

III. 25 Years of Building of Our International Tendency

After outlining the Bolshevick-Communists conception of the revolutionary party we shall now present an overview of the history of our movement and its practical efforts to build such an organization. Let us start by summarizing the challenges which our movement faced at the beginning.

We started with the recognition that Marxism was thrown into a deep crisis when the Fourth International degenerated in the late 1940s and early 1950s. We recognized that all fragments of the Fourth International had in one way or another succumbed to the anti-working class pressures of Stalinism, social democracy, and/or petty-bourgeois nationalism. All the fragments of the Fourth International betrayed the method of the Transitional Program of Leon Trotsky by their capitulation to anti-proletarian class forces. Concretely, the leadership of the Fourth International and all its leaders of the future splits – Pablo, Mandel, Cannon, Lambert, Healy, Moreno, etc. – capitulated either to Stalinism (in particular Titoism and Maoism), Social Democracy (e.g., the Labour Party in Britain), or bourgeois nationalism (e.g., MNR in Bolivia 1952, Peron in Argentina, or the SLFP in Sri Lanka).

As we have analyzed in other documents, the leadership of the Fourth International was, by then, disoriented by new and unexpected political developments – in particular the counter-revolutionary defeats which ended the revolutionary phase of 1943-47, the strengthening and expansion of Stalinism, the consolidation of capitalism, and the failure of the Fourth International to overcome its isolation from the masses (with a few exceptions like in Bolivia, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam). They were faced with a new situation and failed to apply the method of Trotsky's Transitional Program to the new phenomena and to adapt their perspectives to the changed circumstances. As a result, they distorted the revolutionary program in order to adapt to non-revolutionary forces – Stalinism, social democracy, and petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalism – which were stronger than the Fourth International.¹¹⁵

As we wrote in an essay: *"We are fully aware that the possibilities for revolutionary work were very difficult for the Trotskyists under such circumstances. But their centrist failure was not that they remained numerically weak. Neither was their centrist failure*

115 For a full analysis of the degeneration of the Fourth International and its fragments, see our book *Workers Power (Britain) and Irish Workers Group: The Death Agony of the Fourth International*, London 1983. See also Michael Pröbsting: *Healy's Pupils Fail to Break with their Master*. The revolutionary tradition of the Fourth International and the centrist tradition of its Epigones Gerry Healy and the "International Committee" – A Reply from the RCIT to "Socialist Fight", October 2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 16, November 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/healy-and-fourth-international/>

*that they made mistakes. Only those who don't do anything make no mistakes. Their centrist failure was that they became uncritical or even hailed Stalinist, left social democratic, and petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalist forces. Their centrist failure was that they spread illusions among vanguard workers (and their own members) in the revolutionary potential of Tito, Mao-Tsetung, Aneurin Bevan, Messali Hadj, General Peron, etc., instead of warning of their inevitable betrayal of the workers. Their centrist failure was that they failed to understand and to teach the workers' vanguard that only a revolutionary party fighting under the Trotskyist banner can lead the proletariat to victory. Their centrist failure was that, instead, they mis-educated the workers vanguard that an objective revolutionary process would push the Titos, the Maos, the Bevans, and the Perons to provide the workers and oppressed authentic leadership towards the revolutionary toppling of the capitalist system. No Stalinist agent forced them into these centrist failures! These failures were their own volition and responsibility! And it is these failures which marked the centrist degeneration of the Fourth International and all of its leaders in the years 1948-52."*¹¹⁶

As a result, the revolutionary continuity which started with Marx and Engels struggle for communism since the 1840s and embraced the four revolutionary Internationals until the early 1950s had unraveled. Hence, Marxism – or let us more accurately call it the official mis-interpretation of Marxism – became dominated by Stalinism, social-democratism, or Trotskyite centrism. This went hand in hand with the increasing corruption of the workers' movement by the labor bureaucracy and aristocracy. For this reasons the RCIT concluded in its program:

*"In this deep crisis of leadership - combined with the possibilities of the imperialist bourgeoisie for the systematic bribery of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy - the ultimate cause can be found in the extraordinary bourgeoisification of the labour movement and the De-revolutionisation of Marxism, as is has been distorted by left reformism, centrism and the left-wing academics in recent decades."*¹¹⁷

Hence, it is an indispensable and urgent task of the Bolshevik-Communists to reconstitute Marxism as an orthodox, undistorted, militant, and revolutionary tradition, mode of thought, and fighting force.

116 Michael Pröbsting: Healy's Pupils Fail to Break with their Master, p. 36

117 RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, 2012, p. 24, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/>

i) Workers Power (Britain) and the MRCI in 1976–1989: The Beginning of the Reconstruction of Revolutionary Marxism

When *Workers Power* (Britain) and the *Irish Workers' Group* came into existence in 1975 after their split with the Cliffite *Socialist Workers Party* (SWP), they understood that the Fourth International had both programmatically as well as organizationally collapsed and, hence, the revolutionary heritage was broken. The chief task was to re-elaborate orthodox Marxism, to apply and extend it, given the new developments of capitalism and class struggle in the past decades and to build a cadre organization on the basis of such a program.

Later these two groups would join forces with *Gruppe Arbeitermacht* (Germany) and *Pouvoir Ouvrier* (France) and, in April 1984, they would found an international tendency – the *Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International* (MRCI).

These groups agreed on the need to re-elaborate a new program based on the transitional method of Trotsky's program of 1938. They also shared the view that they must build an international tendency based on the principles of democratic centralism. Such, the MRCI's *Declaration of Fraternal Relations* stated:

*"The building of a revolutionary international cannot be put off until national parties have been built. The international must be built by revolutionaries simultaneously with the building of national parties. It must be founded on the basis of an international programme guiding and informing the work of the national sections. On this basis it can and must be organised as a democratic centralist international."*¹¹⁸

Workers Power and the MRCI energetically set about to meet these tasks. They studied the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the development of Stalinism and corrected their analysis. Coming from the IS/SWP tradition, they initially held to Cliff's view that the USSR, China, and the other Stalinist states were state-capitalist societies. However, eventually the comrades reached the conclusion that these countries were degenerated workers states in which Stalinist bureaucracies oppressed the working class, and the strategic task was to organize a political revolution. The results of this work were published in the book *The Degenerated Revolution*.¹¹⁹ However, as we shall show below, this book contained a theoretical error on the issue of smashing the Stalinist state apparatus which we later corrected.

Another important theoretical achievement – as summarized above – was a Marxist assessment of the history and degeneration of the Fourth International

118 MRCI: *Declaration of Fraternal Relations*, in: *Permanent Revolution* No 2 (1984), p. 45

119 This analysis had been documented in *Workers Power: The Degenerated Revolution. The Origin and Nature of the Stalinist States* (1982). The most central comrades in elaborating WP's and the MRCI's programmatic foundations were Dave Hughes and Dave Stockton, both founding members of Workers Power and its forerunner in early 1970s. While Hughes unfortunately died in 1991, comrade Stockton has remained the most influential thinker of the LRCI/LFI. As a leader of creative intelligence, historical knowledge and extraordinary sensitivity he was central in developing our positions and in educating a number of cadres. His failure to withstand the centrist degeneration of the LFI in 2010/11 does not remove his revolutionary legacy.

and those who split with it, which was documented in the book *The Death Agony of the Fourth International*.

Another important contribution was Workers Power's restatement of the Leninist understanding of reformism – social democracy and Stalinism – as *bourgeois workers parties*. By this we understand that these parties are dominated by a bureaucratic caste with the labor aristocracy as its core constituent layer. This bureaucracy is integrated into the capitalist system and cannot be reformed or made into a tool of the working class struggle. At the same time, we recognized that these parties were still based – in terms of membership and electoral support – on the working class and that it was important for revolutionaries to apply the united front tactic.¹²⁰

Another key theoretical advance of the MRCI was the discussion and adoption of its *Thesis on the Anti-Imperialist United Front*. In this document the comrades went back to the original anti-imperialist position of the Communist International at the time of Lenin and Trotsky, which was later upheld by the Fourth International. Such an understanding included the consistent support for the military struggle of nations oppressed and attacked by imperialism. At the same time, communists must not give any political support to petty-bourgeois or bourgeois leaderships of these anti-imperialist struggles.¹²¹

Another important theoretical advance was the elaboration of the *Thesis on Women's Oppression*. In this document we elaborated a materialist analysis of the historic roots of women's oppression as well as an assessment of the heritage of the proletarian women's movement in the times of Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai, and Inessa Armand. The thesis also elaborated a Marxist critique of the feminist movement which it considered as petty-bourgeois. Finally, it outlined a communist program and strategy for a women liberation struggle.¹²²

While re-elaborating the fundamentals of the Marxist theory was certainly the most important achievements of Workers Power and the MRCI during this period, they did not limit their activities to the field of theory. For example, Workers Power was the only left-wing organization which took an anti-imperialist position during the Malvinas war in 1982 and stood for the defense of Argentina and the defeat of British imperialism. Similarly, the comrades supported the Irish national liberation struggle against the British occupation without giving political support to Sinn Fein's petty-bourgeois nationalism.

During the historic British miner's strike in 1984/85, the comrades intervened and applied revolutionary tactics in one of the most important strikes in Western Europe since 1968. They called for a general strike and warned against the reformist strategy of the Scargill leadership in NUM and the betrayal of

120 See on this Workers Power: Thesis on Reformism – the Bourgeois Workers' Party (1983), in: Permanent Revolution No. 1 (1983)

121 MRCI: Theses: The Anti-Imperialist United Front, in: Permanent Revolution No. 5 (1987)

122 MRCI: Thesis on Women's Oppression, in: Trotskyist International No. 3 (1989)

the TUC bureaucracy. They participated in efforts to build a rank and file movement of the miners. However, they did not succeed in recruiting miners for the organization.¹²³

Finally the MRCI succeeded in recruiting a Trotskyist group in Austria. It also won José Villa, a student cadre from the Bolivian POR led by Guillermo Lora, and small group of comrades around him in Bolivia and Peru.

Readers will find a more extensive coverage of the MRCI's history in a longer article by Richard Brenner which we published in 1999.¹²⁴

123 To be precise, WP won three miners but lost them after a short time.

124 Richard Brenner: An ongoing history: the LRCI ten years on, 30.6.1999, in: Trotskyist International, No. 26 (1999), pp. 18-29

ii) The LRCI in the Period 1989-2001: The Collapse of Stalinism and National Liberation Struggles

The year 1989 was important both for our movement as well as for world politics. As mentioned above, the MRCI had set itself the task of re-elaborating a new program based on the transitional method as well as the foundation of an international tendency based on the principles of democratic centralism. In the summer of 1989, delegates from groups in Britain, Ireland, Austria, France, Germany, and Peru discussed and adopted the new program called *The Trotskyist Manifesto*. They also agreed to transform the MRCI into an international tendency based on democratic centralism and elected an international leadership. The new organization was called *League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI)*.¹²⁵

Despite its small size, the founding of this new organization marked an important step forward. Bolshevik-Communists had re-elaborated a program more than six decades after Trotsky wrote the *Transitional Program*. They also had finally succeeded in overcoming national limitations and founded a militant Marxist international tendency.

1989-1991: Political Revolution and Social Counterrevolution in the Stalinist States

Our international tendency immediately faced an acid test. In the years 1989-91 the Stalinist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe went through their terminal crisis. In addition, the Chinese regime was confronted with an uprising of students and workers, which it managed to crush on 4 June 1989. These years constituted a world revolutionary phase.

The LRCI followed these historic events closely in words and deeds. We elaborated a program for the political revolution in these states. We understood that the working class and the popular masses were rebelling against the bureaucratic caste, primarily due to democratic issues (the right of national self-determination, democratic rights like the right to assemble or to strike, etc.) This was hardly surprising given that the workers had been suppressed by Stalinist dictatorships for many decades. This was the beginning of a political revolution. The LRCI supported these struggles for democratic rights and argued for a revolutionary program. We argued that the masses have to prepare for a possible Stalinist backlash (as in fact happened in China) and that they should advance the struggle towards a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy. We warned against any illusions either in the soft-Stalinist Gorbachev-wing or in the restorationist wing around Yeltsin, or respectively

125 LRCI: *The Trotskyist Manifesto*, London 1989, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/trotskyist-manifesto/>

in their Eastern European counterparts. We called for the formation of strike committees and action councils of the working class and workers' militias in order to advance the insurrection for a political revolution. Most importantly, we stressed the need to build revolutionary workers' parties instead of leaving the lead either to reform-Stalinist or bourgeois-democratic forces.

The culmination of this process was the failed Yanayev coup in August 1991. Between the 19th and 21st of August, the so-called Emergency Committee around Yanayev launched an attempted coup. Their plan was to impose a Stalinist-restorationist dictatorship like their Chinese caste-brothers and sisters did in 1989-92. They would have immediately crushed the gains which the workers and oppressed in the USSR had achieved in the years before. These gains included some minimal democratic rights like the right to demonstrate, to go on strike, etc. While sectarians sneer at such very simple gains, we – and all those who have experience of living under a dictatorship – consider them as important gains. While they are, of course, not sufficient, they are rather beneficial when organizing the class struggle.

Hence, during the three days from the 19th to 21st of August, we called for the defense of these gains against the threat of a Stalinist-restorationist dictatorship along the lines of that in China. We gave critical support to those forces who mobilized resistance against the coup – like the pro-Yeltsin forces who organized demonstrations, miners' strikes, and military resistance. At the same time we warned against any support for capitalist restoration. From the moment the coup was defeated and Yeltsin tried to utilize the new situation for advancing the capitalist counter-revolution, we warned that this was the new main enemy.

In the statement we issued on the day after the coup was defeated, 22 August 1991, we wrote:

“Our task is to get the working class to defend their post-capitalist property relations in the context of defending their democratic gains. The destruction of the democratic gains [by Pugo/Yanaev, Ed.] would have made it impossible to raise the consciousness of the masses to a level adequate to this task” (...) *“The greatest danger to the working class now that the coup has collapsed is Yeltsin (...) Yeltsin is no friend of the working class. He represents all the elements in the former bureaucratic caste who have abandoned the prospect of bureaucratic parasitism on proletarian property relations in favour of becoming the new ruling class of a restored capitalist Russia. (...) His pro-capitalist policies spell mass unemployment and the destruction of social welfare for millions of workers; he wants to open up the 120 million Soviet workers to unbridled imperialist exploitation the events of the past week, whilst they have blocked the road to a Stalinist bureaucratic counterrevolution, have acted as a catalyst to speed up the social counterrevolution; the cause of the democratic restorationists has been immeasurably advanced. The tempo of the demise of the nomenklatura has likewise been accelerated.”*

We went on to call for *“workers' councils elected in every workplace and region of the USSR”* and *“proletarian political revolution to smash the dictatorship of the Stalinists*

and prevent the restoration of Stalinism.”¹²⁶

In the end, the process which started as a political revolution of the working class ended in a social counter-revolution. This constituted a historic defeat because it meant the destruction of the degenerated workers states’ and their social gains through capitalist restoration. The reason for this is that decades of Stalinist dictatorship had destroyed any independent working class organizations and politically atomized the proletariat. As a result, there was no revolutionary party and it was not possible to build one during the few years of the political-revolutionary crisis in 1989-91. Only the existence of such a party could have secured a victorious outcome of the political revolution.

All this demonstrates, once again, the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism whose rule had devastating effects on working class consciousness and organizations. This was already emphasized by Trotsky in a study he wrote in 1939 after the start of WWII:

*„The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organization of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one, and the only decisive standpoint, the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, wholly retain their reactionary character and remain the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution.“*¹²⁷

In contrast to various centrists like the Mandeliste Fourth International, the LRCI did not support either the Gorbachev- or Yeltsin-wing. While Mandel excluded the possibility of a capitalist restoration, we warned against this danger. In contrast to the Morenoites, we did not believe in a long “*epoch of February*” where a seemingly automatic process would lead towards a political revolution. And in contrast to the Cliffites – who believed that the Stalinist countries had always been capitalist anyway – we understood that the destruction of the planned post-capitalist property relations represented a historic defeat.

Neither did we share the idiocies of various sectarians who saw the politicization and mobilization of millions of workers against the Stalinist bureaucracy as a “*counter-revolution*.” When they speak about the “*defense of the degenerated workers state*,” they mean in fact the bureaucratic regimes which they wanted to save with the help of Stalinist tanks. These sectarians avoided asking themselves why nowhere did the workers pour into the streets to defend the Stalinists?! Why did these regimes collapse without any support from sectors of the working class?! In contrast to them, Marxists orientate themselves towards the working class and its struggles for their rights, and try to help them overcome their illusions from *within* their mass movement instead of supporting the totalitarian state

126 LRCI: The Failed Coup in the USSR (22 August 1991), in: Trotskyist International No. 7 (Sept. 1991 – Jan 1992), pp. 5-6

127 Leon Trotsky: The USSR in War (1939), in: Leon Trotsky: In Defense of Marxism, New York 1942; reprinted by Pathfinder New York 1973, p. 19

apparatus which suppressed these workers for decades.

Not only did we argue for such a program of political revolution in 1989-91, we also sent several comrades – including the author of this booklet – to Eastern Germany, the USSR, Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, and Romania. We gained important experience in these mass movements and made a number of contacts with progressive activists.

Our most important and sustained intervention was in Eastern Germany which already began in November 1989 when we had to cross the Stalinist checkpoint with our propaganda hidden. Here we succeeded in recruiting a number of young Eastern German workers which constituted a new section of the LRCI and ultimately fused with the Western German section.

