS scheme, with 250,000 students coming out on strike. Basing themselves upon the experience in Britain, the Spanish section of the CWI organised a massive movement among school students involving strikes of millions of youth. They also did great work during the Gulf War at the beginning of the 1990s. Our German section and other sections did extremely useful work at this stage as well.

Emissaries Abroad

But we did not just send emissaries for the ideas of the CWI to Europe alone.

History of the CWI

We also made a determined intervention in Latin America. In the early 1980s we sent comrades such as Paulina Ramirez and her brother, Matteus, and Tony Saunois to Chile. This involved great danger for these comrades as the Pinochet dictatorship was still in place. Great work was undertaken in Chile where the basis of the organisation which we have today was founded. We also sent a comrade from the Spanish section to work in Argentina, which was not as successful.

Also comrades from Britain, such as Clare Doyle and Dave Campbell, intervened in the former USSR in the extremely difficult conditions of the late 1980s and early 1990s to establish the basis of the organisation that we have there. Other comrades, like Steve Jolly, Robyn Hoyle and Paul True were sent to Australia, where again great work was undertaken. This is now bearing fruit with the very successful growth of our Australian organisation.

Our general policy had always been to work, where this was possible, in the mass organisations. After the initial assembling of the cadres, the task was then to develop viable sections of the CWI. But related to this was also the best method to develop the initial cadres and, alongside of this, the leadership of the different national organisations of the CWI. Leadership is something that is not easily acquired. It is an art which has to be learnt and inevitably involves mistakes, particularly from a young leadership. There is nothing wrong with this - in fact it is inevitable - particularly on tactical questions, but the important thing is to learn from mistakes.

International Campaigning

A vital component part of the development of the CWI was the successful organisation of international campaigns. On the issue of Spain, for

instance, before we acquired the initial cadres, we conducted a campaign of solidarity with the Spanish workers in general but, in particular, with the underground socialist unions and party, the UGT and PSOE. At that stage, this party stood well to the left of the Labour Party in Britain and of social democracy in general. These campaigns were important not only because they allowed us to intervene in Spain but also brought towards us important figures from the trade unions in Britain. In our discussions with comrades from Lutte Ouvrière, who were present at the 1997 European School, we made the point that although we have worked, and very successfully, in the trade unions this is not the only way of winning workers. It is possible to win some very good workers, some of them leading shop stewards, on issues which are not immediately related to work in a particular factory or in industry in general. For instance, we won Bill Mullins, who was then one of the leading convenors in a factory of 12,000 car workers in Birmingham, not on a trade union issue but through the campaign of solidarity with the Spanish workers. After he was won to our organisation, we pursued very successful work in his factory on trade union issues. He subsequently played a key role not just in Birmingham and the West Midlands, but nationally in our trade union work and is presently our national industrial organiser.

Defending Our Comrades

In the 1980s also, with the growing importance of the different national sections of the CWI, we were involved in vital defence campaigns of comrades who had been arrested for their activity. In Israel/Palestine, comrade Mahmoud Masarwa was arrested and tortured, Femi Aborisade and other comrades in

History of the CWI

Nigeria were arrested, South African comrades were arrested and some of them imprisoned. We also were involved in the leadership of the general strike in Sri Lanka in 1980, which resulted in the victimisation of thousands of workers. We organised an effective solidarity campaign with these workers on an international scale.

Nigeria

All this work brought towards us some very important contacts. Some of them were won in the most peculiar and unlikely conditions. For instance, the present powerful position that we enjoy in Nigeria was made possible to some extent by our participation in a "Black Book Fair" in London. A Nigerian lecturer visiting London accidentally came across a number of our books and documents. He was very impressed with the ideas contained in them and took them back to Nigeria. This had a big effect on a group of Nigerian activists who considered themselves Marxists, some of whom were still under the influence of Stalinism but who had heard about Trotsky, and they approached us for discussions. Through this we won the position that we have in Nigeria at the present time.

South Africa

Similarly, in South Africa, a group of activists, some of them lawyers and

intellectuals who participated in the first formation of independent black unions in 1973, came across our documents. This had a powerful effect on them and some of them gave up their jobs and flew to London, into exile, in order to have discussions with us. This, in turn, led to a very successful phase of intervention in the underground struggle in South Africa where our organisation was considered as a "tendency" of the African National Congress. Some of the material produced in their journal, Inqaba ya Basebenzi, had a powerful effect on the outlook of the militants who were fighting in the factories and in the struggle against the apartheid regime. This was subsequently confirmed in the early 1990s when the apartheid regime began to disintegrate. This also led to the South African comrades intervening in Zimbabwe which led to the foundation of our Zimbabwean section.

