

I.B. 19

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# WHAT IS L.O.?

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The last I.B. , containing "Why we still need a youth paper", "Notes on reorganisation", "Open letter to WP", "Letter to Sanaj", "Comments on the Manifesto of the IWG", etc., was mistakenly labelled no. 17, but was in fact no. 18. A number of articles, including further material on LO, are already at hand for no. 20. Contributions for the I.B. should be sent to Foster at the centre, preferably typed A4 on Roneo stencils.

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INTRODUCTION  
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We are embarked on a project of adopting techniques from LO without having yet thoroughly analysed the exact relation of LO's techniques to its politics. We must clarify for ourselves how the techniques might relate to our politics and objectives. For the central fact is that we are experimenting with adopting techniques from an organisation of a fundamentally different type from the I-CL. The difference lies not in this or that 'position' but in the very conception of what revolutionary politics is. And therefore when members of LO talk about things like a revolutionary party, and technique for building it, there is a danger of them and us using the same term for quite different things and simply misunderstanding one another - and a danger of us mis-understanding the use of LO's techniques.

If it is a fact that LO is a fundamentally different type of organisation from the I-CL, then it is an overweening fact in relation to which everything else has to be sorted out. We can only hope to successfully adapt some of LO's techniques to our political purposes if we have, and keep firmly in mind, an overall picture of LO as a political formation.

The conclusions hereafter are based on a certain amount of contact with LO over 10 years, and especially on discussions which Reynolds and I had in February this year with what appears to be the leadership of LO, in Paris. In addition ed Reynolds has provided a great deal of facts about LO, which I draw upon and to which I refer the reader. I propose to draw some sort of balance sheet on LO.

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LO AND POST-WAR "TROTSKYISM"  
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LO is a recognisable strand in post-war Trotskyism. It differs from groups like Militant and the WRP in having systematised certain techniques of political organisation. "The Party" as a goal largely sufficient to itself; mass work coupled with the more or less explicit assumption that "the politics" are already given and to be found in a tradition; traditionalist "Trotskyism" (i.e. 1940) supplemented by empirical adjustments to reality since 1940 - these are the features common to a number of "Old Trotskyist" tendencies that neither opted for post-1951 "USFI" political chameleonism nor for a new class position on the stalinist states.

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AN ORGANISATION - DESPITE POLITICS AND  
APART FROM POLITICS  
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LO however differs from a group like the WRP (or the older and somewhat different SLL) in having consciously systematised an entire technique for building an organisation despite and by ignoring the political problems that have beset the Trotskyist movement since the 1940s. The others have attempted to answer those problems, and consider their answers important; thus they appear more 'dogmatic' than LO.

An organisation which largely dispenses with politics in our sense of the word, LO does not work with political ideas as we

understand them, or at least the role of political ideas is radically different for LO and for us. From the Trotskyist tradition LO preserves certain key attitudes and assumptions, with which it works instead. It works with the idea of a sociological orientation to the proletariat. For us as for LO this orientation is fundamental. For LO however it is also a general explanation and measuring rod, something to be counterposed to political analysis and to political science in general. The "wrong orientation" can be used to explain a whole range of political errors of the other Trotskyists - and by and large LO is simply indifferent to the wide range of political problems - questions which for a Marxist are to-be-or-not-to-be questions for a revolutionary working class organisation, as for example an evaluation of the Stalinist states. LO merely asserts that these states remain "bourgeois", without seriously arguing as Marxists. They maintain also that the USSR is still a degenerated workers' state, without realising that this combination is now totally incoherent measured against the real world.

In fact the first mystery that presents itself for solution when you encounter LO is how to explain the disparity between clearly intelligent, knowledgeable, and reasonable, and above all serious, comrades, and the organisation's trifling attitude to serious political questions like post-war Stalinism. It is a mystery the exploration of which leads straight to LO's conception of politics. For, to those who base themselves on the methods of Lenin and Trotsky, to say that Eastern Europe, China and Cuba are just bourgeois (not even state capitalist) is either ignorant or light-minded. In fact the explanation is that for LO such questions are largely irrelevant. It is not interested in such questions.

LO operates with a fixed sociological orientation to the working class, with the idea that an organisation (which it thinks of as a political party; though LO is not a political party in the sense in which the word has meaning for us) must be built, which it carries over from the Trotskyist movement of the 1940s, and in the belief that the Trotskyism of that period before the emergence of some of the dominant features of the modern world is not only correct but adequate and sufficient.