Finally, our experience in the political revolutionary crisis as well as the capitalist counter-revolution in the USSR and Eastern Europe helped us to correct an earlier theoretical mistake. As mentioned above, our book *The Degenerated Revolution* published in 1982 contained an error as it claimed that the task of the proletarian revolution – smashing the state apparatus – had already been accomplished by the Stalinist takeovers of 1948-50. Consequently, we erroneously thought, this was no longer a strategic task of the political revolution. This incorrect position was already rejected by a minority in Workers Power in the 1980s and, after the experience of 1989-91, gained more supporters. We correctly argued that the “bourgeois-bureaucratic” state machine (i.e., police, standing army, bureaucracy) in the Stalinist countries is *not* a proletarian instrument, but one of the petty-bourgeois bureaucracy which is much closer to the bourgeoisie than the working class. Therefore, the political revolution required not the reform of but rather the smashing of the Stalinist-Bonapartist state apparatus. This position finally got a majority at our fourth congress in 1997.¹²⁸

Another theoretical mistake we made in the early 1990s was our concept of the “*moribund workers’ states*.” While we immediately recognized the reactionary nature of the events when openly bourgeois-restorationist forces came to power in the USSR and Eastern Europe, we thought that since the capitalist property relations had (and could) not have been immediately implemented, it would be inaccurate to already speak about capitalist states. Instead we characterized these countries as “*moribund worker’s states*.” In fact, we had misunderstood Trotsky who explained that the class character of a state is determined by the class forces which control the state. After an internal debate we corrected this error at our fifth congress in 2000.¹²⁹

128 See the resolution on this issue in the second edition of our book *The Degenerated Revolution*. The main protagonist of this position was Keith Harvey, a talented and intelligent comrade who played an important role in developing our program during the events of 1989-91. Unfortunately, he became more and more affected by the conservative and demoralized prejudices of the progressive middle class and labor aristocracy. He split from us in 2006 together with a passive-propagandist minority in Britain and eventually dropped out of organized political activity.

129 See: Richard Brenner: The Error of the ‘Moribund Workers State’ – a Correction, in: Workers Power, No. 248 (November 2000), pp. 12-13. The main protagonist of this correction was Richard

Another longer-term achievement of our closer analysis of the collapse of Stalinism was our study of the Marxist discussion about the relationship between the plan and market during the dictatorship of the proletariat. This led to our seriously elaborating how a workers' state will plan its economy and resulted in a number of longer articles as well as a pamphlet called *Plan versus Market*.¹³⁰

1991: The Imperialist Attack against Iraq

Another key event in the early 1990s was the imperialist attack on Iraq in January 1991. The bourgeois dictatorship of Saddam Hussein had conquered Kuwait in August 1990 and the Western imperialist powers – with the support of the Soviet regime of Gorbachev as well as the Syrian Assad regime – used this as a pretext for a massive military buildup in the Middle East.

The imperialists attacked and smashed the Iraqi army in a few weeks time. This provoked a popular uprising of the Shiite and Kurdish workers and peasants in early March. The imperialists preferred a weak dictatorship under Saddam over a victorious uprising and, therefore, halted their troops while the Baathist army crushed the insurrection.

Our organization took a clear anti-imperialist position in this war. We called for the defeat of the imperialist onslaught and for the military victory of the Iraqi forces. At the same time we refused to give any political support to the Baathist regime. We supported the Shiite and Kurdish uprising and called for a workers' and peasant government.

Our clear anti-imperialist stand brought us in sharp conflict with the reformists and centrists. Following the leadership of the Stalinist states, most "Communist" Parties supported the UN embargo against Iraq imposed in the autumn of 1990 in preparation for the imperialist onslaught. The CWI – as well as many other centrists – refused to defend Iraq and took a neutral position. Some sectarians confused the necessary defense of Iraq with political support for the Baathists and even supported the latter's maneuvers to retain or extend their power (like the invasion of Kuwait or the brutal repression of the popular uprising in March).

Brenner. Brenner was a comrade with both the ability of creative thinking as well as being the best public speaker and writer of WP. These strengths brought him a lot of hostility from the centrist left in Britain. Unfortunately, he is equally extraordinary in any lack of self-discipline and the ability to work collectively. His failure to break with the middle class and to dedicate his life to revolutionary work hastened his political failure in 2010/11 when he became a supporter of the LFI's course of centrist degeneration. Since then he has by and large retreated as a public figure of WP and the LFI. Our discussion was also positively influenced by a thoughtful pamphlet called "*The Marxist Theory of the State and the Collapse of Stalinism*". It was published in 1995 by the Workers International League, a British group which had already dissolved long ago.

130 See LRCI: *Plan versus Market: Economics and Politics in the Transition from Capitalism to Communism*, in: *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 9 London 1996. The main contributors to this work were Keith Harvey and Fritz Haller, a former comrade from the Austrian section.

1992-1995: Balkan Wars

In Yugoslavia – a multi-national country – the collapse of Stalinism also led to an implosion of the federal state. The national sections of the bureaucratic caste split and decided to restore capitalist property relations. In such a dramatic transformation, they could only hope to keep power if they stirred up nationalist hatred in order to rally their people behind them.

The Serbian bureaucracy under Milosevic started this process in 1987 by escalating the oppression of the Kosova people and by systematically subordinating other provinces (Montenegro, Kosova and Vojvodina). As a result, Belgrade was able to control half of the eight votes in the federal leadership and thus threatened to oppress the other republics. The Slovenian as well as the Croatian bureaucracy under Tudjman headed for separate states. The latter combined this with chauvinist oppression of the Serbian minorities in Eastern Croatia as well as in the Knin region. Naturally the Western imperialist powers tried to intervene, but initially there were different strategies how this could be best done: from early on German and Austrian imperialism supported separatism in contrast to the UK and US.

The LRCI defended the national right of self-determination and hence defended Slovenia against the Yugoslavian army's attack in June 1991. We took a defeatist position in the war between Serbia and Croatia since both sides waged war in order to oppress each other. At the same we defended the right of self-determination for national minorities (like the Serbs in Croatia). We warned that the nationalism instigated by the ruling regimes served as a distraction from the capitalist restoration. We called for the overthrow of the restorationist regimes and the creation of workers' republics and a socialist Balkan federation.

In the early 1990s, the author of these lines traveled repeatedly on behalf of the LRCI to Serbia and built links with progressive anti-war activists. We translated a number of documents into Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian language and distributed them in the Balkans as well as among migrants in Austria. In addition, in 1992 we co-organized a demonstration of 1,500 mostly Serbian migrant workers against the chauvinist anti-Serbian wave which so strongly dominated imperialist and petty-bourgeois "public opinion." There were two speakers at this demonstration – Pröbsting and a Serbian migrant comrade – and we called for opposition to both the imperialist campaign and Serbian nationalism.¹³¹

In April 1992 the chauvinist forces – in particular those around the Serbian nationalist Karadžić – provoked the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This brought unspeakable suffering to the Bosnian Muslims and those Serbs and Croats who resisted the nationalist partition of Bosnia by the Serbian and

131 We have published a detailed report on this: Michael Gatter: Yugoslavia: bringing the War to Austria, 29.9.1992, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/yugoslavia-bringing-war-austria>

Croatian chauvinists. According to a report about the 1992-95 war written by the head of the Bosnian Delegation to the United Nations in 2008, 200,000 people were killed, 12,000 of them children, up to 50,000 women were raped, and 2.2 million were forced to flee their homes (in a country of about 4 million people).

We denounced the reactionary Bosnian government of Alija Izetbegović which – like the bureaucracies of the other republics – was striving to restore capitalism and which failed to defend the Bosnian people against the chauvinist aggressors. We called for international support for the liberation war of the Bosnian people and combined this with the perspective of a multi-national workers' republic in Bosnia as part of a socialist Balkan federation. We denounced the US and EU imperialists who strangled the Bosnian resistance with an arms embargo and whose UN troops collaborated with the Serbian chauvinists when the butcher General Mladić organized the mass murder of 8,000 Muslim men in Srebrenica in July 1995.

The LRCI was part of the *“International Workers' Aid”* campaign delivering medicine, clothes, etc. for the workers in Tuzla and other places and the author of these lines acted as the Austrian coordinator of this campaign. We called for arms and international volunteer brigades for the Bosnian resistance and denounced the NATO bombing campaign in the summer of 1995 which stopped the Bosnian liberation forces just when they were starting to advance and take back the areas they had lost in the first years of the war.

While many centrists either took a neutral position in this war and some even supported Serbian chauvinism, the RCIT stood for the victory of the Bosnian people and the defeat of reactionary Serbian chauvinists and combined this with the perspective of a socialist Balkan federation.

In this context, we should also note that, at the time, we initially made an error. Only belatedly, after some months, did we recognize that the Bosnian war was a genocidal war from the start. We had held a defeatist position in the first few months after April 1992, and only defended the Bosnian side from the autumn of 1992 onwards. Again, this was an error and we should have had defended the Bosnian side against the Serbian (and Croatian) chauvinists from the very beginning. Within the LRCI's international leadership, the author of these lines argued, together with other comrades, for a correction of the LRCI's line. At an international leadership meeting in July 1995, Pröbsting proposed the following statement:

“The main weakness of our position during that period was that the terrible genocide was not initiated after the autumn, but most major conquests of Muslim territory by the Bosnian Serbs happened during this period. Therefore, we only started to defend the Muslims when they had already suffered their most serious defeats. When we changed our tactics in November 1992, we mentioned two decisive facts: i) the breakup of the Muslim-Croat alliance and ii) the decision of imperialism not to make a full-scale military intervention. Both reasons were not sufficient to create a qualitatively new

situation. The breakup of the alliance with the Croats, important as it was, should not have been decisive for our defensist position because this alliance in itself did not (in this first period) and does not (since its renewal in March 1994) change the situation of the genocide committed against the Muslims. Despite the existence of this alliance, the Muslims (and also the Croats) were wiped out of many parts of the country between April and November 1992. This alliance was not strong enough to counter the offensive by the Karadziz-chauvinists. The abandoning of a full-scale imperialist military intervention should also not have been decisive for our tactics. We know that the main reasons for the war were in the internal Yugoslavian and Bosnian relation of forces. While we should have changed our tactics immediately in the case of an imperialist intervention, it was not correct to argue that the possibility of such an intervention was sufficient enough not to defend the Muslims and the multi-ethnic Bosnians.”

However, this position only received the support of a significant minority and was thus defeated.

More importantly, in 1995 the LRCI faced a split by a small opposition among our ranks which supported pro-Stalinist and pro-Serbian chauvinist positions. This split included the small Bolivian and Peruvian groups led by José Villa, as well as part of the New Zealand section. Leaving aside the fact that Villa, coming from a wealthy background, had for years proved himself to be a mini-caudillio and unprincipled intriguer incapable of collective discipline, these comrades proved unable to understand the importance of the democratic question, particularly in periods of sharp class antagonism and the lack of a socialist leadership.¹³²

132 The Bolivian and Peruvian groups soon dissolved and José Villa, completely demoralized, became a pro-Zionist journalist. In contrast to these two South American groups, the New Zealand group around Dave Brown remained politically active. In 2009/10 they developed – simultaneously but independent of us – a correct and insightful analysis of emerging Chinese imperialism. They also called – even earlier than we did officially – for the Fifth International. They also managed to take a much better position on the Arab Revolution and the democratic issues it involved than they did in the early 1990s. Unfortunately, they have still not completely freed themselves from their sectarian and economist tradition and are obsessively attached to a nation-centered method of party-building. For a fuller critical assessment by the RCIT, see: Michael Pröbsting: The Military’s Coup d’État in Egypt: Assessment and Tactics. A reply to the criticism of the WIVP and the LCC on the meaning of the Military’s Coup d’État and the slogan of the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly, 17.7.2013, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 12, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-meaning-of-coup-d-etat/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Coup d’État in Egypt and the Bankruptcy of the Left’s “Army Socialism”. A Balance Sheet of the coup and another Reply to our Critics (LCC, WIVP, SF/LCFI), 8.8.2013, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 13, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-and-left-army-socialism/>; Michael Pröbsting: Thailand: Shall Socialists Defend the Government Against the Military Coup? Reply to a Neo-Bordigist Polemic of the “Liaison Committee of Communists”, 24.5.2014, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 23, June 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup-reply/>

1997-1999: The National Liberation Struggle in Kosova and NATO's War against Serbia

The Milosevic regime tried to make up for its losses by intensifying the oppression of the Kosova people. In the 1990s, it crushed the heroic miners' strike in 1989 and tried to smash the boycott campaign against public institutions.¹³³ Finally, an armed uprising started in 1997 led by the petty-bourgeois-nationalist UÇK which originated from the Hoxahist LPK. It resulted in a civil war. The imperialists tried to contain the uprising by the so-called Rambouillet Agreement. However the uprising continued. Meanwhile NATO used the civil war as a pretext to build up its military presence in the Balkans and started an aerial war against Serbia. This ended with the cessation of the Serbian occupation but at the same time Kosova became a territory occupied by NATO and EU. This was helped by the betrayal of the UÇK leadership which served as an instrument in post-war Kosova.

The LRCI supported the national liberation struggle of the Kosova-Albanians from the beginning. The Kosova-Albanians had been nationally oppressed by Serbia since 1913 and had always desired independence from Belgrade. We stood for the victory of the uprising and called for a Kosova workers republic. We gave no political support to the petty-bourgeois UÇK leadership and defended Serbia against the NATO bombardment.

We also started to collaborate with Kosova-Albanian migrants in Austria and organized solidarity work. When the armed uprising spread after the massacre of Dreniza on 6 March 1998, the community organized a mass rally of 3,000 Albanian migrant workers and youth in Vienna. The Austrian section was invited to speak from the platform. I spoke as our representative and expressed our solidarity with the national liberation struggle for an independent Kosova of workers and peasants and warned against any interference from NATO imperialism.

Again – in contrast to centrists who failed to support the Kosova-Albanians – we can proudly record that we took a principled position both in propaganda as well as practice by supporting the Kosovar uprising, combining it with a socialist perspective while calling for the defeat of NATO's war against Serbia.

¹³³ The author of these lines visited Kosova in 1994 and gained first-hand experience with Serbian state repression when he was kidnapped for a short time by the secret service UDBA.

1994 until Today: The Uprising of the Chechen People against the Russian Occupation

Russia's two wars of occupation against the Chechen people – the first in the years 1994-96 and the second since late 1999 – were of equal importance during this decade. Against the desire of the Chechen people for independence, Moscow waged an incredibly brutal war. During the first war it massacred about 100,000 Chechens and during the second again up to 50,000 (in a country with a population of only one million!). The victory of the Chechen guerilla war in 1996 was an impressive event – compare the small Chechen people with Russia's 143 millions! – demonstrating once again how much a liberation war supported by the whole population can achieve against a demoralized great power. While the Putin regime has succeeded in occupying the country until now, the resistance continues at a low level. This resistance has become dominated mostly by petty-bourgeois Islamist forces.

We supported the Chechen liberation struggle from the beginning and called for the defeat of the Russian occupation forces. We gave no political support to the petty-bourgeois and Islamist leaderships and called for an independent workers' and peasant republic of Chechnya.

The Chechen war also provided the backdrop for a deeper analysis of Russian capitalism. In March 2001 Pröbsting drafted a document in which he analyzed the development of capitalist restoration in Russia in the 1990s and explained how the country has been transformed into an imperialist power. He put forward a resolution to that effect to a LRCI leadership meeting. However his resolution was defeated as the majority erroneously believed that Russia had become a semi-colonial country.

This reflected that, as early as the 1990s, when the LRCI was still a revolutionary tendency, the majority of its members faced enormous difficulties in applying Lenin's theory of imperialism when faced with new developments. A longer, internal, and controversy-laden process of discussions was necessary to correct this incorrect assessment of Russian imperialism.

At the next congress of the LRCI in April 2003, he again put forward a resolution on Russian imperialism, and this time our position received a narrow majority of the delegates' votes.

The Difficulties in Party Building in the 1990s and the Struggle against Passive Propagandism

The 1990s were a difficult period for party building. Paraphrasing James P. Cannon's formulation, we could speak about our "*Dog Days*." After the destruction of the degenerated workers states and the victory of imperialism in Eastern Europe as well as in the Gulf war, a democratic-reactionary phase had commenced. It led to the crisis and demoralization of huge sectors of the workers' movements. The Stalinist world-movement collapsed, the social democratic left became even less left, and many centrists despaired. They talked about the "*midnight of the century*" and "*the end of the epoch of October*."

We didn't despair because we were aware that the removal of Stalinism would have positive consequences in the long run and that the defeats in Eastern Europe couldn't remove the structural contradictions of world capitalism and, hence, would sooner or later lead to new periods of capitalist crisis and class struggle.

First and foremost, these historic upheavals demanded that revolutionaries elaborate a correct theoretical understanding and programmatic orientation. Our organization passed this test very well. We proved ourselves capable of applying a program of political revolution against the Stalinist regimes under concrete conditions and succeeded in developing it further. The few theoretical mistakes we made were later corrected. So the main task in this period was defending the revolutionary program in order to consolidate and educate the cadre for the future struggles; we stood the test.

However the defeats of the 1990s and our focus on programmatic and theoretical debates had also important negative consequences for our development. It helped to develop or strengthen a conservative, inward looking mentality among substantial sectors of our members who had an appetite for internal discussions and maybe selling the paper at a demonstration (and in some cases even doing some routine trade union work). But many members were inexperienced in or even hostile to activism and openly communist participation in mass movements and struggles, in agitation directed to people without Marxist education, and in recruiting new activists from outside the milieu of the old left. This was a crucial issue, since we understood that we had to turn to the youth who were much less affected by the demoralizing ramifications of Stalinism and its collapse than older workers.