New Initiatives

Our Pakistan section, which is now undertaking some of the most serious work of any section of the CWI amongst the workers and peasants, was established through Pakistani exiles who we came into contact with in London.

In the USA the visits of Sean O'Torain and the work of Alan Jones, who comes originally from Greece, resulted in the setting up of the US organisation.

History of the CWI

Exhausting the Possibilities

Work in the mass organisations, it was clear, was virtually exhausted by the end of the 1980s. More and more, the work of our different national sections was taking place outside of these organisations. But, as happens very often in history, we did not draw all the necessary conclusions as early as we should have done. I have taken this point up in my book, *The Rise of Militant*, where I advance the idea that successful, independent work under our own banner could have been possible in Britain as early as 1985-86. The persecution of the Marxists and the further shift towards the right within the Labour Party had completely changed the situation. The process had begun whereby the British Labour Party more and more separated itself from its working class base. We organised mass meetings attended by 50,000 workers protesting against the expulsions of our comrades. But unfortunately, we did not offer a clear organisational as well as political alternative, at this stage. We asked people to join *Militant*, which we still described merely as a newspaper. We were not a party. The main thrust of our propaganda was against expulsions. The call to join a newspaper, rather than a party, was intangible in the consciousness of those who attended our meetings. Contrast our experience since we changed our name to Socialist Party in Britain to the situation which obtained then. Two hundred and twenty workers agreed to join the Socialist Party in Britain in the course of the 1997 general election. The fact that we are now called a party has had a decisive effect on our own ranks in making them conscious of the tasks which are posed but also in reaching out and winning workers who are looking for a party such as ours.

1992 - Open Work

As comrades know, in 1992 there was a split in *Militant* and the CWI. There is no time to go into all the issues involved in this split - we have done this elsewhere. But what is clear is that the small minority that split from our ranks were utterly incapable of facing up to the new period and the new tasks which were posed by developments in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The decision to conduct more independent work laid the basis for the successes of our organisations in the course of the 1990s. The initiative of setting up Youth against Racism in Europe (YARE) led to great success, which we have detailed in *The Rise of Militant*.

But alongside of the establishment of independent national sections we have, since 1994, launched the CWI as an open International. It would not have been possible to have done this successfully in the previous period. The baggage which we carried from our work within the mass organisations inevitably led to us concealing the true extent of our international organisation. The truth is that virtually everybody knew about the existence of the CWI which was often listed by the different labour bureaucracies in the "evidence" they amassed to carry through our expulsions. The bureaucracy knew about it, our opponents on the left, particularly the Stalinists, spoke openly about this. It was the working class, unfortunately, that did not have a full knowledge of the existence of the CWI. Now, as a more independent organisation, we have corrected this.

We have moved to establish more independent work and an independent international organisation at perhaps just the right historical moment. A huge vacuum now exists in the workers'

History of the CWI

movement. Just look at the Malmo meeting of the so-called Second International in 1997. This was a gathering of social democratic leaders and bankers who very often were one and the same thing. Significantly, the opposition to this meeting, in the streets around the conference, was organised by our Swedish section. There is no mass Stalinist International today, merely fragments of Stalinism - some of them quite important - scattered throughout the world. Unfortunately, the comrades of the USFI, at their Congress in 1995, in effect abandoned the idea of building, in this period, mass revolutionary Trotskyist parties or a mass revolutionary Trotskyist International. We believe also they have begun to abandon the idea of the party as a revolutionary, democratic centralist organisation. It is quite obvious that you cannot have a rigid centralism in any organisation today. Maybe we will have to alter the terminology, perhaps we cannot use the phrase itself because of its connections now with Stalinism. But though we have to carefully examine terminology and change it where necessary, nevertheless the idea of a unified International, of revolutionary unity, is an idea which we must defend, as we must also defend and develop the idea of the need to create parties to ensure the victory of the working class.

On another level, the dockers' strike in Britain shows the need for international action of the working class like never before in history. The 1995 Danish bus workers' struggle, as with their Indian counterparts in Bangalore, also demonstrated the need for the working class to link up on the trade union level internationally. At the same time there is a greater need today, as I mentioned earlier, in the era of globalisation, to not only adopt a general internationalist stance but also to create mass political organisations which are linked together through a real mass International.