On these assumptions, and operating politically on the basis of the tradition (and after all it is a weighty tradition) without trying to develop it and apply it to the changes in the world, LO operates to build an organisation. Apart from "the tradition" and "the class orientation" political questions are entirely secondary considerations for LO. Its militants are not recruited to political positions so much as to a technique. It is a technique that will build the party the want of which has been so cruelly felt by the Trotskyists since the definitive collapse of the Comintern in 1933. In fact, we shall see, LO's procedure involves a fundamental rupture with the Trotsky/Lenin conception of the marxist revolutionary party.

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 ORIGINS: THE 'COLLAPSE OF THE FI'  
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LO originates in the beginning of the 40s after the French Trotskyist

movement had more or less collapsed. It explained that collapse, in which the European Executive of the FI had adopted a position which made concessions to French patriotism on the invasion of France in 1940, in terms of the class composition of the movement, that is its petty bourgeois composition. LO was eventually to identify with Trotsky's comments on the class composition of the SWP in "In Defence of Marxism" (though it seems not to have given much attention to Trotsky's pioneering analysis of the expansion of Stalinism into Eastern Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia in 1939-40).

LO says that the FI collapsed under the weight of patriotism in 1940. That is not a sufficiently complete account of what happened to be true. The European Executive of the FI, dominated by the French section, did take a position in 1940 when France fell to the German armies, which lost sight of the fact that the countries being invaded (France, Belgium, Holland) were imperialist countries towards which revolutionaries could have no attitude other than defeatism. But in 1944 at the conference of European Trotskyists which reorganised the movement, the comrades took a clear position of condemnation of the errors made in 1940. The political confusion of 1940 was thus an error, a recognised and condemned error, not political collapse. Inescapably mistakes - even very great mistakes - are made in politics - the expansion of savage Nazi control into very wide areas of Europe did present real problems.

For example, in 1933 the ILO did not declare the Comintern bankrupt after it allowed the Nazis to assume control of Germany without a struggle. It declared the German party bankrupt. Only in August 1933, after the ECCI declared the tactics of the KPD to have been entirely correct, did Trotsky reluctantly declare the CI bankrupt. That is, only after the demonstration of inability to learn from that tremendous disaster for the working class and humanity. Certainly we must use a different scale of measures for a small propaganda organisation without a serious base in the working class, which is what the FI was in 1940. But not according to any rational and political scale (as opposed to a moralistic one) would it be necessary to declare bankrupt a political tendency which proved capable of assessing and correcting its errors, and of criticising it from the authentic position of communist internationalism.

And all the more so because it is a fact that it was a series of accidents, the product of the organisational weakness and disruption as well as the war, that allowed the French section to speak in the name of the European Executive. That is, in sum, that the declaration was itself a product of accidental factors, entirely separable from the political complexities and the chaos of Europe in mid-1940.

Even if we consider the patriotic error of 1940 to be of enormous political importance, we still have to take account of the fact that this line did in fact appear to speak for the European Executive only because of the organisational weakness of the FI.

And what happened to the FI in world war 2 was that it suffered organisational disruption, within which briefly serious political

confusion was able to speak in the name of the European Executive.

If we strip away the specious political element from LO's account of the "collapse" of the FI, we have nothing left but the fact of the organisational disruption of the FI (not collapse: contact was maintained between the Trotskyist groups in the democratic imperialist countries, and the International Secretariat continued to exist in New York. The IS did not make any social patriotic errors, let alone collapse into pro-Allied 'patriotism'. And LO by talking of the family of Trotskyism - in which it includes people we would exclude - seems to agree with that assessment.

If the FI can be said to have ceased to exist in 1940 the only explanation in terms of what actually happened is that it was too weak organisationally. LO has an organisational theory of the collapse of the FI (and that is implied in the 'framework of Trotskyism' conception).

The implications of such an account are inescapably this: that the FI should not have been founded in 1938. For it was so feeble then that it could not and did not base its justification for existence on claims to organisational adequacy. The justification for its existence lay in the continuity of its programmatic basis with the CI, of which it had been a faction, and in the programmatic achievements of the ILO. Dismissing the argument that the FI should only be 'declared' when it had a substantial organised body of support in the working class (is that LO's position now?) Trotsky said - the FI has no reason to be declared. It exists, it fights. But he added: is it still weak? Yes, but strong in its programme and in the tempering of its cadres. In 1939 Trotsky recorded that the International Secretariat scarcely existed.