In the end, this was not so surprising. Revolutionaries are, like all human beings, influenced by the times they are living in and by the dominating "*Zeitgeist*". Changes of the world situation or of the class struggle may often lead to the loss of many comrade-in-arms who are overwhelmed by the new historical necessities demanded by the changed conditions of class struggle. This might shock the one or other communist at the very beginning but it should never become an obstacle in taking the necessary steps. As Lenin said:

*„Communists who have no illusions, who do not give way to despondency, and who preserve their strength and flexibility “to begin from the beginning” over and over again in approaching an extremely difficult task, are not doomed (and in all probability will not perish).“*¹³⁴

Together with other leading cadres, Pröbsting pushed for a re-orientation of the LRCI towards the resurging class struggle in the second half of the 1990s. We were aware that, if we do not reach out to new layers of activists, our membership will decline and become increasingly conservative in its outlook. However our efforts were met with open hostility from some and passive resistance from many more comrades. As a result we lost a number of them during the 1990s. The British section had less than half as many members as in 1990. In the year 2000, the Austrian section also lost more than half of its comrades who were not prepared to re-orient themselves in words and deeds, something which involved taking up exemplary mass work and carrying out recruitment from new layers. Our experience taught us that while it may be possible to pass resolutions about adopting an activist, outward orientation, it can be very difficult to make these comrades change their attitude so that they are capable of implementing such a re-orientation.

This was one of numerous experiences we needed to get on with our progress. Those of us who learned the lessons were not surprised or despondent during subsequent internal fights but, quite the contrary, bore down to face every fight that was necessary to keep the Marxist ranks free from any revisionist deviations.

We also made numerical gains by winning a group in Sweden and later in the Czech Republic. We also built a small group in Australia by transferring cadres from New Zealand. We also supported the German section by transferring several cadres and winning over an ex-Lambertist group of trade unionists. However, three important weaknesses remained: The remaining majority has not learned the lessons of the past internal struggles in their entirety. We also remained a largely European tendency with hardly any members in the semi-colonial world. In addition, our tendency was largely composed of intellectuals, students, and labor aristocrats. As we will see, these weaknesses would weigh heavily on the LRCI, and constituted a negative heritage.

134 V.I.Lenin: Notes Of A Publicist (1922); in: LCW, Vol. 33, p. 207

Discussing the Character of the Period

An important debate in the LRCI in the 1990s was the discussion on the character of the period. The majority view – adopted at the second congress in 1992 – was that the events in 1989-91 had opened a “*democratic-reactionary phase*” which however was only the first phase of a “*world-historic revolutionary period.*” While we agreed with the assessment that the defeats of 1991 had opened a short-term “*democratic-reactionary phase,*” from the beginning the author of these lines and other comrades opposed the view that we had entered a “*revolutionary period.*” We argued that the capitalist crisis had not yet been exacerbated to the degree that would result in massive destabilization of world politics and the global economy. We argued that such developments inevitably lay ahead, but that this would only happen at a later period. The character of the period in 1990s, we explained, had rather a “*transitional character.*”

Accordingly, Pröbsting put forward corresponding resolutions to the next LRCI congresses in 1994 and 1997 but lost. Finally he succeeded in gaining a majority at the congress in 2000. Year after year in which no revolutionary events of world-wide significance took place, contrary to their expectations, certainly helped the comrades to come over to our analysis. The following is the key section of the adopted resolution drafted by the author of these lines:

*“While the LRCI stood the test of the new period in the 1990s in a programmatic sense, it misunderstood the character of the period we are in. We characterised the period overoptimistically as a revolutionary one. We expected the deepening of the contradictions of capitalism, the rivalry between the great powers and as a consequence a massive upswing of class struggles and the emergence of revolutionary situations sooner than has happened. In reality, this process, as outlined above, was slower and more contradictory than we expected. In reality, the elements cited above prevented the period from having a revolutionary character. This does not mean that the LRCI was fundamentally wrong in its assessment of the dynamic of the world wide class equilibrium. We were wrong in assessing the tempo, not the fundamental direction, of the dynamic of the capitalist contradictions. Indeed, the elements of stability of the imperialist world system are decreasing and the elements of instability are increasing, as was apparent by the end of the democratic counter-revolutionary phase in 1997/98. But the period from the beginning of the last decade until now did not have a revolutionary character, marked by sharp contradictions. In the context of “global capitalism,” and continuing US-hegemony, imperialism was able to achieve a relative, temporary stabilisation, which reminds us – to draw a historic analogy – of 1896-1913 rather than 1914-1948. This period bears a character of one preparing for future world-wide political explosions. One can characterise it as a transitional period or one of Interregnum.”*¹³⁵

True, the majority of comrades did not arrive at tactical mistakes from their incorrect position on the character of the world period. But their mistake gave

¹³⁵ Resolution on the World Situation and its historic Place in the Imperialist Epoch; in: LRCI IIB 129 (23 August 2000) Congress Documents of the V. LRCI Congress.

unnecessary ammunition to those pessimistic comrades inside and opponents outside of the LRCI who polemicized against us. And, even more importantly, it reflected a theoretical confusion of this majority of comrades and helped create confusion among future members, which would seriously disorientate them when a global revolutionary period eventually opened in 2008/09.

In the final analysis, one has to say that, unfortunately, the majority of the leading comrades failed to understand the method behind the Marxist characterization of historical periods. Every change of the world situation demonstrated how they would stumble around with eyes closed, unable to correctly analyze the nature of the period and to understand its consequences. This inability, together with their unwillingness to at least accept our correct analyses was, in the long run, a crucial factor which ultimately led to the degeneration of the entire organization. We will elaborate on this below.

In these discussions on the character of the period, the author of these lines also provided an outlook of future developments in world politics for which revolutionaries should prepare. Written in the spring of 2000, we think this outlook made a prognosis which was broadly confirmed by the events of the following decade. Here is a key excerpt of a draft document written by Pröbsting:

“Towards a new, revolutionary crisis period

In all probability, the imperialist system will experience a sharp crisis and the opening of a new revolutionary period – probably in this decade. The reasons for this are: i) the accumulation of explosive contradictions in the imperialist world economy, ii) continued development of block formations and inner-imperialist rivalry, iii) the lack of important pre-conditions for a new boom period (like e.g., massive destruction of capital, a clear imperialist Hegemon, historic defeat of the working class in the imperialist centers), iv) in many countries the working class is still not decisively beaten and even sees an upswing of class struggles.

This new period will be characterised by a more intense rivalry between the great imperialist powers. Until now these contradiction have been suppressed by the heavy weight of the USA, but they are nevertheless present and express themselves (building of a separate EU army, steps towards the re-armament of Japan, repeated trade conflicts). US imperialism also lacks the resources to integrate Russia and China into a kind of world political alliance. Instead the contradiction between Moscow, Peking and Washington will increase, but Russia and China can challenge the USA not on a global but only regional level (e.g. Caucasus, Central Asia, Taiwan, South Chinese Sea)

This new period will be marked by a tendency of advancing block formation, particularly around USA (NAFTA, Latin America), EU (Eastern Europe, Northern Africa), and Japan (parts of Asia). This also implies increasing attacks against the oppressed people in the semi-colonies and an attempt to subordinate them further under the imperialist command (e.g., “Dollarization,” stationing of imperialist troops up to the formation of protectorates à la Balkans, etc).

The period ahead of us will witness an increase of world political instability. This

implies more civil wars and wars between states in the future, first in the weakest chain of the imperialist world system – the semi-colonial states (look to Africa, the Balkans, the Caucasus, etc.)

Against the backdrop of a crisis-ridden capitalist development, capital will be forced to increasingly attack the working class world-wide. In countries where the bourgeoisie has not succeeded until now in turning around the relation of forces qualitatively at the shop floor level – particularly in continental Europe and Japan – we will see more intense attacks. Given the upswing of the class struggle and the revival of the trade unions which suffered heavy defeats in the past (AFL-CIO in the USA) we can expect sharp clashes between the classes. (...)

Against this backdrop of increasing economic and world political contradictions, there will be an increased importance of national and democratic struggles. Precisely because the great imperialist powers are pushing for penetration and subjugation of the semi-colonies (and ex-Stalinist states) but at the same time are not capable of delivering economic and political stabilisation for these regions, there will be an increase of national rebellions against the great powers or their henchmen. For the same reason the bourgeois classes will increasingly be forced to hold onto their power by authoritarian means. Clashes with the working class (and the petty bourgeoisie) will be the result. These struggles can and will, in one form or another, be combined with social protests and insurrections.

These are the elements which will put international conflicts including wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions into the center of world politics. These are the elements which characterise a revolutionary period. These are the elements which make the building of a new revolutionary mass international more important and more realistic than ever. In the fire of many class battles, in defeats and victories revolutions, a new layer of the proletariat and the youth will be politically educated. Against this backdrop the ideas of revolutionary communism will fall on fertile ground. The new revolutionary international will be able to rally the proletarian vanguard.”¹³⁶

136 ASt resolution for the V. LRCI Congress: Thesis on the world situation and its historic place in the imperialist epoch

iii) The LRCI/LFI in the Period from 2001 to 2008: Pre-Revolutionary Period of Imperialist Wars and Resistance

The year 2001 saw the beginning of a new period in world politics with the 9/11 attacks and the imperialist war against Afghanistan as well as the rising anti-globalization protests. These events reflected that the imperialist world order had become less stable, imperialist wars in the South would become a regular feature, mass resistance in the semi-colonial world was increasing, and mass movements against the effects of global capitalism were also increasing even in the imperialist countries. They opened up a new political period which was no longer dominated by the collapse of Stalinism but by the offensive of monopolies and great imperialist powers and the mass resistance against them. Thus Pröbsting concluded in autumn 2001 that this new period had a pre-revolutionary character, i.e., a period of increasing contradictions of world capitalism and sharper class struggles which would at some point be transformed into a revolutionary period.

This characterization was supported by the healthier elements inside the leadership, but also met with strong resistance from others. The latter were rather inclined towards a conservative, passive-propagandist outlook which already forewarned of their later degeneration. But gradually we succeeded in overcoming this resistance, at least on the surface, and at the sixth congress in April 2003 our characterization was adopted. However, the sources of disagreement remained subliminally, waiting to manifest themselves much more severely at a later time.

2001: The Imperialist War of Aggression against Afghanistan

Immediately after the 9/11 events the LRCI warned that the US imperialism and its allies would use this as a pretext to *“prepare a sustained war on the peoples of the Third World, especially on those peoples who fight back.”* We called for the defeat of the imperialist war drive and concluded our statement: *“Defend any state or people targeted for revenge attacks by the USA and NATO”* ¹³⁷

When the war against Afghanistan was approaching, we issued statements and leaflets with the heading *“Defend Afghanistan! Defeat Imperialism!”* At the same time we condemned the Taliban as a reactionary force. We supported their military resistance but could not give them any political support. When the imperialists succeeded in occupying the country and a guerilla war for national liberation began, we continued to uphold our anti-imperialist stand.

This put us in sharp opposition to most centrists who refused to call for the

¹³⁷ LRCI: Fight imperialist hypocrisy! Reject individual terrorism! Stop US military retaliation! Statement on 9/11 Attacks by the International Secretariat of the LRCI, 13.9.2001, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/north-america/resolution-on-9-11/>

defense of Afghanistan claiming that one could not support a country led by radical Islamists like the Taliban. The centrist's pacifism reflected their adaption to the liberal intelligentsia and the labor bureaucracy which again was under the impact of the huge imperialist public relations campaign regarding the need "to fight against terrorism" which "threatens us all."¹³⁸ In short, the Afghanistan war and the following occupation drew a sharp class line between consistent Marxists who take an unambiguous anti-imperialist stand and the centrists who cover their adaption to imperialism by social-pacifist phrases.

In the weeks before the beginning of the Afghanistan War there was a certain vacillation among some comrades of the Workers Power leadership who did not take a clear anti-imperialist position, i.e., defend the Taliban against the great imperialist powers. However the LRCI leadership intervened and we corrected this mistake.

Our sections participated in the anti-war mobilizations and in Austria we were able to make first contacts with Muslim migrants communities. These contacts and our experience in collaboration with these brothers and sisters would prove to be invaluable for our future work among the masses.

In this context we shall also point to the Palestine solidarity work which the LRCI started with the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000. Several comrades went to Palestine as part of the *International Solidarity Movement*. We combined this practical work with propaganda for our long-standing position of support for the Palestinian liberation struggle with the strategic goal of smashing the Zionist state and replacing it with a multi-national Palestinian workers and fellahin republic from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. We also participated in the solidarity demonstrations with the Lebanese resistance against the Israeli attack in the summer of 2006.

2003-2011: The War in Iraq and the Struggle against Imperialism

As we had predicted, the war against Afghanistan was just the beginning of the imperialist offensive to subjugate the Middle East. From the autumn of 2002, the US and Britain were preparing for another war against Iraq. This provoked a mass anti-war movement around the world, including inside the imperialist metropolises. At its high point – the international day of action on 15 February 2003 – between 15-20 million persons demonstrated around the world against the war-mongers Bush and Blair. This movement – definitely the most impressive mass movement in the imperialist countries since 1968 – received additional impetus with the beginning of the US/UK attack on 20 March. While the imperialists succeeded in conquering the country, they were soon faced with an armed mass insurrection. Their occupation became so costly and unpopular even among their own population that finally the US and British governments had to withdraw their forces in 2011.

¹³⁸ See Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, pp. 336-370

Based on our anti-imperialist program, the LRCI called for the defense of Iraq and the defeat of the imperialist aggressors. At the same time we rejected any political support for the Baathist or Islamist forces. Inside the anti-war movements we fought against the reformist and pacifist forces who appealed to the UN “*to find a solution*” and against those who equally condemned both sides, the US/UK and Iraq.

The sections of the LRCI took an active part in the mass demonstrations against the war. The Austrian section was able to develop exemplary mass work the furthest and would play a leading and initiating role in anti-war protests. At the school students’ strike on 20 March 2003, we had a substantial contingent of students. After this we were a central part of an anti-war collation which initiated a number of protest actions. The high point was on 21 June 2006 when US president Bush visited Vienna (Austria’s capital city). On that day alone we initiated a school student strike in the morning in which 5,000 school students participated. At the same time our coalition – together with a reformist-dominated coalition – called for a mass demonstration in the evening in which 25,000 people participated. Just before this, the author of these lines was sentenced by a court for leading a protest action of several dozen activists against a pro-war meeting organized by Zionists.

This exemplary anti-imperialist mass work – together with our campaigns and school strikes against cuts in education – constituted the most important area which allowed the Austrian section to recruit new layers of militants and to build a sizeable youth organization. We combined sharp criticism of the politics of various reformists and centrists with a flexible application of the united front tactic. After the requisite sharp internal debates on issues of strategic re-orientation and methods of party building – and the resulting loss of a number of conservative members – we had prepared and built an organization which was willing and able to implement this line. The result was a rapid growth of both the Austrian section as well as the youth organization. Those members who proved to be unwilling to carry on as dedicated revolutionaries had left our organization and soon gave up organized political activity altogether.

Revolutionary Developments in Latin America: Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, and the Bolivarian Movement

The new period found also expression in the upswing of class struggles in Latin America. In Argentina, the capitalist crisis and the continuous neoliberal attacks finally provoked a spontaneous mass uprising in December 2001 – the so-called *Argentinazo* – which caused several presidents to resign in a period of a few weeks. During this uprising the *piqueteros* (unemployed activists) – about a third of the working class had been made unemployed at that time – and the proletarian youth played a major role. A number of enterprises faced with bankruptcy – the most prominent of them were Zanon and Brukman – were

taken over by their workers and production was continued under workers' self-management. At the same time, the majority of trade unions remained under the control of the Peronist and the CTA bureaucracies and did everything to derail this revolutionary situation.

In 2002, the author of these lines was sent twice as the LRCI representative to Argentina and spent nearly half a year there. During that time we collaborated with the PTS, a sizeable Trotskyist organization. Unfortunately, the discussions were concluded without any concrete results because we could not overcome our political differences (e.g., the application of the united front tactic towards reformists and trade unions including the workers' party tactic).¹³⁹ More importantly, however, was the PTS's rejection in principle of taking steps towards joint international work. Furthermore, the situation was assisted by a conservative tendency among the majority of the LRCI leadership who also opposed our efforts to advance our discussions with the PTS.

In retrospect, this conservatism has to be severely condemned. It expressed the unwillingness to approach activists from semi-colonial countries at times in which it would have resulted in a tremendous improvement of the class composition of the LRCI (i.e., overcoming the limitations inherent to an organization based only in imperialist Europe). Progress in our discussion with the PTS could have led to a fusion which may have eventually been followed by a split. However, at the time, it would have made a vast improvement in the organization's composition and in the collective experiences of its members, as well as a substantially increasing its size. The author of these lines has to self-critically admit that, at the time, he did not sufficiently fight against the conservatism on this issue among the majority of the LRCI leadership, with the consequences which this would lead to.