Reassembling Revolutionary Forces

The question is how to build such a mass International. We have a vital role to play in this process. We have in the past, as I described, sent comrades to different countries and continents throughout the world to establish the first forces of genuine Marxists. If necessary we will continue to do this. But a new mass International will not develop in a linear fashion. The process will involve fusions, splits and the reassembling of genuine revolutionary forces on an international and national plane.

We have been very successful in this regard. From the beginning we managed to absorb into our ranks organisations that did not agree with everything that the CWI stood for. In Cyprus, for instance, the group mentioned earlier that eventually joined us, after quite lengthy discussions, was somewhat heterogeneous. Many of those who remained with the CWI and who played a key role in building a very important section in Cyprus were, from the outset, committed to the general perspectives and programme of the CWI. But there were others who could be described as occupying a left centrist position, vacillating between the ideas of the CWI and centrist ideas. Some of them dropped by the wayside as the group became more serious, while others evolved into genuine revolutionaries with a rounded-out outlook. Similar developments took place in Sri Lanka. While the NSSP affiliated to the CWI, the leaders of this organisation, particularly Bahu, never fully agreed with the analysis that we had made of Stalinism, of developments in the former colonial and semi-colonial world and the national question, etc. While successful collaboration ensued for a period, the differences never disappeared and were a factor in the split of the NSSP from the CWI in 1989

History of the CWI

(although a very important minority led by Siri stayed with the CWI).

A more recent example of a very successful fusion was in France. Comrade Renaud from Gauche Révolutionnaire (GR), the French section of the CWI, comments:

"We came to the CWI from the USFI. We had come into political opposition to the leadership of the organisation in France, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR). From 1987 they had been pursuing a policy of "automation". They interpreted this to mean that every initiative undertaken by themselves was deemed "sectarian". Leading comrades of the LCR would even argue that to sell the paper was sectarian. The line was that we should try to intervene in "new kinds" of organisational forms, new formations, for example, the developments on the environment and amongst the ecologists.

"There were, of course, some correct points in what they said. We have never hesitated to aid any group of workers in the labour movement, particularly those evolving towards the left, environmentalists involved in serious struggle, etc. But the problem with the USFI's position was that they never tried to put forward their own political line, but tended to adapt their programme, in an opportunist fashion, to the leaders of these "new formations". For example, when a left group within the Socialist Party [PS] launched a school students' union the USFI deliberately played down their own role and forswore any attempt to win this group over. At every demonstration, they lent them [the PS] megaphones, etc, because this group, according to the USFI, should be the "leaders' of the school students' union. In reality, the Mandelite youth organisation was bigger than this group.

This role of merely "helping" the leaders of the traditional left organisations and not politically challenging them we opposed.

"In the beginning it was not clear in our heads but we wanted to build the forces of Trotskyism in an open, fighting organisation. We wanted to build and recruit to our party with our programme. Our clash with the Mandelites on this issue is what shaped our tendency inside their organisation. We had already begun to bring a newspaper out whilst still within the LCR. We won a majority of the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire [JCR - the LCR's youth organisation] in 1989. But you will see there have been many changes in our political line as we have sought to clarify our position. In the French Mandelite organisation there are several tendencies, which are really factions. In fact, the LCR is not a party but a federation of factions.

"They expelled us in October 1992 when we were quite well organised with a group of 50-60 young people around us. When we were expelled we were approached by many groups. I think comrades would be astonished at the number of Trotskyist groups throughout the world, many of them very strange to say the least. We know, we met them all. We had heard of the Militant, and at first thought it was a kind of left, social democratic, "workerist" tendency within the social democratic and labour movement. But then we went through the experience of the Brussels demonstration after a comrade had seen a poster in Ireland.

"After the demo we approached the CWI with a view to launching the YRE in France. We originally thought that we would have to join the CWI as a condition for us setting up the YRE. But we were pleasantly surprised that this

History of the CWI

was not the case and that we were given permission to form the YRE. We thought that this was a very good start, which then led to political discussions and eventually a large level of agreement which resulted in us joining the CWI."

David Cameron was also one of the founders of GR in France and, at the time he made the following comments, was a member of our International Secretariat. He has now returned to France to help build our French organisation. David adds:

"The USFI and Mandel had completely failed to understand the changes in the world situation. We had definitely drawn the conclusion that this organisation was impossible to reform after their congress in 1991. So, as Renaud has commented, we started looking around for other organisations. We did not confine ourselves to that but also began to develop our own ideas in opposition to the LCR. This led us to contact with many organisations, more than we wanted to!