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BUILDING THE PARTY DESPITE THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS

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The organisational explanation of the collapse of the FI seems central to LO's thinking. Certainly LO has no appreciation whatever of the nature or the importance of the ideological work which was the central activity and the central reality of the FI up to 1940. Quite literally it seems unaware of it - even when apparently basing itself on elements of Trotsky's thought it is totally drawn out of context. For LO the collapse was organisational. The task is organisational: build the party, the party as a machine.

This urgent concern probably began in the 40s - that is when the general political positions of Trotskyism were still sufficiently focused on the real world to be roughly adequate. It was taken up in 1956 (with the re-birth of LO: in fact, however, the idea of re-birth is mystical and cultist) in a situation in which the general positions of 1940 Trotskyism were not and could not be focused as the basis of Trotskyism in the concrete situation. It has continued as the central concern of LO, which bases itself on a tradition only, into a situation where the organisation has become de-politicised (certainly in the sense that 1930s Trotskyists were political; or, for that matter, 1940 LO).

The cry, Build the Party, is of course the cry of the defeated

Trotskyist movement (SLL, OCI, LO) which experienced the paralysis of its own inability to compete in the working class. However, that cannot be a task in and of itself; it cannot be separated from, or achieved apart from, the work of political analysis, theorising from experience, and then the application of the results of the theorising to guide the organisation's practice, giving political answers to the problems of the working class, answers firmly fixed in the living politics of the Trotskyist party and attempting to be levers of the party. All of these are for us the programme. An organisation without them is an organisation without a programme, and at best having a 'tradition'. Tradition cannot be a programme, in the Leninist sense, of a tool for the use of an interventionist party.

In another sense too the cry "Build the Party" without the living concern with politics and theory (theory as the product and then the guide to the activity of the party) is devoid of meaning for Marxists. The root idea for us concerning the party is the unique character of the working class as a revolutionary class and the consequent need for struggle for scientific communist consciousness, for ideological hegemony against bourgeois ideology. That is the fundamental purpose of the Leninist party, its unique purpose derived from the unique problems of the working class as a class in a society whose spontaneously dominant ideology is the ideology of the ruling class.

Tradition, even the weighty tradition of Marxism, cannot serve for this - only living 'ideological' politics can, through the Party. The whole history of Marxism shows beyond argument that even the weightiest and most fundamental texts of Marxism are entirely incapable of resisting adulteration and blunting (Lenin, State & Revolution). Only the conscious struggle of the living Marxists, reacting specifically and concretely, focusing and re-defining Marxism, can make of Marxism a consistently revolutionary instrument for the working class, for separating out and maintaining scientific consciousness in the revolutionary working class. Without this you get no revolutionary party, even if you get a machine.

This, it must be stressed, is what is unique about our theory of the party. If it is not true then there is no rational basis for activities designed to build a hard revolutionary party. If the function of the party is not as above, then there is no need for a revolutionary working class party of a special type.

If there is no irreplaceable function of this type for the Leninist party, then there is no need for our party. Certainly the working class party is not fundamentally a machine for underground activity or for preparing an insurrection, though it in fact does all of these things, and must prepare itself to do them. Parties of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie have done these things, though the bourgeoisie improvises its instruments (e.g. the Jacobins in the French Revolution) because it is, unlike the proletariat, a class that develops organically as a dominant class in the society it moves to take control of in its revolutions. Were it not for the ideological task of the revolutionary party of the working class, were it not for the problems of the proletariat in that respect, then the working class too could be expected to improvise (which of course it does - Hungary, Spain - but it can only seize and consolidate power if it is conscious), assuming it is a revolutionary class. If all the proletariat needs is an organisation,

then the tightly knit organisations are just sects, premature and almost certainly irrelevant.

If what the proletariat needs is a machine - then it does not need to have its militants labouring for decades in advance of the maturation of the situation where it requires an uprising.

If LO's operative conception of the party is correct, then its activities are absurd.

LO does not theorise, does not have a living politics other than the politics of organisation-building in the working class - that is, a task derived from politics it has virtually forgotten. It does not see the central task of the party in the Leninist conception as even important, let alone central. One way of getting a clear picture of what LO is is to understand that it is almost a precise inversion of the IMG new thinking of 1972. The IMG said the Party had no administrative function and no need to make calls to action, for its central role was to present a rounded conception to the class, and when the class accepted the rounded conception then it would see the practical activity that was necessary to it flowing from the 'rounded conception'. We made fun of it by pointing out that it was a view of the party as a brain - with no hands. LO is simply the administrative function, the hands - minus everything else.