In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez came to power in 1998, being carried along by the huge wave of desire of the popular masses to overcome their social misery. He soon faced strong hostility both of the majority of the domestic bourgeoisie as well as US imperialism which resulted in an attempted coup d'état in April 2002. During the 2000s the Chavez government took several state-capitalist measures (like the nationalization of the oil corporation PDVSA) and created social welfare programs for the poor (the so-called *misiones*). He combined this with strong anti-imperialist and socialist propaganda – including a call for a new Fifth International – and created a continent-wide movement which was often called the *Bolivarian* movement.

A similar movement coalesced in Bolivia where Evo Morales was elected as president in 2005. He also had the support of most trade unions, peasant

139 In addition, one has to say that the PTS leadership had a too conservative attitude towards the *piquetero* movement which constituted the leading force during the revolutionary crisis. The PTS's correct insistence on the importance of the *industrial* proletariat made them overlook that revolutionaries should orient towards the entire proletariat and recognize the importance of its lower strata. As a result, the PTS was not able to grow during the revolutionary period in the year 2002, contrary to other "Trotskyist" parties like the PO.

federations, and other mass organizations. Like in Venezuela, his program of social reforms and limited state intervention in the economy provoked the resistance of the right wing parties and the Western imperialists. Later on, similar governments came to power in Ecuador and in Peru. They increasingly collaborated with the emerging imperialist powers China and Russia.

Many reformists as well as centrists like the IMT of Alan Woods hailed the Bolivarian regimes as “socialist.” They took Chavez’s promise to “*construct 21st century Bolivarian socialism*” at face value and supported the Bolivarian movement. In fact the Bolivarian regimes were not “socialist” but rather bourgeois, left-populist regimes. They represent popular front governments which are close allies of Chinese and Russian imperialism.

This, however, must not lead revolutionaries to ignore the fact that the Bolivarian movement has a lot of support among anti-imperialist and socialist-minded workers and peasants. Simply denouncing Bolivarian popular-frontism is not sufficient. This is why our movement – while sharply criticizing the Bolivarian policy – argued for applying the united front tactic. We defend the Bolivarian regimes against the coup plotters as well as imperialist pressure. We call for joint activities with these forces and – would Chavez have founded a “Fifth International” in 2009/10 – we would have attempted to fight as a revolutionary faction inside such an International against the Bolivarian misleaderships. The goal has to be to break up the popular front and constitute the working class as an independent force.

The Anti-Globalization Movement

The accelerating contradictions of capitalist globalization and the imperialist war offensives provoked a growing mass protest movement. This anti-globalization movement took to the streets for the first time at the WTO negotiations in Seattle (USA) in 1999, but became a mass movement in 2001. The biggest mobilizations took place against the meetings of the great imperialist powers – the G-7 summits. There were also important gatherings of the *World Social Forum* (WSF) respectively the *European Social Forum* (ESF).

Of particular relevance were the mobilizations against the G-7 summits in Genoa (Italy) in the summer of 2001 as well as in Heiligendamm (Germany) in 2007. Both saw international mass mobilizations and massive clashes with the repression apparatus. The LRCI mobilized sizeable international contingents to these events. Particularly memorable were the days of street fighting in Genoa when the young militant Carlo Giuliani was murdered by the Carabinieri. The day after the murder, 400,000 people participated in a mass protest. In these mobilizations and battles we proved that we had become an organization not only capable of producing good propaganda but also of undertaking necessary actions. Two of our comrades were arrested in this event – among them the author of these lines.

There were also various ESF conferences which we attended with sizeable delegations. At these conferences we argued for a strategy oriented to the working class and militant mobilizations. We confronted the reformist and petty-bourgeois leaderships which opposed any kind of democratic structures in order to build an organized and democratically controlled movement. In fact, the reformist forces – mainly a coalition of the ex-Stalinist *European Left Party* with various trade union bureaucrats and petty-bourgeois “civil-society” leaders with the support of centrists like the Cliffite IST – wanted to have their hands free for backstage maneuverings. One of the reformists’ tools was the so-called “*consensus principle*” which meant that decisions could be made only if everyone in the room agreed to them. This allowed the bureaucrats to prevent any unpleasant decisions.

Inside the LRCI leadership we had a controversial discussion about the character of the anti-globalization movement. Pröbsting argued for support and participation in this movement as a revolutionary opposition while at the same time pointing out the movement’s cross-class character given the strong presence of petty-bourgeois “civil society” forces. Hence, he called it the “*anti-globalization movement*.” However, the leadership majority downplayed this contradictory class character and called the movement an “*anti-capitalist movement*.” This incorrectly suggested that this movement was at least subjectively directed against capitalism as such. However, this was most definitely not true because Social Forum declarations and indeed the consciousness of many activists were primarily opposed to neo-liberalism and wars, but not to capitalism per se. These differences led to occasional conflicts inside the LRCI leadership about tactics to be used against the Social Forum leadership. For example, not all of the LRCI leaders were happy when we – and a number of anti-war activists – staged a protest at the ESF conference in London in 2004, as the organizers had invited a leader of the Iraqi Communist Party to speak from the platform. We opposed his presence, since his party was, from the beginning, part of the US occupation administration in Iraq. To the indignation of the SWP leaders, who defended his presence, we thwarted the Iraqi CP’s leader speech.

The Crisis of Reformism and the New Workers’ Party Tactic

The exacerbation of the class contradictions and the neo-liberal policies of the social democratic parties in Europe created a crisis and the decline of reformism. This led to the formation of new reformist or centrist parties to the left of social democracy. Most notable among these were the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (NPA) in France, the *RESPECT* party led by George Galloway in Britain and the *Linkspartei* in Germany. Later, the ex-Stalinist *European Left Party* (ELP) also saw an upswing in some countries (SYRIZA in Greece, *Izquierda Unida*, in Spain) while it had discredited itself in Italy where *Rifondazione Comunista* had supported the neoliberal popular front government of Romano Prodi.

The LRCI responded to the crisis of social democracy by advocating the new workers' party tactic, i.e., calling unions and progressive activists to break with social democracy and to unite in building new workers' party. We argued that such a party should have a revolutionary program of action. However, we also made clear that we did not consider the adoption of such a program as a precondition for our participating in its formation. We criticized the reformist or centrist leaderships of the new left of social democracy parties referred to above, which usually had a strategic orientation towards elections rather than building a mass party through participation and mobilizations for mass struggles.

While our British comrades did not participate in the RESPECT party of George Galloway, our German comrades participated for some time in the WASG (which later would fuse with the ex-Stalinist PDS to form the Linkspartei) while comrades in France entered the NPA.

In the summer of 2008, the Austria section co-initiated a left-wing electoral list with several centrist and left-reformist groups (e.g., the CWI, Stalinists, Turkish migrant groups, former social democrats) when the Austrian social democracy was hit by an important internal crisis. While the electoral alliance was a failure, it enabled us to recruit a number of youth and workers and helped to educate our membership and periphery through the political debates which we held inside the electoral alliance. It also helped us to gain some public prominence when our leading candidate, Nina Gunić, called at a press conference for the "*expropriation of the super-rich.*" This anti-capitalist statement did not only provoke outrage among bourgeois commentators but also among the reformist and centrist forces inside the electoral alliance.¹⁴⁰

140 Here is an incomplete selection of some articles from the bourgeois media decrying Nina Gunić statement:

Die Presse: Linkspjekt will die "oberen Zehntausend" enteignen, 22.07.2008, http://diepresse.com/home/politik/neuwahlen/400293/index.do?_vl_backlink=/home/index.do

DER STANDARD: Linkspjekt will „die oberen 10.000“ enteignen, 22.07.2008, <http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=1216325364129>

Kronen Zeitung: Sehr linkes Ziel: Linkspjekt will die „oberen 10.000“ enteignen, 22.7.2008, http://www.krone.at/index.php?http%3A//www.krone.at/krone/S25/object_id__108413/hxcms/index.html

ÖSTERREICH: Linkspjekt will „obere 10.000“ enteignen, 22. Juli 2008, <http://www.oe24.at/zeitung/oesterreich/politik/neuwahlen/article335452.ece>

Christoph Rella: Die Rückkehr der Sozialisten, 22.7.2008, <http://www.wienerzeitung.at/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=3858&Alias=wzo&cob=362076>

Internal Debates and the Split in 2006

At the sixth congress in 2003, the LRCI debated the slogan calling for the founding of the Fifth International. We argued that the “Trotskyist” milieu had proven once more that it is completely incapable of meeting the challenges of the class struggle by providing revolutionary answers. We explained that it is necessary to orient to new layers of workers and youth most of whom have no “Trotskyist” education. We understood the slogan of the Fifth International also as the application of the New Workers’ Party tactic on an international scale, i.e., approaching radical, left-moving sectors of the working class and oppressed who are looking to build a political alternative.

However, a significant minority of our tendency opposed this slogan. They did so because they effectively rejected our orientation to the new and radicalized layers of workers and youth and preferred an orientation to the traditional left and old trade unionists. In the end we adopted the slogan of the Fifth International and renamed our organization “*League for the Fifth International*” (LFI).

In addition, also recognizing the fact that a new period had started, we discussed and adopted a new program.¹⁴¹

The acceleration of the class contradictions and struggles opened the opportunity to orient to mass movements and to recruit new layers of young militants. The LRCI did this successfully in some countries (Austria, Germany, and Britain) while in some others the comrades proved incapable of building the group and had stagnated over years (Sweden, Czech Republic, and France).

All in all, this was obviously a positive development. However, given the tensions looming inside our organization between the conservative minority which favored a passive-propagandist orientation, and those who supported orienting ourselves to actual struggles and recruiting new layers of activists, this development rather exacerbated the tensions. Most of the opponents of the Fifth International slogan in the British section would soon start a faction struggle which would dominate the inner-party discussions in 2004-06.

The minority, which would later constitute itself as a tendency and then as a faction, attacked the *New Workers’ Party tactic*, soon started to challenge our whole assessment of the period. They disputed our characterization of the period as “*pre-revolutionary*.” Instead, they claimed that in the 1990s capitalism had entered a “*long wave of upswing*” during which its productive forces would grow. They claimed that this upswing would last until about 2015. They accused us of “*catastrophism*” because we stated that globalization had accelerated – not alleviated – the contradictions of the capitalist world economy. For us, China’s rise would not propel the world economy to a new upswing but rather escalate the rivalry between the great powers. Pröbsting wrote several longer documents

141 LFI: From Protest to Power – Manifesto for World Revolution, London 2003. The program was drafted by Richard Brenner and Dave Stockton.

in which he explained that the world view of this minority completely contradicted both empirical facts as well as Lenin's theory of imperialism. As he wrote, they were "*De-Leninizing*" Leninism. Their whole outlook was optimistic for capitalism and pessimistic for the class struggle and party building. Finally, the faction which constituted half of the British section's membership but had only little support in rest of the LFI, would split in the summer of 2006. Similarly, a handful of members from the Austrian section also created a faction in May 2006 with a similar passive-propagandist outlook. They would already split again within a few weeks. The future of these factions was rather comical. Their world view about the "*long upswing until 2015*" came to a sorry end two years after the split with the opening of a new period of capitalist decay. They founded a group called "*Permanent Revolution*", which remained nationally-centered, issued a few issues of a journal, and finally dissolved in 2013. Their Austrian counterparts had already dissolved and disappeared from organized political life less than a year after the split. However, the right wing of the LFI and major elements of the British section would later regret the struggle against these rotten elements.

Astonishingly our British comrades, while correctly criticizing the faction's rejection of the New Workers' Party tactic and their passive-propagandist outlook, found it difficult to answer the faction's absurd claims about the period and the world economy. Until shortly before the split in the summer of 2006, all documents on this issue were written by Pröbsting. The method of the conservative minority, but also the paralysis of the majority of comrades, demonstrated how deeply widespread Anglo-Saxon empiricism and eclecticism were in the British section. The chickens came home to roost in that, during the entire history of the LRCI, there were hardly any articles or debates, let alone a common understanding of Marxist philosophy. It turned out that most leading comrades were completely unaware of the philosophical debates in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, before the Stalinist clamp-down, and in particular of the leading philosophical school of the materialist dialecticians around Abram Deborin, Ivan K. Luppol, and N. A. Karev.¹⁴² The Austrian section published some articles on Marxist philosophy in its theoretical journal, but this was obviously not enough.

Another lesson of this debate was the strong eclecticism among the British comrades concerning Marxist political economy. This was already demonstrated in the early 1990s during seminars on political economy when several leading British comrades would sympathize with Ben Fine and his rejection of the

142 However, perhaps in their defense, one has to admit that most of this debate has never been translated to English. On the other hand, there *are* a number of English-language academic books on this subject which are available to anyone interested in Marxist philosophy. Consequently, British Marxists are usually influenced either by Althusser's structuralism (see e.g., Alex Callinicos from the SWP) or George Lukács (e.g., John Rees) or, worse, by charlatans like Žižek. However, there are also some who "manage" throughout their entire personal history of political activism without even pretending to be interested in Marxist philosophy (e.g., the SPEW/CWI).

Marxian law of the *Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall*. Others like Dave Brown and German and Austrian comrades correctly defended the orthodox Marxist viewpoint including the theory of breakdown (which was also defended by Leon Trotsky and well elaborated by Henryk Grossmann). Later in the 2000s, reformist economists like David Harvey would become popular among our British comrades. The negation of the importance of Marxist philosophy led to severe weaknesses in implementing the Marxist method in the sphere of economy (and not only there!).

These problems were also demonstrated by the long and somewhat sharp internal debates we had around the production of the book which was published in 2008 under the name *The Credit Crunch*. There was a year-long controversy about Pröbsting's essay "*Imperialism, Globalization and the Decline of Capitalism*" – which is part of this book – which was caused by the objection of several leading comrades against his "bold" statement that capitalism is in decline and that the productive forces are stagnating.¹⁴³ While the British comrades finally moved forward and came closer to our understanding, it should not be forgotten that this involved long and controversial discussions.¹⁴⁴

It is both ironic and humorous that Pröbsting's "bold" statement was soon to be vindicated by the start of capitalism's historic crisis in 2008, yet this did not provoke our opponents to any kind of self-criticism.

Another expression of this weakness was the LRCI/LFI's failure – despite corresponding plans since the early 1980s – to further develop Lenin's theory of imperialism and to apply it to the modern conditions. In hindsight, given their difficulties in understanding the essence of Lenin's theory of imperialism, it is not surprising that the comrades didn't see themselves in a position to fulfill these plans.

All these difficulties demonstrated how important it is for a Bolshevik organization to have a sound theoretical Marxist basis in Marxist philosophy and political economy.

143 See Michael Pröbsting: *Imperialism, Globalization and the Decline of Capitalism* (2008), in: Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: *The Credit Crunch – A Marxist Analysis* (2008), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-and-globalization/>

144 To his credit, Richard Brenner made great efforts to deepen his knowledge of Marxist political economy and succeeding in developing a solid and profound understanding. Based on this, he wrote a number of insightful articles which were published together in the book *Credit Crunch*.

Growth ... and Harbingers of Problems in the Future: Class Composition, Orientation, and Our Struggle against Aristocratism

The split in 2006 resulted in a numerical setback regarding the organizations membership. However, it left the organization more united, with a clear political as well as organizational perspective of its future building. This laid the basis for the subsequent growth of the Austrian, British, and German sections. Not only did this strengthen us numerically, but also brought fresh and dynamic forces – including several talented young cadres – into our ranks. However, this success proved to be mixed, as a large number of these new recruits were university students or youth who were orientated towards the academic world. This also brought petty-bourgeois ideological influences and mindsets, fashionable in the progressive academic world – skepticism, post-modernism, and eclecticism – into the organization and thus exacerbated already existing problems.

We soon recognized the potential problems and the need to counteract them in order to bring the organization closer to the ordinary working class and the oppressed. Given the increasing number of migrants among the European working class and the prominent role of Muslim migrants in the anti-war movement, we recognized the importance of this question. Almedina “Nina” Gunić, a Bosnian migrant comrade and leader of the Austrian section, played an important role in stimulating a discussion on this issue. With her advice and experience, the author of these lines wrote in late 2005 a first draft of *Theses on Migration and the Strategy of Revolutionary Integration*.¹⁴⁵ A conference of the Austrian section in January 2006 agreed with the fundamental line of the theses and adopted several slogans. The theses included the application of the old Bolshevik slogan of “*the right to one’s native language*” which meant the abolition of an official state language and the right of national minorities to use their native language in public administration as well as in schools and universities. These positions naturally clashed with the deeply-seated social-chauvinism of the official workers’ movement. Most centrists considered it the best option to urge migrants to learn German so that they can better assimilate. This was, by the way, one of the major conflicts we had with the CWI and Stalinists in our electoral alliance in Austria in the summer of 2008.

Another conclusion we drew from these discussions was the need for the LRCI sections and its youth organizations in Europe to deliberately try to win migrants, specifically migrant youth. We argued that the sections, as well as their leaderships, should reflect the composition of the multi-national working class. While the Austrian section succeeded in this – its membership and leadership

145 Unfortunately, at that time the theses could not be finished for publication and we only printed articles on this subject. When we eventually completed an extended version of the theses in the autumn of 2010 and published them as a booklet, they would provoke an intense conflict within the LFI leadership, as we shall see below.

always had a migrant share of 20%-40% – the other European sections hardly won over any migrants or migrant youth. For example, throughout its entire history from the 1970s on, the British section hardly ever recruited comrades of black or Asian backgrounds.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, we criticized the fact that the LFI had far too few female members and hardly any women leaders. By 2010, only 18% of the LFI members in Europe were women and the only women on the IEC was our comrade Nina Gunić.¹⁴⁷ We explained that the LFI must make it a priority to win more women – particularly from the working class – and to develop women as leaders. Naturally, everyone agreed with this on every occasion the issue came up ... but nothing changed.