"A comrade from the JCR who is no longer with us - he ended up badly, going back to the LCR - went on holiday to Ireland in the summer of 1992 and bought a copy of Irish Militant in a newsagents. This is how we came to learn about the October 1992, anti-racist YRE demonstration. In fact, we had been arguing for years within the LCR and USFI for them to take such an initiative. Following the Brussels demonstration we had many discussions with the CWI.

"What did these discussions actually amount to? We first of all had to get rid of any misconceptions that we were dealing with "left reformists". When you approach an organisation, you have to ascertain the nature of that organisation. Are these people

Marxists? Are they reformists? Are they sectarian? Are they Stalinists? The second point is how do these people analyse what is going on in the world? What are their perspectives? And, of course, vitally, are they competent in building viable organisations both on a national and international scale? Through discussions we became convinced that both the Militant and the CWI met the criteria that we had set ourselves.

"There are many lessons in relation to how we joined the CWI which will be useful in similar experiences in the future. I don't think that fusion with other groups is the main way of building the International. I think we will build out of the new layers coming into action but, also, the question of working with other groups and fusion can be posed as well.

"In France, at the moment, there is a certain flux on the left. In my opinion there is the beginning of a break-up of the three largest Trotskyist groups - which were set up in the 1960s - with the emergence of an opposition in Lutte Ouvrière, for example. And at the same time, there is the emergence now of defined political currents, even with their own newspapers, within the PCF [French Communist Party]. There is, therefore, the possibility of fusions and regroupments posing further questions for our intervention in the mass organisations. I think similar questions will be posed elsewhere. Renaud said at the end of his contribution that when we joined the CWI we weren't perfect - we're still not perfect. I think we have learnt a lot from the International and I also hope that we have contributed to the International.

"Just a word on work within the traditional organisations in the past. The French section is one of the few in the International which has never actually

History of the CWI

done entry work. We came into the International after the CWI had exhausted the tactic of work within the mass traditional organisations. I wonder if we had come in ten or fifteen years before, what we would we have done in France? Let's put the question another way. Could the LCR with 1,500 members, in 1968, and 3-4,000, in the mid-1970s, have been more effective in working within one of the two major mass organisations of the French working class? Hundreds of workers joined the French Communist Party in the decade after 1968 and tens of

thousands joined the Socialist Party. Now, if the LCR had decided to employ the tactic of the CWI (given the size of the LCR) to enter the PCF - difficult but not impossible - or go into the PS - easier but not so profitable - is it not possible they would have made a much bigger impact? It seems to me that when an organisation of this size - and from that point of view size is important - could have maintained an independent organisation and yet, at the same time, worked within either wing of the mass organisations, that could have been the most effective method."

History of the CWI

Lessons from the Past - for the Future

The main forces for our organisation will come from new layers of the proletariat who have only just begun to move into action or have not yet entered the political arena. The task of winning these layers may appear to be immediately more arduous than the "easier" task of trying to group together different "revolutionary" organisations. There are, of course, some very good comrades in different organisations with a different tradition to our own. It would be a mistake not to seek principled revolutionary unity with genuine forces. However, we have to turn our back on the sectarian fragments who will never be capable of building genuine mass Marxist forces.

The early 1990s were not the easiest of times for us or for revolutionary Marxists in general. But we managed to keep alive the revolutionary thread. We have analysed, we believe in a correct, rounded-out fashion, the objective situation which confronted us and the working class, and are prepared for a new, more favourable position for our organisation. While we are not completely out of the woods yet, the most difficult period is perhaps behind us. This does not mean that we will not have more problems but, at the same time, there will be great opportunities

for the development of our organisations and the CWI if we work correctly. The achievements in the future will far surpass what we have done in the past. We must raise the level of all comrades, from the leadership to the newest comrades. Every member has a vital role to play in the development of the revolutionary movement. Each comrade, as Trotsky commented, carries a particle of history on their shoulders. We stand in the best revolutionary traditions of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and the achievements of the revolutionary movement of the last four or five decades. One worker today can win 10, 50, 100 tomorrow and prepare the ground for the development of new mass workers' parties and a new mass workers' International.

We must learn the lessons of the past. There have been enough defeats of the proletariat. Because we have not yet attained mass influence, there are bound to be setbacks and defeats. But there are going to be victories as well. And in defeats and in victories, this new generation will learn the lessons of the past and build an organisation which, this time, will carry the working class to victory.

Peter Taaffe