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 THE WORKING CLASS ORIENTATION  
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We share with LO a belief that it is the fundamental duty of revolutionaries to implant their politics in the working class. We probably share with LO a belief that unless this is done then having correct and adequate politics is not in the final analysis going to make any difference. At first sight it appears that we share also with LO a contempt for scenario-nongering post-war "Trotskyism".

We do not however share LO's position, not even on these questions. For LO the working class orientation is more than the struggle by a Leninist organisation for its political line, a line which usually originates outside, and is capable of existing apart from the working class entirely. For LO the working class orientation is not a product of a political line (for then it is the product of the "traditionalist" politics), it is a universal substitute for a political line. Wherever political problems exist, problems the revolutionary Leninist party would try to answer, LO invokes the class orientation.

To the whole set of political problems of the last 40 and more years, LO has counterposed a class orientation (to "build the party") and rests content. Used, fetishised in this way, the "proletarian orientation" becomes a workerist fetishism that devours the elements in our political conceptions which the revolutionary party brings to the working class, and develops. It appears that for LO the orientation is deliberately raised up and more or less explicitly proclaimed as sufficient and adequate.

Posed as LO poses it, the class orientation becomes a complete caricature - one element grotesquely out of proportion. It transforms itself into a rather vulgar syndicalist indifference (and,

through LO's internal methods, an organised opposition) to politics. This is the fundamental reality of LO, what is alive in LO. It is disguised and camouflaged by the references to what is being done as building the party (though the party here is not any recognisable variant of a Leninist party) and by the traditionalised Trotskyism.

The central thing about LO's class orientation is not that it is seen as necessary and central, but that it is seen as sufficient.

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STALINISM  
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Even LO's position on Russia is not actually a living position. If it were then those holding it would find the feeble assertions that the other Stalinist states are simply bourgeois intolerable, for really and seriously to hold the view (as opposed to the dogma - that is, a mindless inheritance) that Russia is a degenerated workers' state, you will have to square it with Eastern Europe, China etc, in order actually to believe it. You can only hold both the view that Eastern Europe, China etc are bourgeois, and Russia is a degenerated workers' state if you hold neither view seriously. The one comes from the tradition of Trotsky, the other from derived prejudices (as opposed to theorising).

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TECHNIQUE IS POLITICS  
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LO's technique is its politics, and its politics are its techniques. That is why everything else is optional, secondary and irrelevant. And why its militants function beneath and out of reach of the sound of the debates that have occupied the Trotskyist movement for 40 years. Their "get on with it" approach is only reasonable and rational if you think you can "get on with it" irrespective of the political questions - with just the simplistic class approach: class loyalty and loyalty to an organisation to which is attributed all that belongs to the class. You can't. Anybody who says you can is junking the whole thinking of our movement. LO has done this.

You can destroy the living Trotskyist method by relegating and translating it into a tradition.

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LO MUST BE SEEN AS A TOTALITY  
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The dominant drives of LO - build an organisation, gear into the rhythm of working class life, strip away and abjure everything not immediately 'practical' for building the party; the systematic honing away to reduce all questions to the proportions deemed proper for "a militant's eye view" - these, I think, form a necessary unity in LO. Basically the central value, "build an organisation of militants in the class" is cut away from most of the complex of concepts and recognised qualifications, "accompanying" conditions which give it its Leninist meaning (partly this cutting away is through what 30 years of world history have done to the theory LO started with). For LO organisation-building has a Zinovievist (see Zinoviev's 2nd CI Congress document on the party) or a Blanquist technical meaning, as we've seen.



Everything else follows logically and correctly from this. If building an organisation can be posed as the goal you must assume - you are assuming - that the political basis is at least sufficient to allow it to be built. If the party is seen technically, there is a built-in bias to that assumption. If the basis is sufficient - not just for the next steps, but for the indefinite future - then concern with developing and augmenting it is a petty bourgeois "intellectualist" self-indulgence. Any questioning or doubting testifies to a concern with something other than the central goal, and antagonistic to it. Certainly anything that questions the basic certainties that allow the organisation to function is antagonistic - indeed, anything that might implant in the minds of LO militants the idea that some other activity might be equally important for revolutionary politics as the development of the organisation is antagonistic - logically!

The multi-dimensional Trotskyist epochal project to build a revolutionary party, reduced to the uni-dimensional organisational project of LO (and the OCI, WRP, SWP-US..) demands simplicity, stability and certainty of attitudes. Thus theorising and ideological work in totality is banished, and tradition takes its place, tradition supplemented by improvisations for current politics, and locked into a technique which is all-embracing. The reduction is due partly to the problems thrown up for the Trotskyists, and the implicit decision to ignore them for the sake of organisation-building.