As a result of our serious intentions of recruiting young women, we first initiated a “*Revolutionary Women’s Collective*” which would later become a “*Revolutionary Women Organization*.” At the highpoint of our work, our women’s organization was part of a broad united front in a demonstration for equal rights in March 2011. More than 10,000 women and men participated in this demonstration and comrade Nina Gunić was among those who addressed it. However our women’s organization was met with fierce resistance from our opponents inside the LFI, and shortly after they had expelled us in April 2011 they dissolved this organization.

Our sense of urgency to make conscious efforts to win over migrants and migrant youth was part of a general strategic outlook about which we tried to convince the comrades in the LFI. We explained that the more class contradictions and struggles accelerate, the more vital it will become that the LFI succeeds in changing its composition and becoming more proletarian. We explained that in order to progress in building a revolutionary workers’ party, we have to become an organization with at least a high proportion of revolutionary workers and oppressed. We emphasized that we should orient to win workers and working class youth not from the labor aristocracy but from the lower and middle layers. The problem in the LFI was not only that they couldn’t win migrants and migrant youth but that they hardly won workers (except some from the more privileged and educated strata) or proletarian youth. The comrades had, but couldn’t admit, a class problem.

We raised criticism that the LFI in its present composition – predominately intellectuals, university students and labor aristocrats – would not be able to meet the challenges of the class struggle. In addition, we stressed that we

146 As we outlined in our theses on migration, by migrants we are referring primarily to migrants (or their children) who came from semi-colonial countries. A German student or manager who migrates to Austria or Britain, for example, to study or work cannot really be considered a migrant.

147 While the sections in Pakistan and Sri Lanka had a lower share of female members, one has to bear in mind the objective difficulties in these countries dominated by patriarchic traditions. During a visit to Sri Lanka in the spring of 2010, comrade Gunić, the women’s secretary of the LFI, played a crucial role in supporting the comrades in their founding of a women organization.

needed to make conscious efforts to bring more workers, migrants, and women into the leadership.

While several comrades in the international leadership occasionally agreed with our proposals, many protested and sometimes – like at the IEC in March 2008 – this provoked sharp clashes. Similarly, our proposal at the LFI congress in 2010 to consciously develop workers, migrants, and women cadres and positively discriminate in their favor vis. petty-bourgeois intellectuals provoked sharp polemics, not to say outcries. Our proposal was finally defeated at the congress by 36% to 64% of the votes.

Related to this we argued – beginning in 1995 in the Austrian section and more systematically for the entire LRCI from the early 2000s onwards – that the sections must desire not only to grow but also to establish deeper roots among the working class and the oppressed. For this they had to overcome their role as purely propaganda groups and become more militant communist organizations which undertake – in addition to propaganda – agitation and exemplary mass work.

While occasionally we received platonic support for our orientation, more often we heard that such a transformation of the LFI sections was not possible. However, over a number of years the Austrian section proved that it *is* possible. Looking back to the period since 2003, the Austrian section was – despite unfavorable class struggle circumstances – the most successful of the European LFI sections in undertaking exemplary mass work and recruiting out of these struggles. Of course, this was not at the expense of our propaganda tasks: we had a monthly paper, a theoretical journal, and had published a number of pamphlets.

In addition to the anti-war work already mentioned above, the section and its youth organization undertook work at schools focused on campaigns against cuts in education. Our youth work reached a new high point in April 2009, when we initiated a series of school strikes against cuts in education. The first and second strikes were each joined by about 1,500 Viennese school students. After these successes, nearly all youth organizations jumped aboard the wagon (even the conservative one) and ultimately 60,000 school students went out on the streets in Austria – the biggest school student strike in the country's history.

Furthermore, we intensified our work with migrant communities. We were active part of the campaign in solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle and collaborated with Muslim migrant communities both during the Gaza War 2008/09 as well as at the protests against the Zionist murder of Turkish solidarity activists in June 2010. We gained a lot of respect for this and – despite unavoidable clashes with conservative community leaders – repeatedly had the chance to address crowds of thousands of migrants at these demonstrations where we received enthusiastic responses.¹⁴⁸

148 For examples, see the videos of speeches from Nina Gunić and Michael Pröbsting at the

There was an occasion in which the British section and its youth organization were also in a position to play a certain role in the class struggle. This happened during the university student movement in 2010. But, unfortunately, they were not capable of playing an independent and communist role and didn't succeed in recruiting any new members. In the end, their leading involvement in the university student movement only accelerated their opportunist adaption towards the petty-bourgeois milieu.

We explained that we had to build organizations which – to a certain degree and in exemplary areas – could play a certain role in the class struggle. The comrades did not understand that the weaknesses of our class composition – too few workers and proletarian youth, migrants, and women - were related to a conception of the organization as one focused on intellectual, propagandist tasks. The LFI had an internal culture in which a comrade who had knowledge of Marxist theory, or who could write well-formulated articles, was highly valued (“*a promising cadre*”), while a comrade from a working class background who could attract workers and oppressed, who could help with practical work, or who could organize was never seen as similarly valuable. In addition to this, they don't even attempt supporting the development of working class comrades into *working-class intellectuals*. More likely, their orientation was to recruit many intellectuals from the middle class who are willing to lead the propaganda and theoretical work.

We would later call this problem “*aristocratism*,” i.e., a political and practical orientation, including in party-building, towards the intellectuals, university students, and labor aristocrats.

However, the leadership explicitly rejected the idea that a bad class composition is a problem for the LFI. They claimed that, in small organisations, such class compositions are necessary and unavoidable. In a letter, the leadership of the German section argued that the social composition of the fighting propaganda group like the LFI sections “*will have a disproportional high share of university students or better educated, political interested workers (skilled workers)*.”¹⁴⁹ This was the case, they claimed, “*because of the dominant role of propaganda*.” The Austrian supporters of the LFI majority argued in a similar vein in a statement they issued: “*It is perfectly natural that fighting propaganda groups tend, because of its very high requirements for a membership, not to be dominated by the lowest layers*.”

¹⁵⁰ After the split, they would emphasise even more the pre-dominate role of intellectuals in communist pre-party organizations:

Gaza solidarity demonstration. Nina Gunić on 16.1.2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stSfp9ZGPxE&list=PL1471A456DE52F1D5>; Michael Pröbsting on 9.1.2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azVN2x37g30&list=PL1471A456DE52F1D5&index=1> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6Lh4_t9OVQ&index=2&list=PL1471A456DE52F1D5

149 Letter of German leadership to the Austrian sections' conference, 3.2.2011, in: Internes Bulletin der Liga der Sozialistischen Revolution Nr. 383, 4.2.2011 (our translation)

150 Reply to the “*Bolshevik Opposition*” by the Austrian supporters of the LFI majority, February 2011, in: Internes Bulletin der Liga der Sozialistischen Revolution Nr. 385, 23.2.2011 (our translation)

*“The core of the Marxist strategy for the achievement of socialism has always been recognition of the need to fuse the theoretical conquests of the socialist movement, which historically were developed by intellectuals, with the leading elements of the working class’ own organisations and movements. Distinct stages or phases can be seen historically in the development of this fusion; from very small numbers of revolutionary intellectuals committed to the working class cause who form an ideological current and first begin the task of promoting the revolutionary programme within the working class, through propaganda groups able to take the first steps in developing working class cadres and then cadre parties, predominantly composed of working class activists and constituting a recognised political current within the working class.”*¹⁵¹

In other words fighting for the working class interests with a communist programme requires ... “education”, i.e., bourgeois education. Therefore, according to the LFI leadership, for the mass of the global working class – particularly in the semi-colonial world – which possesses relatively less education, it is rather difficult to meet the requirements of the type of communist organisation like the LFI wants to build. On the other hand, according to the LFI leaders, the well-educated intellectuals and labor aristocrats (a disproportionately large proportion of whom live in the imperialist countries) are fitter to build communist pre-party organizations. Such arrogant nonsense has nothing to do with Marxism! Is it really “perfectly natural” to build an organisation for founding the future revolutionary party, that has the goal to free the working class and all oppressed, that such an organisation is not lead, not even dominated in its composition by workers, women, migrants, oppressed nations although they are the absolute majority in the world? Such an aristocratic standpoint might be “perfectly natural” among the progressive petty-bourgeois left milieu in the imperialist countries, but in the rest of the world it is just “perfectly absurd.”

In summary, we have to say that our efforts to re-orient the LFI’s work more towards winning activists from the lower and middle strata of the working class failed. While comrades agreed with such an orientation, it proved very difficult – and in the end impossible – for them to change the modus operandi and political culture of the organization to allow the recruitment and consolidation of new proletarian members. Looking back, we overestimated the possibility of convincing the comrades to practically re-orient of the League towards the working class and the oppressed (not only in words but also in deeds). Or to put it the other way around: we underestimated how much is determined by the comrades consciousness, how much their inappropriate class composition made it impossible for them to intensify our efforts to proletarianize the League via conscious efforts in our mass work.

The working and living conditions of workers and the oppressed were too distant from these comrades’ own daily lives and were therefore often pictured

151 LFI: Trotskyism in the Twenty-First Century, 14.2.2014, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/trotskyism-twenty-first-century>

in an absurd and illusionary way. For example, one of the former leaders of the British section, Luke Cooper, a white middle class intellectual par excellence who teaches at the Richmond University in London, vehemently denied that a huge section of migrants in his country define themselves as migrants and not primarily as British nationals. His argument was that each migrant defines himself by some specific, individual, and unique definition that has nothing in common with the understanding of other individual migrants. Unsurprisingly, Cooper was not in any kind of regular contact with migrants (at least not from the working class). It was indeed humorous how self-confidently most leaders of the LFI would argue about how to recruit and develop workers, women, migrants and other oppressed into cadres with hardly any success in doing so – not for years, but for decades.

It was an important lesson for us and helped us to more clearly set our priorities in party building and select our new members accordingly when building the RCIT. As a result, today our organization is led mainly by workers from the lower and middle strata of the working class and by workers from semi-colonial countries.

Growth in South Asia

An equally important success in the years 2007/08 was that we came into contact with Trotskyists in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A group called *Socialist Party of Sri Lanka* (SPSL) which had previously split from the CWI contacted us and after discussions and visits they joined the LFI. They had a proletarian composition and undertook trade union work among important sectors like health workers and the Tamil plantation workers. While they did not have many Tamil members, under very difficult conditions, they – in contrast to the CWI – defended the Tamils right of national self-determination.

We were also in contact with a small group of socialists from a former student cadre of the IMT group in Pakistan. It was confronted with pre-revolutionary developments in 2007/08 when a mass movement of lawyers and students protested against army chief Pervez Musharraf's actions after he unconstitutionally suspended Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry as the chief justice of Pakistan's Supreme Court. This protest movement would initiate a political crisis which ultimately brought down the dictatorship of Musharraf. Our comrades intervened in the movement and combined support for the democratic demands with a socialist perspective. As a result, the group grew dramatically, called itself *Revolutionary Socialist Movement* (RSM) and became a section of the LFI.

The RSM had also a branch in Kashmir – but only in the northern part of this region since the southern part is occupied and oppressed by India. After discussions, the author of these lines drafted a resolution arguing for a united, independent and socialist Kashmir which was agreed to and adopted by the

section.

However, the section's success in recruiting a whole layer of university students who soon would dominate the group also caused the problem that it developed an unhealthy class composition. This opened it to petty-bourgeois ideological influences as we would soon see.

iv) 2008 – 2011: The LFI's Failure to Meet the Challenges of the Revolutionary Period of Historic Crisis of Capitalism

The Great Recession in 2008/09 and its consequences had vast implications both for the world economy as well as for world politics. It opened a new world historic period of a revolutionary character: the productive forces are in decline, the main contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and the oppressed, between the imperialist monopolies and states and the semi-colonial people and between the imperialist robbers themselves – all these contradictions are intensifying to such a degree that they repeatedly throw the equilibrium out of balance. The inner contradictions of capitalism are posed in such a sharp way that they unavoidably provoke pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations, as well as counter-revolutionary developments. In other words, the aggravation of the class contradictions poses the question of power – which class rules in the society – more often than in the past periods.¹⁵² The present period is therefore one in which the destruction of capitalism and the historical leap forward towards socialism is on the agenda or – to use Georg Lukács' words – which is characterized by the "Actuality of the Revolution".¹⁵³

Failure to Understand the Nature of the Period

It was clear to us from the beginning that this new revolutionary period would put all revolutionaries to a decisive test. We understood that it was urgent first to understand the character of the new period and secondly to draw the right conclusions for party-building. Pröbsting formulated this position for the first time in a short resolution which was tabled at an international leadership meeting in early January 2009.

„The new period is characterized by a historical crisis of capitalism. It is a period not of years but has a more long-term character. It is a period where the "curve of capitalist development" (Trotsky) is pointing downwards and where the productive forces and the social development are retreating rather than advancing. It is a period where short-term booms are not excluded but where the crisis-ridden, depressive character of the world economy is the dominant feature. World politics will be characterized by increasing instability and rivalry because the imperialist hegemon – the United States of America – is no longer capable of dominating the world. Faced with this crisis, the imperialist bourgeoisie will launch huge attacks on the working class and the oppressed people and as a result we will see a sharp increase of class struggle. This is why this period will be marked by a series of wars, pre-revolutionary, revolutionary, and counter-revolutionary situations. This is why the new period is a revolutionary period.

¹⁵² For a closer analysis of the historic period which opened in 2008/09 and its contradictory developments, we refer readers to our book *The Great Robbery*, pp. 372-382.

¹⁵³ Georg Lukács: Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought (1924), <http://marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1924/lenin/index.htm>

The working class enters this new period with a profound crisis of leadership. The official leaderships are very closely integrated into the bourgeois state apparatus and management. The revolutionary forces on the other hand are extremely weak. But at the same time the working class and the oppressed will form new forces of struggle and new vanguards. Existing vanguard elements – under reformist leadership at the moment – will question their leaderships and come into conflict with them. Against this background the task of Marxist revolutionaries is to address these militant and vanguard elements by means of propaganda and agitation, by joining them in struggle and striving to give a lead, by putting demands on the existing leadership and applying the united front tactic. Our task is to win the best elements of the vanguard for Bolshevism and to recruit them. The strategic task in the new period is to build the revolutionary party on a national and international scale.”

This resolution – which also received the support of leading German comrades – was narrowly defeated and opened up an intense and controversial debate. The majority – who had their main basis in the British section – not only argued against the characterization of the period as “revolutionary” but also now began in principle to oppose the characterization of periods. Hence this group of comrades also now rejected our past approach of attempting to characterize periods as “revolutionary,” “pre-revolutionary,” “transitional,” or “counter-revolutionary”. The eclecticism which we observed already in the years before had now reached new and more dangerous proportions.

A number of documents were written in the next year and a half, both by us and our opponents, but finally this group of eclectics would gain a narrow majority at the LFI congress in the summer of 2010.

If we summarize the two decades of discussions about the nature of the period, we can state that, from the early 1990s onwards, we were able to understand the nature of the dynamics of each period – and hence the corresponding tasks – and by this to foresee the character of the next period. Thus we were prepared for the changes in the class struggle, were not caught by surprise, and did not get confused by abrupt turns. If one agrees with Trotsky’s statement that *„the strength of Marxism lies in its ability to foretell,”* one has to conclude that the majority of the LFI leaders were hardly blessed with this skill.¹⁵⁴

Our understanding of the revolutionary nature of the period did not remain confined to the fields of theory and analysis. We also applied it to the areas of tactics and party-building. We concluded that given the nature of the new period as being one of an historical crisis of capitalism, it was unavoidable that the ruling class had to launch general attacks against the working class (massive austerity packages, etc.). Hence we argued that the LFI, in those cases in which such general capitalist attacks took place, should agitate for a general strike and put this demand to the trade unions. This was rejected by the majority of the LFI leaders as “*ultra-left.*” The British section even went so far as to criticize the SWP

¹⁵⁴ Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin. The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals* (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p. 198

when the latter called on the TUC in the autumn of 2010 to organize a general strike against the attacks of the government!

They justified their opportunism by stating that communists should deploy tactics which “react” to the policy of the official leadership of the workers movement. In fact, this was a position reflecting their tailist adaption to the reformist and centrist milieu which in turn adapts to the labor bureaucracy. The real task of communists is to agitate for tactics which are objectively necessary for the working class in a given situation to organize the fight back against the capitalists’ offensive.

Failure to Understand the Oppression of Migrants and the Nature of the Labor Aristocracy

As mentioned above, in the summer of 2010 we developed an extensive thesis on the nature of migrant oppression in the imperialist countries and the revolutionary strategy of the liberation struggle. We argued that migrants in the imperialist countries are nationally oppressed minorities who are in their vast majority a super-exploited labor force. As a consequence, we defend their rights including their right to use their native language in schools and public administration. At the LFI congress in June 2010, we got a narrow majority (58% to 42%) for our program calling for the abolition of the state language and for the right to use one’s native language.

However despite this victory, the substance of the issue remained highly disputed. Leading LFI comrades strongly opposed our position. They argued that migrants in Europe are not national minorities and that assimilation of them into the ruling nation is progressive.¹⁵⁵

In fact, these comrades were breaking with our past programmatic method.¹⁵⁶ While the LFI had never elaborated a deeper theoretical and programmatic analysis of migration, we had at least stated in our founding program – the *Trotskyist Manifesto* – a broadly correct definition of the character of the oppression of migrants which laid the basis for our later analysis:

“We fight the “mini-apartheid” style restrictions on democratic rights that are placed on immigrant workers all over the world. These restrictions are a means of facilitating the super-exploitation of immigrant workers and dividing the working class of a particular country along racial or national lines.”

“In addition, the post-war boom sucked millions of workers from the semi colonies to the imperialist heartlands, from one semi-colony to another, and from less developed to

¹⁵⁵ As the German section’s leadership wrote in a letter in December 2010: *“However, as Marxists, we recognise that with the development of the world market, the capitalist mode of production also always has a tendency towards “assimilation” and “integration” of minorities. This tendency has a progressive character, as Lenin and other Marxists explained.”*

¹⁵⁶ This holds true for the entire LFI program: The author of these lines drafted the Manifesto which was adopted at the LFI congress in 2010. However, in their practical policy, the LFI moved more and more away from the revolutionary essence of the program.

more highly developed imperialist countries. These migrant and immigrant workers are also racially oppressed. (...) The racially oppressed suffer discrimination in education and all spheres of welfare provision. They are subject to super-exploitation at work."
157

As a result of their lack of understanding the oppression of migrants, the LFI majority could not develop a strategy of consistent struggle for their revolutionary liberation. They argued that we should actively fight only for the right of migrants to learn the language of the ruling nation, but not for their equal right to learn to speak in their mother language in schools. If they wanted to learn their mother language, this should be done in their spare time. Schools should offer this possibility only if it is an official demand of the migrant organisations.¹⁵⁸ Another comrade wrote that our demands for multi-language classes "*can only mean absolute chaos or a national split.*" This, of course, is the old social-chauvinist fear that if migrants are not educated in the national majority language this will result in "splits and chaos." In fact, today there are already various multi-language schools in Vienna – without any chaos!¹⁵⁹ All these arguments against our strategy of revolutionary integration reflected a fundamental separation of these comrades from the world of migrants and aristocratism in the ideological field – i.e. consciously or unconsciously defending the privileges of the dominant white nation.

In contrast, we said that assimilation of the migrants/national minorities into the ruling nation is not in itself progressive. Under conditions of oppression, Marxists should neither consider assimilation nor national separation as something progressive per se. Lenin always argued *not* for assimilation but for fusion on completely voluntary and equal basis. This of course is only possible under socialism. Today it is essential to fight for the unity of multinational working class on the basis of a common struggle. This again requires that we struggle

157 LRCI: The Trotskyist Manifesto, London 1989, p. 53 and p. 124

158 In the same letter, the German section's leadership wrote: "*We also support the right of migrants for school education in their native language. However, we do not share the LSR-position demanding the exercise of this right independent of the expressed (or not expressed) will of respective migrant communities. In our opinion, it is no accident that in Germany, at least, this demand is not raised by the vast majority of migrants, and that it is not raised by any progressive migrant organisation.*" As a matter of fact, we proved to the German comrades – who hardly have any migrants in their ranks – that there are already a number of migrant organisations that demand the right to be educated in their native language at schools and universities. But to maintain their line of argumentation, some leading comrades then objected that these migrant organisations are politically backward and, therefore, do not represent the vanguard of the migrant youth which is supposedly willing to learn the official state language and have no interest in studying their own native language tongue to be used in their education and their daily civil life. Again these comrades are obviously also unaware of the existence of a number of progressive organizations, like the German teachers' trade unions or left-wing migrant organisations, which also demand the right for students to use their native language in the education system.

159 See our resolution on schools: *Einheit durch Kampf für Gleichberechtigung! Resolution für das Recht auf Muttersprache für MigrantInnen an den Schulen*, in: *Revolutionärer Kommunismus*, No. 7, August 2011

consistently for the equal rights of all parts of the oppressed and exploited. The struggle for equal rights also includes the demand for abolishment of any preferential treatment of the dominating nationality. Therefore, we fought for the abolishment of the state language as the Bolsheviks did. In the end, our position was defeated by a 6-2 majority at the IEC in December 2010.

Another reflection of this aristocratism was the protest of the majority of the Sri Lanka section's leadership – with the support of the LFI leadership majority – against the slogan of a *“Socialist Tamil Eelam.”* In the second part of the LFI congress in Asia in January 2011, the author of these lines dared to say that if the majority of the Tamils in Sri Lanka supported an independent state, revolutionaries should raise the slogan of a *“Socialist Tamil Eelam.”* We were severely condemned for raising this subject, something which we should have been allowed – according to the majority of the Sri Lanka section's leadership and with the tacit support of the LFI leadership majority – only if they would have agreed in advance to discuss such an issue. The real reason for their indignation was that the only Tamil member on the SPSL leadership body, as well as other members supported this slogan in contrast to the majority.¹⁶⁰ In fact, an issue which is a basic Leninist position on the national question – to support the separation of an oppressed people if its majority desires this – became a scandal for the SPSL and LFI majority. This was another reflection of their aristocratic tendency.

This is related to an incomplete assimilation of the Leninist program for national liberation by the LFI majority. In this way they opposed our application of Lenin's positive program for oppressed nations (autonomy, self-government, right to use one's native language, etc.). They also attacked our insistence that Lenin's national program is addressed to oppressed nations, not oppressor nations.

The other side of the coin of the majority's aristocratism was their rejection of the Leninist position that the labor aristocracy is a small top layer in the working class which is politically backward and bribed by the bourgeoisie. They rather believe that the labor aristocracy is the best organised and most militant sector of the class who gets privileges because of its class struggle. The LFI majority vulgarized Lenin's theory by de facto liquidating its characteristic as a bribed, pro-imperialist strata and instead explained the aristocracy's privileges as a result of its class struggle combativeness: *“While the “labour aristocracy” shares with the middle strata many common appearances, with regard to forms of income privilege and even “life style”, the root of these privileges are not “tradition” and the benevolence of the bourgeoisie but the class struggle of the proletariat and the strength of working class organisations.”*¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ According to the minutes of a meeting of the majorities of the SPSL and the LFI leaderships after the congress, the latter assured the Sri Lankans leaders: *“The IS members present assured the SPSL that they would work to prevent a repetition of any such occurrence.”*

¹⁶¹ LFI: Resolution on the Working Class,, 10.12.2009, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/>

Instead they reduced the concept of the labor aristocracy to the empirical observation that it is better paid: „*At the core of the concept of the 'labour aristocracy', as used by Lenin, then, is the simple idea that the working class is socially differentiated and stratified economically.*“¹⁶² From this some LFI leaders concluded that the labor aristocracy represents a huge, important sector of the working class in the imperialist countries – in discussions it was suggested about one third of the proletariat – and, hence, it is “*the core sector of the working class without whom the revolution cannot succeed.*”

In sum, while the LFI leadership opportunistically overstates the progressive character of the labor aristocracy, it underestimates the importance of the middle and lower strata of the working class and of the nationally oppressed layers.

These theoretical differences were not accidental. Rather, they reflected the longstanding – in fact, from the very beginning of their existence decades ago – isolation of the LFI majority in Europe from workers from the middle and lower strata of the working class, migrants, blacks, and other national/racial minorities. Surely, a number of comrades had the subjective will to overcome this isolation, but they lacked theoretical insight into the problem as well as the willingness to break with their orientation to the milieu of the petty-bourgeois left and intelligentsia. As a result, the majority adapted more and more to the reformist and centrist prejudices, distorted the Leninist conception, developed a practice isolated from the working class migrants, and finally took political and practical centrist positions.

The Practical Demonstration of the LFI's Centrism during the August Uprising 2011 in Britain

A practical demonstration of the LFI's transformation into a centrist organization was their cowardly and cynical attitude during the August Uprising in Britain in 2011. During this historic event, the lower strata of the working class and the nationally and racially oppressed rose up after the police shot Mark Duggan. According to *Scotland Yard* more than 30,000 working class youth, black and migrants on the streets fought against the police and expressed their anger between 6 and 10 August. It forced the Tory/Liberal-Democrat government to mobilize 16,000 police on the street to put down the uprising and even to consider the use of the army against its own population. Despite all its limitations and weaknesses, it was definitely one of the most important class struggles in Britain since the miners' strike of 1984/85. To make an actual comparison, it was a larger version of the recent protests and riots in Ferguson after the police murder of Mike Brown.

[content/resolution-working-class](#)

¹⁶² Luke Cooper: Theories of late capitalist development: Harvey and Callinicos on contemporary imperialism, in: Fifth International Volume 3 Issue 4, Autumn 2010, p. 21

Understanding the importance of this event, the RCIT immediately produced several documents outlining an assessment of this event and adopting a strategy on how the vanguard of the workers and oppressed should respond. In addition, the Austrian section sent a delegation of three comrades to London.¹⁶³

Naturally during this uprising the bourgeois state and media were full of rage and denunciations against the insurrectional youth. As expected, the petty-bourgeois left and intellectuals adapted to this pressure and either condemned the uprising or remained passive. Workers Power's and the LFI's opportunistic orientation to the progressive petty-bourgeois milieu meant that they adapted and capitulated to pressure of this milieu.

During the uprising, Workers Power, to its credit, refuted the reactionary condemnation of the uprising made by other centrists like the CWI, the Labour Left and the Stalinists. But they treated the riots as an understandable, even justified, but hopeless local uprising without prospects. Worse, they even made concessions to the petty-bourgeois public opinion in relativizing the motivation of the masses in this uprising. In their statement they wrote: "*Some are motivated by hatred of the police and rage at this society – others by the promise of raiding local shops for goods – some by both.*"¹⁶⁴ While this was somewhat corrected, in another statement published one and a half weeks after the end of the uprising, they took a completely passive approach towards the entire event.¹⁶⁵ They did not

163 For an extensive analysis of the August Uprising and eyewitness reports from RCIT comrades, we refer readers to the following documents: Nina Gunić and Michael Pröbsting: *The strategic task: From the uprising to the revolution! These are not "riots" – this is an uprising of the poor in the cities of Britain!*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-uprising-of-the-poor>; *The August Uprising in Britain - A Report of the RKOB delegation on its visit in London in August 2011*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-report-from-uprising>; Michael Pröbsting: *What would a revolutionary organisation have done? August uprising of the poor, the nationally and racially oppressed in Britain*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-august-uprising/>; Michael Pröbsting: *Five days that shook Britain but didn't wake up the left. The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/>. All documents were published in the RCIT's journal Revolutionary Communism No. 1 (September 2011).

164 Workers Power: With the working class youth of London – against the police, Statement from 8 August, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/with-the-working-class-youth-of-london-%E2%80%93-against-the-police/>

165 Following the uprising, and from a safe distance in time, the WPB was forced to accept our characterization of the uprising – they even adopted the very name we gave to the event "*August Uprising*". As they wrote: "*the August 2011 riots will be remembered as a working class youth uprising against repression, racism and the recession.*" ... "*In all cases, there were a mix of people, classes and motivations for those who came onto the streets. Like revolutions, so-called 'riots' bring people from all the lower classes onto the streets, but this does not mean it is impossible to discern the dominant groups and the main class interests driving the action. It was in the main an uprising of working class youth against police brutality, racism and harassment, and the underlying conditions facing the working class today*" (Workers Power: The political situation in Britain after the August uprising; Resolution on the political situation after the riots, 19.8.2011, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/political-situation-after-the-august-uprising/>)

call for joining and supporting the uprising; they didn't produce any agitational material, and they refused to participate themselves (see more below). They didn't apply the united front tactic in calling for the organisations of the workers' movement to join, support, and spread the uprising. Neither did they raise a single proposal to the tens of thousands of youth on how to fight and to spread the struggle except one sentence: *"we support self-defence."*

While *after* the end of the uprising they correctly called on the workers' movement to defend the poor against the repression, *during* the uprising they failed to call on the very same workers' movement to *support and join it*.

The neglect by Workers Power/LFI of the lower strata and nationally oppressed layers of the working class in theory and practice found its full demonstration during the August Uprising. They deliberately decided not to have any organised intervention in the uprising despite the fact that it continued for several days and regardless of the most favorable conditions. Extremely favorable, in fact, because, first, the uprising took place in London, the city in which the entire LFI had its strongest local branch. And secondly because at exactly the same time, between August 5th and 7th, they were holding their international youth conference; while from August 8th to 12th they were convening their international REVO summer camp close to London. According to a public REVO report, this camp was attended by more than 80 people.¹⁶⁶ They easily could have sent a delegation of several dozen comrades to the uprising to intervene, to participate, to discuss with people and to learn together in a concrete struggle alongside proletarian youth. Indeed, several young comrades proposed that they join the protests, but the LFI leadership adamantly rejected any such proposal. After a vote was taken, comrades were forbidden from joining the uprising.

Instead of intervening in the class struggle the LFI and REVOLUTION enjoyed their summer camp close to London while, at the same time, tens of thousands of youth were fighting in the streets! In a public REVO statement entitled *"Summer, sun, socialism - that was our international summer camp this year,"* the comrades report about *"interesting workshops"* and the *"opportunity of sports and leisure facilities of the camping grounds."* *"Every day we watched the events of the 'riots' in London and discussed about it [sic] at the Camp plenary. So we adopted for example a resolution and an international united front call against police violence and about the conditions for the British youth. Since as a youth organization we also like to fete, we had in the evening parties at a big camp fire or in the community tent. On Thursday "Broken Dialect," an anti-capitalist hip-hop crew, was our guest and thereafter DJs made music for us. The camp offered a lot of room for members, supporters and contacts to hold political discussions, but also to build new friendships."*¹⁶⁷

166 REVO Germany: Sommer, Sonne Sozialismus – das war unser diesjähriges internationales Sommercamp, 29. August 2011, <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/?p=1645>

167 REVO Germany: Sommer, Sonne Sozialismus – das war unser diesjähriges internationales Sommercamp, 29. August 2011, <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/?p=1645> (our translation)

We condemned this pathetic attitude of the LFI at that time: *“This official REVO report makes clear what was the practical attitude of this organisation is to a mass uprising of the lower strata of the working class which was taking place before their very faces. Published two weeks after the uprising, it is nothing other than a verification and justification of the collapse of LFI/REVO’s basic revolutionary attitude. These sunshine socialists don’t feel ashamed in any way when they report about their interesting workshops and how they enjoyed their parties in the evening while at the same the police killed and crushed working class youth which was fighting back on the barricades. And they are bold enough to write “With the working class youth - against the police!” at the same time. What cynicism, what a petty-bourgeois collapse of any basic revolutionary backbone! (...)*

It is easy to support an uprising of the migrants in the French banlieues in the autumn of 2005 and to develop tactics for them while being far away from France. It is easy to write an action programme for the revolution in Tunisia, Egypt or Libya. But when an uprising of the lower strata of the proletariat happens in their own country, in their own cities (!), they are not capable of implementing, not even developing, the correct tactics or any sort of a revolutionary action programme for the fighters, and even refused to join them on the barricades. When the uprising of the masses at Tahrir square in Cairo was taking place, the LFI sent two comrades to Egypt to write eye-witness reports. When there was an uprising at home they did not even send comrades to the barricades to – at least – write eye-witness reports, not to mention the possibility of intervening. The absolute majority of the so-called Marxists in LFI/REVO preferred to have programmatic discussions (and fun) while an uprising happened on their very doorstep.

*What the WP/LFI/REVO leadership doesn’t understand is that Marxism cannot be learnt and internalised without participation in the class struggle. Of course, a small propaganda group cannot participate in each and every struggle. But we are not talking about a minor event. We are talking about one of the most important class struggles in Britain since 1984/85 in cities where, at the time, the WP/LFI/REVO had– because of the REVO camp taking place near London – altogether about 100 people available.”*¹⁶⁸

Trotsky once drew the following line between Bolshevism and centrism which today is very relevant for the characterization of the LFI: while the former supports the oppressed in their struggle, the centrists consider this as “adventurist” and prefer to limit themselves to defend the oppressed against bourgeois repression:

„Nevertheless, Ledebour’s position even on this question does not leave the precincts of centrism. Ledebour demands that a battle be waged against colonial oppression; he is ready to vote in parliament against colonial credits; he is ready to take upon himself a fearless defense of the victims of a crushed colonial insurrection. But Ledebour will not participate in preparing a colonial insurrection. Such work he considers putschism,

¹⁶⁸ Michael Pröbsting: Five days that shook Britain but didn’t wake up the left The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward, 1.9.2011, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/>

*adventurism, Bolshevism. And therein is the whole gist of the matter. What characterizes Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude toward oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognizing their "right" to self-determination and to parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of this right. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in capitalist countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus, or Arabs in the art of insurrection and it assumes full responsibility for this work in the face of civilized executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over this boundary remains centrism."*¹⁶⁹

After the uprising, we concluded that Workers Power and the LFI had finally crossed the Rubicon. They had failed a major practical test of class struggle which took place – literally – on their front doorstep. It was an uprising of a key sector of the working class and the oppressed. They showed that our previous warnings and criticism about their aristocratic orientation away from these sectors of the working class were absolutely correct. After a process of degeneration, they finally had become a centrist organization.

Failure to Understand and to Fight against Centrism

Another fundamental issue in our inner-party struggle was the character of centrism and how to fight it. When we had a debate about the Grantite IMT, the leading Austrian comrade, who was in the camp of the LFI majority, claimed that they are "*one of the many currents of Marxism,*" albeit not revolutionary Marxists. He said that some centrist organisations belong to the reformist camp and others to the Marxist camp. This was a justification for his refusal to publish any criticism of the IMT group (or any other centrist group) for their opportunist role during a 6-week long university strike in the autumn of 2009.