Some of the sects have carried out this reduction in a way which de-stabilises themselves and leads to a rapid turnover of punch-drunk members. Like the SLL-WRP they immediately amalgamate their improvisations or brainstormings with the basic assumptions and prejudices of the organisation. Thus trident sectarianism often turns petty things into articles of faith - for a moment. LO has a more sophisticated technique here too. In the same way, the 17th Century English philosophers freed themselves from the constraints of deism and religion on science by saying God was the first cause, the originator of everything, while the problem for science was to explore the interactions and laws of the secondary causes - that is, the world. LO has the same two-tier, dualistic way of reconciling dogma and relations with the real world. LO reduces "God" to a few simple ideas (organisation, class, Trotskyist tradition - "the books") and operates empirically in current politics. If the 17th Century thinkers freed themselves from religious pseudo-knowledge and liberated themselves to seek real knowledge, what LO "liberates" itself from is Marxism as a living political method guiding the organisation in current politics. Here the useful analogy breaks down because many of the political positions in the tradition will have an obvious applicability to situations LO encounters and reacts to. Nevertheless it is a reactionary dualism.

For the party leaders who think the political basis of the organisation is sufficient, any questioning must counterpose itself to "building the organisation in the working class", must appear as disruptive of the organisation's efforts. The only ideological work needed is systematic refinement of the political artefacts to reduce them to dimensions of a narrow, and narrowly conceived, practicalness. Anything in addition is positively to be deplored. Here it is necessary to remember that the organisation does actively, systematically, and continuously use psychological pressures and

exercises to condition its members so that nothing 'deplorable' happens. The simple basic ideas, the routine, the moralism, the integration of as much as possible of the personal, intellectual and (now) sexual life of the individual member into the organisation, into the control of the organisation (that is, of a small group at the centre - in so far as it is conscious control rather than the group's inertia) indicates a consistent drive to achieve this. And it is either stupid or disingenuous to say for example - we also want total personal commitment from revolutionaries.

We want commitment based on a living political consciousness. An organisation structured so as to substitute for living political consciousness, a technique and a routine for psychologically processing and depersonalising its militants - that is not a revolutionary Marxist organisation. The structure of the LO organisation and its political and social culture or life-style do in fact substitute for politics. Given the lack of living politics, this is necessary. Given the depersonalisation - which appears to be a deliberate goal of the organisation - it would require an extraordinary strength of character to oppose one's own judgment on anything to that of the organisation - that or becoming "possessed" by some countervailing and competing social, cultural influence. To counterpose one's own political judgment to the organisation without becoming politically disorientated - especially, I should think, in a hectic political situation - would require in addition to strength of character a political balance which the LO organisation cannot encourage - which it indeed forbids by its de-politicised routine and the erection of this routine as the central value of the organisation - and which anyway is normally the product of an active political life.

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DISCIPLINE  
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It can be utterly misleading and disorientating to view the question through rhetoric and images about "commitment", "devotion", "Bolshevik discipline", "petty bourgeois individualism". Rather it is mystifying, when dealing with a quasi-religious sect - for which these signify something very different to what they mean according to our politics. We do want wholehearted and unreserved commitment to the working class and its revolution. We demand an abandonment of egotistical concerns and calculations - a spirit of commitment to the struggle come what may, of a total personal commitment that deliberately leaves itself no way of future personal retreat. Like ancient warriors who killed their horses before a battle as a gesture of their decision to win or die - revolutionaries should break their ties to bourgeois society as completely and irrevocably as possible. But this has absolutely nothing to do with the case of LO and how it differs from a serious political organisation!

What is noteworthy about LO is not that it fosters the decision to burn one's boats, but that it achieves this sort of commitment in one and same process in which it also de-politicises and de-individualises (to the declared best of its ability) its militants. It does not achieve this as a result of creating political relationships and political solidarity among its members, but by destroying all political relationships and substituting social, organisational and

psychological relationships; basically, by substituting a way of life, or rather by grafting a way-of-life sect onto certain goals that originally were derived - and rationally derived - from Trotskyism.

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POLITICAL SELECTION  
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However necessary for us it may be to subordinate and eliminate what is personal to us to the perceived needs of the class in action, it is an individual choice, and a series of individual choices. Even if the choice of one or many militants is to choose to follow somebody else's choice, someone else's judgment, that is still a choice and a judgment too. This is an essential part of the political process; the process of cogitation, responses, debate and polemic is in fact a process of selection and tempering, of groupings and regroupings around the axis of varying answers to political problems. The yeast of this process is the active conscious life of the individuals who make up the revolutionary 'movement' or party.