When the LFI was still a revolutionary organization it had a Marxist characterization of centrism as a petty-bourgeois current.

„Secondly, it is a mistake to argue that the centrism of the Fourth International fragments is "special" because it does not "constitute a direct reflection of social forces foreign to the proletariat". All centrism precisely reflects the social weight of the petit-bourgeoisie, a stratum which vacillates between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Since the labour aristocracy in the imperialist countries has, due to its sharing in the feast of super profits, the life conditions of a comfortable petit-bourgeois, such consciousness is not (as the WSL theoreticians like to think) limited to shop-keepers or people with a college education. The history of the Fourth International after 1948 is the history of capitulation to these forces, either to the petit-bourgeois utopian programmes of the Stalinists - e.g. the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist Parties, or to petit-bourgeois

¹⁶⁹ Leo Trotzki: Was nun? Schicksalsfragen des deutschen Proletariats (1932); in: Schriften über Deutschland, pp. 246-247; in English: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat

*nationalists - e.g. Algeria, Nicaragua. The suggestion that these antics and betrayals do not represent a "complete break from the programme of Bolshevism" is to besmirch the programme of Lenin and Trotsky."*¹⁷⁰

Similarly, the LFI refused as nonsense any such characterizing of centrism as a variation of Marxism. We stated among the objectives of a Marxist organization: *"Thus the polemical defence of Marxism from all varieties of revisionism, reformism, centrism, economism-chvostism, Stalinism, Maoism, populism, post-modernism, syndicalism, opportunism, sectarianism and anarchism are among the very first tasks of the communist pre-party organisation."*¹⁷¹

However, the LFI of today "discovers" that centrism is a variation of Marxism. Instead of criticising their comrade, the other LFI majority leaders attacked us for being "sectarian" and "one-sided": *"We have also heard extremely one sided and, therefore, false, characterizations concerning centrism from Michael Pröbsting too - at the IEC. He said that centrism is simply "not Marxist" or that its essential feature is that it "betrays". This ironing out of contradictions, quoting only the "in the final analysis" positions of the Marxist classics, could lead to just as severe mistakes as errors made in the opposite direction. It is possible to make sectarian errors towards centrist formations as well as opportunist errors."*¹⁷² The majority also argued that *"the essence of centrism is its motion."*

These statements showed that the comrades had broken with the Marxist understanding of centrism which is first and foremost – including its many zigzags – its adaptation to the labor bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. Hence, it was also the traditional understanding of the LRCI that centrism was not *"one of many currents of Marxism."* Quite the opposite, we understood centrism as a current alien to Marxism and its method.

*"Unable to unite theory and practice, centrism's theoretical 'new' reality tramples on the doctrine and method of Marxism."*¹⁷³

This deviation also reflected that the LFI leadership was increasingly adapting to this milieu. To give one example: In the summer of 2009 – in the midst of the Great Recession – a conference of the leadership of the European Social Forum (ESF) took place in Vienna where, at the same time, the LFI was having its leadership meeting. As usual, nothing came out of the ESF conference and its leaders just mourned about their impotence to do anything. When Pröbsting stated at an internal LFI leadership meeting in June 2009 that the failure of the ex-Stalinist *European Left Party* (ELP) and trade union leaders at the ESF to mobilize for a program of struggle against the generalized attacks of the bourgeoisie represented a *"betrayal"* and the centrists' failure to criticize them

170 "Workers Power/Irish Workers Group: The Death Agony of the Fourth International and the Tasks of Trotskyists today (1983), S. 82

171 LFI: The Method and Principles of Communist Organization (2007), in: Documents of the League for the Fifth International, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 76

172 IS Majority: It is time to call a halt! A reply to the "Bolshevik Opposition", in: Internes Bulletin der Liga der Sozialistischen Revolution Nr. 386, 2.3.2011

173 LRCI: The Trotskyist Manifesto, p. 133

for this reflected their "*cowardice*," this was met with strong opposition from the LFI majority leaders (in fact the incident in the LFI quoted above refers to this IEC meeting).

In an LFI Internal Bulletin published a year after our expulsion, the leadership summarized that it had become increasingly clear to them in 2010 that we were "*opponents of our [Editor: the LFI's] strategic orientation.*" This was obvious for them because of Pröbsting's "*one-sided emphases of the positions he presented at the Congress itself but became clearer in his interventions at the subsequent ESF.*"¹⁷⁴ Indeed, at the European Social Forum in Istanbul in summer 2010, comrade Gunić and Pröbsting dared to criticize the ESF's leaders' failure to build a proper militant and democratically-structured movement during all the previous years and to mobilize against the strategic offensive of the capitalists since the onset of the Great Recession. While the LFI majority leaders were annoyed by this (which of course they didn't tell us openly) because they feared this would undermine their "friendly" relations with these ESF leaders, our speeches received support and applause from a considerable part of the participants of the summit who were also deeply disappointed of the inactivity of the ESF leadership. By the way: despite all the LFI's leaders' diplomatic efforts, they gained no advantage because the ESF bureaucrats simply ignored them. The correctness of our criticism was soon proven by reality. The ESF's bankruptcy during the capitalist crisis was so obvious to anyone – including themselves – that the summit in Istanbul in 2010 turned out to be its last one. Since then, the ex-Stalinist bureaucrats of the ELP have replaced them with their own so-called *Alter Summits*.

We could do no more than shrug our shoulders in response to the majority's accusations against our so-called "*sectarianism.*" Over many years we have proven through our exemplary mass work in Austria that we could – much more than the other LFI sections – do mass work and engage in united front work with social democrats, Stalinists, community leaders, and centrists. While the majority leaders erroneously believed that they could charm the centrists by replacing criticism with diplomacy, we knew from long experience that these forces were prepared to cooperate with revolutionaries only if the latter had built a sizeable organization which matters.

In fact the LFI majority leaders were preparing their adaption to centrism. They rarely use the term "centrism" in their propaganda and prefer instead just categories like "*radical left*" or "*revolutionary left.*" They are hoping for an unprincipled rapprochement with centrist forces. As a result, after our expulsion, Workers Powers consecutively joined several "*pluralist left unity*" projects like the "*Anti-Capitalist Network*," after this they paid court to the "*International Socialist Network*," and currently they place their hopes in "*Left Unity.*" The first two were petty-bourgeois projects which soon collapsed or degenerated, in the case of *Left Unity*, into an utter reformist bonsai electoralist project composed

174 LFI: IS Report to Council, April 2012, in: IIB 221 (April 2012), p. 9

of demoralized old leftists and some post-modernist university students. The German section similarly orients to another centrist rapprochement called "*New Anticapitalist Organization*." In its statement announcing our expulsion, the Austrian section called the left groups to come together and participate in "*a left conference to discuss and overcome differences*." Unsurprisingly, not a single left-wing group paid even the slightest attention to the call of these fools.

When the LRCI/LFI was a revolutionary organization, it was unambiguous about the necessity to openly fight against all forms of centrism. As we wrote in the "*Trotskyist Manifesto*": "*The struggle against centrism of all sorts has been a decisive feature of the construction of every revolutionary international*." ¹⁷⁵ It is the task of the RCIT to continue this tradition which the LFI deserted.

In the end, the LFI's capitulation to centrism has demoralized many members and, as a result, between 2011 and 2013, they lost half of their membership in Europe.

Split, Decline, and Further Political Degeneration of the LFI

Naturally, the majority of LFI leadership considered us as an obstacle in this course towards centrism. As mentioned above, they secretly started to prepare a struggle against us in the second half of 2010. With massive intervention from other sections and last minute recruitment of new members in the Austrian section, they managed to defeat us at the conference of Austrian sections in February 2011. In public statements, they announced that the Austrian section would begin "*a critical assessment of our own political history*" ¹⁷⁶ which included a critical approach to their (i.e., our decades-long) consistent solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle against Zionism. In short, we faced a political and organizational turn both on programmatic issues (centrism, the question of migration, methods of tactics like how to apply the general strike slogan, etc.) as well as party-building issues (orientation to university students and labor aristocrats versus the lower and middle strata of the working class and the oppressed). We therefore formed a faction called "*Bolshevik Opposition*" in order to fight for a return to the revolutionary line and to discuss these issues with the entire LFI membership. Fearing such a discussion, they decided to get rid of us and to preemptively expel us. Hence, a few weeks later they suspended us and banned us from attending branch meetings of the Austrian section. Similarly, they suspended the author of these lines from attending meetings of the International Secretariat despite being an elected member of it. On 1 April 2011 an international leadership meeting took place in Vienna and, as the first point on the agenda, we – two long standing members of the international leadership and three leaders of the Austrian youth organization – were expelled.

¹⁷⁵ LRCI: The Trotskyist Manifesto, p. 134

¹⁷⁶ Siehe: AST: Spaltung in der LSR, 1.4.2011, <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/?p=7>; AST: LSR wird wieder AST, 14.6.2011, <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/?p=61>

In the final speech before our expulsion we warned these comrades that without us they would lose the revolutionary corrective and descend into centrism. They would soon prove us correct, as we saw during the August Uprising in Britain. Furthermore, a few months after expelling us, the LFI faced a new faction fight. Their right-wing, which was strongly based on their university student cadres and which was particularly energetic in driving us out of the LFI, accelerated their adaption to centrism. In the end, this right-wing renounced the concept of the Leninist vanguard party and proposed a liquidationist line. Among the leaders of this liquidationist group were Luke Copper and Simon Hardy from the British section, Roman Birke (the central leader in Austria), Gunnar W. (the longtime central leader in Sweden), and Ales S. (the longtime central leader in the Czech Republic). As a result, Workers Power has been thrown back numerically to where they were at their foundation in 1976, the youth organization in Britain, Sweden, and Czech Republic have been dissolved, the Czech section no longer exists, the Austrian section retains a handful of university students, only a shadow of its past, etc.

Theory and propaganda have suffered significantly as well. The LFI had to cease the publication of their English-language journal *Trotskyist International* which had been issued twice a year in book format until the summer of 2010. While *Trotskyist International* began to appear again as an A4-Journal in the summer of 2014, Workers Power had to reduce the frequency of its paper – which was published on a monthly basis in the past – to five issues a year.

Programmatically, the LFI has accelerated their centrist deviation from the revolutionary program. They repeatedly failed to take a revolutionary anti-imperialist stand. When the LRCI/LFI still was a revolutionary organization it sided with the military struggle of the Taliban – the Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan – against the imperialist occupiers. In its 2014 Action Program, Workers Power has dropped its slogan for support of the anti-imperialist struggle in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁷ In addition, the centrist LFI refused to side with the Muslim popular masses when they attacked the Western imperialist embassies in many countries in September 2012, with the military struggle of the Islamists in Mali against the French occupation force in 2013, or with the Islamists in Iraq and Syria who are being attacked by the US and their allies since August 2014. Similarly, they supported the petty-bourgeois campaign for the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Assange to Sweden – a long-time demand of US imperialism. When the LRCI/LFI was still a revolutionary organization, it didn't send greetings of condolence to the family of a fallen soldier of the British army. This has changed now, and Workers Power expressed publicly that it "*sympathizes with the family of the victim*" after Islamists killed a British soldier in service during the Woolwich attack in May 2013.¹⁷⁸

177 Workers Power: An Action Programme for Britain, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2014/04/an-action-programme-for-britain/>

178 See RCIT: After the Woolwich attack in Britain: Stop imperialist war-drive and racism! Socialists

Another example of the LFI's rapid degeneration into centrism is their adaption to Russian imperialism. This has been manifested by the LFI's grotesque defense of its participation and active role in the notorious pro-Russian imperialist *Yalta conference* in July 2014 in support for the Donbass Republics in the Ukraine. This conference was organized by Aleksey Anpilogov and the Russian left-wing intellectual Boris Kagarlitzky. Anpilogov is a proponent of extreme Great Russian chauvinism and regular collaborator of the Russian anti-Semitic right-wing paper *Zavtra*. The two declarations of the latter conference were drafted respectively by the LFI's Richard Brenner and by Maxim Shevchenko, a member of Putin's "human rights council" as well as of the *Izborsky Club*. The *Izborsky Club* is a Eurasian, right-wing chauvinist "think tank" headed by Aleksandr Prokhanov, the publisher of *Zavtra*, and has among its members Aleksandr Dugin, the leader of Russia's extreme right-wing Eurasian movement, and Putin's advisor Sergey Glazyev. Another important figure at the conference was Vladimir Rogov and his right-wing chauvinist *Slavic Guard*. In other words, the conference lent "socialist" credentials to proponents of extreme Great Russian chauvinism and imperialism as well as the Putin regime.¹⁷⁹

The LFI now scandalously tries to present this Yalta conference as a progressive manifestation and claims that its leading figures are "left-wing" and "Stalinists" (e.g., the right-wing Putin supporter Shevchenko is called a "leftwing journalist").

must not solidarize with Britain's professional army but with the anti-imperialist resistance!, 24.5.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-woolwich-attack/>; Workers Power: Statement on the killing of a British soldier in Woolwich, 23.5.2013, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2013/05/british-soldier-killed-woolwich-london>

179 See on this e.g.

Manifesto of the People's Front for the Liberation of Ukraine, Novorossiia and Transcarpathian Rus, 24.07.2014, <http://solidarityantifascistukraine.wordpress.com/2014/07/24/manifesto-of-the-peoples-front-for-the-liberation-of-ukraine-novorossiia-and-transcarpathian-rus/>

No to the war in eastern Ukraine! Yalta Declaration, <http://www.rogerannis.com/no-to-the-war-in-eastern-ukraine-declaration-of-yalta-crimea-antiwar-conference/>

Paul Goble: Izborsky Club Says Only a Eurasian Empire Can Save Peoples of Russia, September 23, 2013, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.ca/2013/09/window-on-eurasia-izborsky-club-says.html>

Paul Goble: Influential Izborsky Club has No Time for Liberalism, Human Rights or Diversity, Commentator Says, January 10, 2013, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.co.at/2013/01/window-on-eurasia-influential-izborsky.html>

Izborsky Club proposed the idea of big bang of the Russian Federation, 25.6.2009, <http://survincity.com/2009/06/izborsky-club-proposed-the-idea-of-big-bang-of-the/>

Izborsk's energy, 28.9.2012, <http://ru-facts.com/news/view/2703.html>

AWL: A Popular Front for Russian Nationalism, 23 July, 2014, <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2014/07/23/popular-front-russian-nationalism>

Dale Street: A reply to Richard Benner on the Yalta conferences, Ukraine and Russia, AWL, 29 September, 2014, <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/23934>

International Yalta Conference "The Global Crisis and Confrontation in Ukraine", 26.07.2014, <http://rusvesna.su/english/1406322126>

¹⁸⁰ Similarly, the LFI downplays the participation of Russian chauvinists by stating that they are just “nationalists” and by equating this with participating in a conference with Arab nationalists. As so often happens to them nowadays, they “forget” the small detail of taking into account the different *class character* of nationalist movements. For Marxists it is principled to collaborate with *petty-bourgeois nationalist movements from semi-colonial countries* on the basis of the united front tactic (e.g., like the IRA in the 1970s and 1980s, the Columbian FARC or Hamas today). However, it is impermissible for Marxists to collaborate with *nationalists of a Great imperialist power* (like Russia) who are aggressively promoting the expansion of this empire! ¹⁸¹

180 The LFI defense of the Yalta conference is expressed in its two articles on this subject: Richard Brenner: The Yalta Conference on Solidarity with the Resistance in South East Ukraine, LFI, 23/09/2014, <http://fifthinternational.org/content/yalta-conference-solidarity-resistance-south-east-ukraine>

Marcus Halaby: Smears and social-imperialism, the politics of the “third camp” on Ukraine, LFI, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2014/11/smears-and-social-imperialism-the-politics-of-the-third-camp-on-ukraine/>

181 For the RCIT’s analysis and position on the civil war in the Ukraine see:

Michael Pröbsting: The Uprising in East Ukraine and Russian Imperialism. An Analysis of Recent Developments in the Ukrainian Civil War and their Consequences for Revolutionary Tactics, 22.October 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/ukraine-and-russian-imperialism/>

RCIT: After the Fascist Pogrom in Odessa: Advance the Struggle against the Counterrevolution in the Ukraine! Commemoration for the Fallen Fighters in the Struggle against the Counterrevolution! All Out for the International Day of Antifascist Solidarity on 8 May! 6.5.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 23, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/after-odessa-pogrom/>

RCIT: Counterrevolution and Mass Resistance in the Ukraine, 17.4.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/mass-resistance-in-ukraine/>

Joint Statement of the RCIT and the Movement to Socialism (MAS, Russia): Ukraine: Rivalry between Imperialist Powers escalates after Right-Wing Coup: Stop the Imperialist Saber-Rattling! 2.3.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/ukraine-war-threats/>

MAS: Ukraine/Russia: The victory over the imperialist colonialism is impossible without the proletarian revolution! in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/mas-declaration-5-3-2014/>

RCIT and MAS: Right-Wing Forces Take Power in the Ukraine: Mobilize the Working Class against the New Government! 25.2.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 19, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/right-wing-coup-in-ukraine/>

MAS: No to the Terror of the Bandera-Fascists! Stop the Repression against the Communists of Ukraine! 22.2.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 19, <http://www.nuevomas.blogspot.co.at/2014/02/no-to-terror-of-bandera-fascists-stop.html>

RCIT: “Ukraine: Neither Brussels nor Moscow! For an independent Workers’ Republic!” 18.12.2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 18, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/ukraine-neither-brussels-nor-moscow/>