LO's conception rules out not 'theorising' in the abstract - it rules out and fights against the possibility of its members thinking and deciding about the political problems. To the degree that its processing succeeds it is the equivalent of a surgical operation in that it removes certain propensities. A Leninist organisation should create a climate of opinion and cultivate in its militants the firm conviction that to counterpose one's own personal concerns to the great goals of communism is contemptible and in general strive to create a situation where great personal "strength of character" - that is, of petty egoism - is indeed necessary before the organisation's basic goals are questioned, or democratically decided methods and immediate tactical decisions are disrupted or ignored. But it must also ensure the possibility of objective, rational, political assessment of itself and its methods as well as the objective situation. Against every one of these basic norms LO is fully armed and opposed both in its premises and its structure and its conditioning process. In no sense is Marxism in favour of LO's type of depersonalisation.

We counterpose to the individualism of capitalist society, conscious political and class solidarity; we in no sense counterpose to it the 'solidarity' of the religious order. The revolutionary party exists as a collective and an entity in action. Its membership consists of volunteers who agree to respect a common discipline in action, to abide by majority decisions etc. The Party may confront one or a number of its members as a disciplinarian force which insists that a minority gives up for now its right to express opinions different from the majority, that is, for the moment, the party. A certain degree of difference of opinion, dependent on a given situation, may lead to splits, or expulsions. In no way however does the party have a right to forbid its members to think. Nor should an organisation that wants to be Marxist presume to eliminate the habit of thinking, of independent-mindedness - nor should it confuse party discipline with mindlessness, still less with deliberately fostered mindlessness. To have to even discuss this as a problem which exists in reality indicates that we are dealing with a peculiar sect which in a limited way reproduces some of the

characteristics which the Stalinist police-state 'Parties' produced by a different technique.

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MECHANICAL ORGANISM  
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The totality of LO amounts to a misunderstanding of the goals and methods of political organisation. Political selection and re-selection, the posing and resolution of political problems - fluidity, flexibility, and responsiveness to the situation, these are necessary and irreplaceable. The political watchwords have to be defined and re-defined, and they change. Political selection, re-selection, and regroupment of militants is the political procedure. In fact it corresponds to a fluid and changing political reality. It must be flexible enough to adjust - even in the teeth of the opposition of the leaders in a preceding period. LO's structure says with every element of its routinised and mechanical functioning that adjustment can only be with the agreement of the entrenched leaders, and even only on their initiative. It represents the congealed mechanical unity of a social organism fused by inflexible social, traditional/political, and organisational ties into a purely mechanical unity, controlled by an entrenched and unchallengeable leadership of 3 or so people. The necessary precondition of its existence as a fixed, self-perpetuating organism (it is not a party) is the de-personalisation and de-politicisation of the individual militants. Without the elimination of politics and of the individual militants' habit of thinking critically about the political problems, an organisation of this sort is impossible; otherwise the critical thinking would act as a corroding and dissolving acid.

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L.O.'s DEPOLITICISED STRUCTURE  
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LO is structured so that there is no political life outside a circle of perhaps less than half a dozen people. Systematic conditioning of the membership is a central goal of the organisation - that is, socialisation, control and supervision of reading, of leisure, of personal life, generation of sustained and pervasive moral pressure, the absence of channels for any ideological (and, it would seem, organisational) initiatives or independence. There is a fixed and permanent concentration of all political and organisational initiatives in the organisation.

The de-politicisation of its members is a necessary result of this whole type of organisation, not some inexplicable accident. The class orientation and the project to build an organisation of militants in the class are central and compartmentalised from all political questions. That is how LO manages to dispense with politics and yet build an organisation.

It is one of the clearest manifestations of LO's radically different conception of politics.

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THE DISSOLUTION OF TROTSKYISM INTO SOME OF ITS COMPONENTS  
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In its purely technical project to build a revolutionary

organisation LO parallels Blanquism which (in the early stage of Blanqui's career) believed the task of communists was to build up an organisation until it was strong enough to launch an insurrection. The organisation was central - and in fact an 'adequate' organisation was sufficient. Viewed from its de-politicised concern with the working class and given its disinclination to concern itself with the political questions of the last third of a century, LO is best summed up politically as effectively syndicalist. In fact in LO two of the key ideas in Leninism (the centrality of the working class and the need for a party) have become dislodged from the network of complementary ideas which give them their specifically Marxist and Leninist character.

LO has broken away fundamentally from the conception which linked the class with the 'party of a new type' in modern Leninism/Trotskyism - the struggle for the ideological emancipation of the working class. We have focus on the working class (common also to Blanquism and syndicalism) but the Marxist-Leninist contribution to understanding what is specific to that class as a revolutionary class is gone. We have a focus on a revolutionary party as essential (common also to Blanquism) but also a complete obliviousness as to what, irreplaceably, that party must do in relation to the working class and its revolution. In LO Trotskyism is decomposed into some of its prehistoric elements.

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 IDEOLOGICAL DISARMAMENT  
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Neither Blanquism nor syndicalism are tradition for which we have reason to have contempt - on the contrary, revolutionary syndicalism was a politically underdeveloped working class reaction against opportunist parliamentarism. Blanquism, which became explicitly communist, formed for decades the link between the plebeian revolutionaries of the French revolution and modern communism.

But both are political currents that were absorbed into, and subsumed in, Leninism - and thus superseded by it. Neither the one nor the other - nor a combination of both as in LO - can in any sense now be a possible substitute for Marxism and Leninism. For people wanting to base themselves on Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, and their politics, to settle for such a substitute is to allow themselves to regress back to an earlier political era. It amounts to sloughing off over 100 years of revolutionary experience in politics!

The Blanquists could be found almost 150 years ago focusing on 'building a party' and on 'the proletariat' (though Blanqui did not have a conception of the proletariat that Marxists would agree with, apparently including in it very broad plebeian layers too). To think that can now be enough when a traditionalised Trotskyism is added to it - that is, in fact, to accept - and even contribute to - a catastrophic defeat for revolutionary working class politics.

It is to proclaim that living Marxist political responses became either unnecessary or impossible after 1940 (and thus implicitly it leaves us wondering if much of the work of the leading Communists beginning with Marx was even relevant to revolutionary politics. For practical purposes LO in fact uses the books to give its militants a basic education and revolutionary culture.

But either 'the books' are a product of a struggle for Marxism, that is, scientific socialism, which was necessary and must continue - or else they are optional. And if the struggle for Marxism was not optional, why did it stop, or rather can people who attempt to be serious revolutionaries allow it to stop?

In 1940, in 'In Defence of Marxism', Trotsky discussed the implications for Marxism if in fact the conclusions could not be avoided any longer that Russia was a new form of class society, neither bourgeois nor proletarian - and one which had to be recognised, given the then stagnation of the capitalist world system, as the replacement for and the way out of the impasse of moribund capitalism. The programme of Marxism would have to be recognised as outmoded, he concluded and revolutionaries would have to elaborate a programme for the defence of the slaves of the new system - and begin again theoretically where Marx and Engels began in the 1840s. What LO has done politically bears a remarkable resemblance to what would have had to be done if it had to be concluded from the evidence that capitalism was being replaced by a new and unforeseen form of class society. Indeed it has done much more than would then be necessary: it has been defeated into taking refuge in almost total ideological disarmament by the post-war problems. Not only disarmament but also the adoption of a sect politics that militates against ideological work, and amounts to a clear repudiation of such work. In 1940 Trotsky contemplated something similar to the political situation of LO now as the unavoidable consequence of the irrefutable establishment by historical development of the bankruptcy of Marxism. He thought of it as an epoch-closing political catastrophe for the politics of revolutionary communism and the proletariat.

The way LO is structured proclaims that ideological work, that is Marxism, is not necessary. In a catastrophic situation such as Trotsky spoke of, the revolutionaries would have had to partly disarm ideologically - but they would not have then adopted a way of relating to the slaves of the new society for the purpose of "Building an organisation of militants" that was designed to root out any possibility of ideological rearmament. LO does just that.

LO voluntarily (as a choice, partly a choice of allocation of resources) has abandoned a struggle for Marxist ideological and political continuity. To do that is in fact to abandon Marxism itself.

LO's theoretical position as communists today is scarcely better than that of Auguste Blanqui 140 years ago. For either Marxism - that is, revolutionaries using Marxism - is able to explain and understand in relation to the programme of Marxist communism, the tremendous changes of the last one third of a century, or in this way, by this route, it is found to be bankrupt. The combination of implicitly "admitting" that Marxism is bankrupt and of believing nevertheless that it is still possible to "build a communist organisation in the working class" - that is only a roundabout way of saying it was always irrelevant or at least a luxury.