For an detailed analysis of Russia as a great imperialist power, see:

In fact the Yalta conference was one which was organized and led by proponents of the imperialist Putin regime and the extreme right-wing Eurasian movement in Russia. In short, it was a conference in support of Russian imperialism. It was the Russian equivalent of a conference, let us say, for the Syrian rebellion organized by a US right-wing institute like the *American Enterprise Institute* or the Zionist *American Israel Public Affairs Committee*. By the way: a few weeks later, the same Aleksey Anpilogov organized a second conference in the very same hotel in Yalta to which leading European fascists and semi-fascists were invited such as the British BNP, the French National Front, Hungary's Jobbik, Belgium's Vlaams Belang, and others.¹⁸²

While the Austrian section played an active and prominent role in the Palestine solidarity movement until our expulsion in 2011, their rump didn't show up at a single demonstration either during the 2012 or 2014 Gaza wars – with one exception in which they marched literally at the end of a demonstration of 20-30,000 people in order to display their distance from the Muslims! The German youth group already calls the Palestinians to “bomb (...) the war-mongers and oppressors, Netanyahu, Hamas, Fatah, Obama or Merkel”. In other words, they equate US and Israeli imperialism with Palestinian organizations like Fatah and Hamas! In contrast, when the LFI and REVOLUTION still followed a revolutionary program, we unconditionally sided with the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupiers and even defended bourgeois and petty-bourgeois Palestinian organizations against the Zionists and imperialists.¹⁸³

On an ideological level, the LFI has deepened its theorization of the leading role of intellectuals in communist pre-party organizations. In a programmatic document it wrote:

“The core of the Marxist strategy for the achievement of socialism has always been

Michael Pröbsting: Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism. Another Reply to Our Critics Who Deny Russia's Imperialist Character, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Summary of the RCIT's Analysis, 28 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-china-and-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: More on Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Reply to Chris Slee (Socialist Alliance, Australia) and Walter Daum (LRP, USA), 11 April 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-slee-on-russia-china/>

182 On this, see: Anton Shekhovtsov: Russian and European fascists reverse the 1945 Yalta Conference, 28 August 2014, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.co.at/2014/08/1984-russian-and-european-fascists.html>

AWL: Another Yalta conference, 29 August, 2014, <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/23635>

183 REVO Germany: 3. Intifada? 21. November 2014, <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/allgemein/3-intifada/>

*recognition of the need to fuse the theoretical conquests of the socialist movement, which historically were developed by intellectuals, with the leading elements of the working class' own organisations and movements. Distinct stages or phases can be seen historically in the development of this fusion; from very small numbers of revolutionary intellectuals committed to the working class cause who form an ideological current and first begin the task of promoting the revolutionary programme within the working class, through propaganda groups able to take the first steps in developing working class cadres and then cadre parties, predominantly composed of working class activists and constituting a recognised political current within the working class."*¹⁸⁴

In the end, its orientation towards the progressive petty-bourgeois left milieu and its programmatic degeneration – all in the name of avoiding “sectarianism” and becoming part of a “strong and united radical left” – led the LFI into political confusion and numerical decline. Opportunism doesn't pay off.

184 LFI: Trotskyism in the Twenty-First Century, 14.2.2014, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/trotskyism-twenty-first-century>

v) An Ongoing History: The Foundation and Rise of the RCIT since 2011

As we have said, our expulsion was a preemptive strike in order to avoid critical debates among the membership of the LFI. Naturally, this put us in a very difficult situation. We were five militants in a single country. To a certain degree we were reminded of Trotsky's declaration in 1929, after the expulsion of the Left Opposition in the USSR and the resulting tremendous setback to their forces: *„Let there remain in exile not three hundred and fifty who are true to our banner, but thirty-five or even three; the banner will remain, the strategic line will remain, and the future will remain.“*¹⁸⁵

However, we didn't see any reason to despair because we were confident in our program, our analysis of the world situation, our strategic line, and our experience. We decided that as Bolshevik-Communists we had the duty to continue the revolutionary tradition which the LFI had now deserted, to develop Marxist theory and its program further and to rebuild – enriched with our experience from the past – the revolutionary organization both nationally and internationally. Despite our initially very small size we were optimistic because we knew that we were like a small but extremely sharp axe compared to the organization we had left, which had become a large hammer made of foam rubber. While we emerged from the split with a clearer understanding what we needed to do and what we must avoid, the comrades we left behind were in a state of confusion which resulted in yet further splits, decline, and the formation of political swamp.

We were aware that we faced the threat of national isolation and that we had to build an international organization simultaneously with the national organization. While our sudden expulsion cut us off from discussing the critical issues with other LFI members, we had established a certain reputation among them. We were contacted by members and former members in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the USA, and soon established close relations with them. Comrades in Pakistan, around Central Committee member Shujat Liaqat and the Kashmir branch, formed a faction in protest against the leaderships' adaption to the trade union bureaucracy and its failure to consistently support the national liberation struggles in their country. Tamil comrades in Sri Lanka, including M. Thangavel who was the only Tamil member of the leadership and responsible for the work among the plantation workers, joined us and started to organize work with plantation trade unions. The comrades fused later with a Trotskyist group of mostly Tamil workers around K. Kamalanathan. In addition, various members of the Austrian section and their youth organization also joined us.

We drafted an international program for the international organization which

185 Leon Trotsky: How to help the Centrists? (1929); in: Writings 1929, p. 398

was adopted after discussions and amending.¹⁸⁶ As a result we founded the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* in April 2012 with sections in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the USA, and Austria. Later, in April 2013, we were joined by the *International Socialist League* (ISL) in Israel/Occupied Palestine the most prominent member of which, Yossi Schwartz, has amassed a record of five decades fighting as a Jewish communist against Zionism and in solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle. Soon after, discussions with a small group of Brazilian trade unionists led to a fusion and they formed the *Corrente Comunista Revolucionária*. In addition we won supporters in Yemen and Sweden.¹⁸⁷ We collaborate and debate with various other socialist organizations and activists in other countries. As a result of the growth of our sections and the winning over of new groups, today former members of the LFI constitute only a small minority of the RCIT's membership.

Growth and Exemplary Mass Work

Without doubt, our expulsion put us in a very difficult starting position given our numerical weakness and our initial national isolation. However, it also proved a tremendous advantage: we could develop Marxist theory and propaganda as well as implement our methods of party building without any obstructions and compromises. In hindsight, all this far outweighed the difficulties.

Contrary to our own position, the LFI leaders convinced themselves that small communist groups have to be dominated by intellectuals, students, and labor aristocrats. However, practical experience has closed this discussion: we built an organization – both internationally as well as in Austria – which from the beginning has been dominated by workers and proletarian youth both in membership and leadership and which has a high share of migrants and members of national minorities.

Despite our initial small size we understood that we must not retreat into study circles but have to build the organization by a combination of theory, propaganda and agitation, and exemplary mass work.

Our comrades in Pakistan are working under extremely difficult conditions, given the state repression against organizations which consistently support national liberation struggles. Nevertheless they experienced massive growth through trade union work, participation in workers' and student protests as well as protests against national oppression and Marxist education work.

Comrades in Sri Lanka focus on organizational work among Tamil plantation workers. They are doing this in the context of an extremely difficult domestic

186 See RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, 2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/>

187 See, for example, the websites of our comrades in Brazil (<http://elmundosocialista.blogspot.com>), Israel/Palestine (<http://www.the-isleague.com/>), Sweden (<http://vansterparlan.v-blog.se/>), and Austria (<http://www.rkob.net>).

situation marked by the historic defeat which the Tamils suffered in 2009 when President Mahinda Rajapaksa smashed the de facto independent Tamil state led by the LTTE and killed tens of thousands of Tamils.

In Palestine/Israel comrades stand up against the Zionist chauvinist wave and openly support the Palestinian liberation struggle – including calling for the defeat of the Israeli army and the military victory for the Hamas-led resistance of the people of Gaza during the recent wars.¹⁸⁸ One of our younger members, 16-year old Hila Slutzky, has gained national prominence by initiating a campaign against sexist dress codes in schools directed against young women.¹⁸⁹

In Brazil, the CCR's leading member Joao Evangelista, a long-standing local trade union leader, played an active and prominent role during the longest teachers' strike in Brazilian history in the spring of 2014.¹⁹⁰

In Austria, one of our comrades led an occupation in a factory during a national metal workers strike in October 2011.¹⁹¹ Our prominent role in the Palestinian solidarity movement during the Gaza war in November 2012 led to a (failed) attempt of the Zionists to bring our comrade Johannes Wiener to court for "sedition" because of a speech he gave at a demonstration.¹⁹² We founded

188 See numerous articles from our ISL comrades at <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/> as well as on their website <http://www.the-isleague.com/>.

189 See Women's Oppression in Israel: Studs? Rather we need more Amazons and real heroes! Interview with Hila Slutzky by the Youth Organization RED*REVOLUTION, 7 September 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/women-in-israel-1/>; Hila Slutzky: Israel: Violence against Women during the Gaza war, 19.08.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/violence-women-gaza-war/> as well as <https://www.facebook.com/mafsikot?fref=photo>

190 See Brazil: Speech from RCIT trade union activist at Teacher's Congress, Speech from J.Evangelista, member of the leadership of a local trade union branch in São Paulo and delegate at the national congress of SINPEEM in Brazil, 4.11.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-speech-at-trade-union-congress/>; CCR: Brazil: Report and Video from CCR (RCIT Brazil) on Teachers Trade Union Assembly on 4 April 2014, 8.4.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/report-sinpeem-4-4-2014/>; CCR: Report on Teachers Trade Union Assembly on 11 April 2014, 19.4.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/report-sinpeem-11-4-2014/>

191 See Metallerstreik: Vorläufiger Erfolg bei der Betriebsbesetzung in Kärnten, Interview mit Christian Hoff, Mitglied des Streikkomitees und Aktivist des RKOB, <http://www.rkob.net/inland/interview-mit-hoff/>

192 See Victory! The Charge against RKOB Spokesperson and Palestine Solidarity Activist Johannes Wiener has been dropped! Austria: Israelite Cultus Community suffers defeat in its attack on Free Speech and Palestine Solidarity, Statement of the RKOB, 10.1.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/solidarity-with-wiener-won> ; Austria: Israelite Cultus Community attempts to criminalize partisanship for the Palestinian Resistance! Charge of "Sedition" against RKOB Spokesperson and Palestine Solidarity Activist Johannes Wiener is a Pretext for Attack on Freedom of Expression, Statement of the RKOB, 20.12.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/no-criminalization-of-solidarity-with-palestine>; Austria: Pro-Israeli War-Mongers try to throw 20-year old Palestine Solidarity Activist into Prison. RKOB spokesperson Johannes Wiener is accused of „sedition“

a new youth organization called RED*REVOLUTION which initiated two school student strikes in December 2013 – in the second strike, 15,000 students participated – and gained national prominence (including TV appearances of its spoke person Marc Hangler).¹⁹³ In addition we played a prominent role in the solidarity movement with the struggle against the military dictatorship in Egypt and built close relations with this migrant community.¹⁹⁴ We also won over the majority of activists of the largest and most proletarian branch of the social democratic youth organization in Vienna and jointly formed with them a new workers' organization called RED RESISTANCE.¹⁹⁵ Both the youth organization RED*REVOLUTION as well as RED RESISTANCE are affiliated with the Austrian section of the RCIT. Today, the Austrian section is stronger than it has ever been throughout its entire history. In addition to Pröbsting, leading working class comrades include Johannes Wiener (a gardener), Marc Hangler (a waiter), Nina Gunić (a waitress), Marko Nikolić (a social worker), and high school students from the middle strata of the working class like Simon Müllauer. The national secretary is Rebecca Stauder, a 16-year old high school

because of a Pro-Palestine speech during the Gaza War, Statement of the RKOB, 13.12.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/no-to-criminalization-of-rcit-activist>; Statements in Solidarity with RCIT Activist Johannes Wiener, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/solidarity-with-johannes-wiener>.

193 See our reports in English: Austria: School Students protest against attack on education rights! 25.11.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austrian-school-students-protest/>; Austria: School Students go on strike for their education rights! 5.12.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austria-school-student-strike/>; Austria: Successful School Student Strike on 6.December 2013! 6.12.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austria-successful-school-student-strike/>; Austria: Red*REVOLUTION calls for a second School Student Strike on December 12! 10.12.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austria-2-school-student-strike-on-12-12/>; Austria: The Great Second School Student Strike on December 12! (with Photos and Videos), 12.12.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austria-the-great-second-school-student-strike/>; For more reports in German language go to the website of Red*REVOLUTION at: <http://www.redrevolution.at>

194 You can find at <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/> numerous reports, pictures and videos of solidarity demonstrations against the Egypt dictatorship. Here are two Egypt: Report with Videos from Demonstration in Austria against the Military Dictatorship on 20.4.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-solidarity-demo-in-austria-20-4-2014/> with two speeches from Michael Pröbsting: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDS2DdNSg0E&list=UUCSUT4RYehM3d6by9iI4AIw> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pP3hcl-O0-o&list=UUCSUT4RYehM3d6by9iI4AIw>; See also a speech from Marc Hangler at a rally on 14.8.2014, <http://www.rkob.net/wer-wir-sind-1/rkob-aktiv-bei/schweigemarsch-%C3%A4gypten-14-08-2014/>; a speech from Johannes Wiener at a rally on 4.5.2014, <http://www.rkob.net/wer-wir-sind-1/rkob-aktiv-bei/freies-aegypten-demo-04-05-2014/>.

195 See Austria: Founding Conference of a new Workers Organization, 11.11.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/austria-roter-widerstand/>

student from the lower strata of the working class. These leaders reflect well the class composition of our entire section.

The growth of our sections and our expansion in new countries has brought into our ranks many comrades with different experience from countries with highly diverse class struggle conditions. This continues to give us the opportunity to learn quite a lot. While we already shared fundamental programmatic agreement with the ISL on the tasks of permanent revolution in Israel/Occupied Palestine, the discussion and collaboration with these comrades helped both the former LFI cadres as well as them to deepen and further develop our theoretical analysis and perspectives. Similarly, we gained from the rich trade union experience of our Brazilian comrades as well as a group of Tamil comrades which were former members of a Healyite group in Sri Lanka. The same holds true for the former social democratic youth group in Austria which we won over.

Marxist Theory and Propaganda

The foundation of the RCIT also enabled us to advance our theoretical work independent of the LFI's leaders' eclecticism. Besides elaborating a new program, we also elaborated Action Programs for Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Israel/Palestine and Austria. In addition we made serious advances in the field of Marxist theory. While the LFI always spoke about the need to develop the theory of imperialism (but had not done so until now), the RCIT has published a comprehensive book which analyses the development of imperialism and the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world in the past decades as well as the program of Marxist anti-imperialism. We also published a book which analysis the capitalist restoration in Cuba and the program of social revolution.

In addition, the RCIT has published a number of studies and booklets on the Arab Revolution, the History of Israel's Wars and our program of permanent revolution for the Palestinian liberation struggle, China's rise as an imperialist power, the development of Russian imperialism, the civil war in the Ukraine, the rise of inner-imperialist rivalry, alcoholism and the Bolshevik tradition of struggling against it, migration and revolutionary integration, liberation struggles and imperialist interference, the history of centrist degeneration of the Fourth International, capitalism and class struggle in Bangladesh, the coup d'état in Egypt, crisis and class struggle in Greece, and the August Uprising in Britain. In addition we have published educational material which introduces workers and youth to Marxism.¹⁹⁶

The RCIT publishes a monthly English-language journal and a website with new articles every 1-2 days. We manage to cover the most important international

196 See, for example, Johannes Wiener: 100 Questions and Answers on Socialism, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/100-q-a-on-socialism/> (This pamphlet has been published in German, English, Portuguese, and Hebrew languages); Johannes Wiener: Das ABC des Marxismus. Teil 1: Die Welt in der wir leben

events and publish regular reports about important events in the countries where we have sections and our work. Our website contains material in English and 15 other languages. The Austria section also publishes a German-language theoretical journal in addition to its monthly paper.

Of course there is no reason for complacency. We still have to travel a very long road to achieve our goal of building strong revolutionary parties and the Fifth Workers' International. Compared with what is needed to achieve these goals, we are still very small. But we have seen through our experience that we have the correct analysis to understand world developments, the correct program to fight against capitalist exploitation, and the correct methods to build communist fighting organizations, which can grow in periods like the present one. This gives us the assurance to continue this work and to look confidently towards the years ahead.



Contingent of the RCI's Austrian Section at the MayDay Demonstration in Vienna in 2014



Supporters of the RCI's Pakistani Section and Delegates of Flood Victims in the Hattizabad district before a Meeting with Officials in Lahore on 16.11.2014



Leading comrades of the RCIT Section in Sri Lanka at a Conference in January 2012



Contingent of RED*REVOLUTION - the Youth Organization of the RCIT's Austrian Section - at the School Student Strike on 12.2.2013



Leaders of the RCIT Austrian Section speaking at Public Events: Nina Gunić (top left), Michael Pröbsting (top right), Marc Hangler (below left) and Johannes Wiener (below right).



Yossi Schwartz (RCIT Israel/Occupied Palestine, top left), Joao Evangelista (RCIT Brazil, top right), M. Thangavel (below left) and K. Kamalanathan (below right), both from the RCIT Section in Sri Lanka



Leaders of the RCIT's Austrian Section: Rebecca Stauder (top left) and Marko Nikolić (top right),
Simon Müllauer (below left) and Clemens Pollheimer (below right)