What LO has done - and continues to do - is done in the name of building an organisation of militants. But the very conception of

what an organisation of militants must be and what it must do is wrong. Certainly it is very far from our conception. And if the development of Marxism ceased in the 1940s (when it ceased for LO), then we must conclude that most of the concerns of Marxism in the previous 100 years were of little concern to revolutionary communist politics. Blanqui was sufficient. Everything beyond Blanqui has simply been a misunderstanding - or possibly the result of alien class pressures on the would-be communist revolutionaries.

Catastrophic defeat was experienced by the Trotskyists in the '40s. Organisational disruption at the beginning of the war; rallying after 1944 only to see capitalism and stalinism successfully link arms against revolution, against the revolutionary proletariat; collapse at the end of the 40s in Britain and France. The documents of the Second World Congress, held at the beginning of 1948, are very much permeated with a spirit of defeat and pessimism, though the congress unambiguously reaffirmed the political positions of our movement. The "mainstream" found a way out of this situation by attaching its hopes first to the Yugoslav CP and later to a variety of events which were seen increasingly as a "process" to which the mainstream tried to attach itself. It took the LO comrades a decade after the late 40s collapse to get going again. Their solution was to abandon politics other than the politics of organisation-building. LO seems to have recoiled as a response to the events of the 1940s. But it is not possible to recoil from the problems of the world without regressing to an earlier stage of development. LO is a regression to 1940 Trotskyism, just as the USFI is often an abandonment of it. The I-CL must face up to the problems of the real world, disarming ideologically in neither the USFI nor the LO sense.

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LOYOLAISM  
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The working-class and organisational focus of LO, and its attitude to Marxism, are best understood by reference to syndicalism and Blanquism. But nothing less than religious formations offer us the type of systematically processed and regulated life which exists in LO - Loyola's Society of Jesus (and, in a different way, various cults that exist today: scientologists, etc.) LO is not an organisation with a high political discipline - its discipline is that of an integrated organism.

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MORALISM  
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Reynolds recounts that the ultimate argument he encountered which justified the incoherence of saying Russia is a degenerated workers' state and the other Stalinist states, identical in social structure, are bourgeois, is that one makes a moral choice. Therefore, in deference to the October Revolution, Russia remains a degenerated workers' state, and as a sort of reprisal for the course history has taken, in those countries, China etc. remain simply bourgeois states, though if one refers to the facts they are more or less identical to the Soviet Union.

Just as the idea of "building the party" has grown out of all

proportion, and grown away from its political root ideas, so also with the idea of politics as a moral choice.

In fact morality is an important part of our outlook. Not the morality of priests, and other self-proclaimed vicars of "God", nor a morality that is above society and its classes or above history; but still, a morality - based on the needs of the proletarian class struggle and of revolutionary activity in class society, understood scientifically, that is, understood by Marxists. Insofar as ideas translate into imperatives for practice, they establish a political morality. Certainly the revolutionary party must instill into its militants that it is immoral not to act as a communist militant once one has understood what communism is and what the proletarian class struggle is.

There is a morality growing out of our programme and our ideas - and subordinate to them.

LO however takes the fact that for revolutionary militants political consciousness dictates behaviour which becomes a moral imperative, and uses it as a substitute for political consciousness, and for exercising rational choices within our politics. It becomes a moral question, not only to act for the proletarian revolution and to focus oneself on this task. It is a matter of morality to have this or that position within the framework of communism.

Instead of political morality being the link between the basic ideas of communism and our personal commitment to them - that is, a function of accepting certain ideas, - morality enters as a basic determinant at the start, and serves also to answer - that is, to back up the LO leadership's makeshift answer to - problems that arise in the course of political life. In addition, appeals to this basic communist morality as a solution to political disputes that arise among communists are used. This procedure in an organisation is simply an abuse of its position by the leadership: an appeal to a force outside of the framework of the political problems that are actually posed, and outside a framework of rational positions and decisions.

In fact, such a conception of morality in politics makes rationality impossible. Whereas the morality of a Marxist and a communist is derived from reasoning about society (it may of course originate in a 'gut' class reaction: the point however is that Marxism translates such instinctive reactions into a rational and coherent set of ideas) and is thus relative, the morality that would take as given conclusions about Russia or China which could only rationally be derived from reasoning is absolute and a-historical. It is thus irrational. And it is not just quaint. In fact it takes politics back to the medieval world where political judgment was a product of religious and moral premises, produced not by rational but by moral choices, ultimately justified with references to God's will. It thus operates with the basic ideas of communism as if they are a-historical, and, indeed, outside of history.(+) This, again, is logical step from the fundamental LO position of abandoning the 'ideological' combat aspect of Marxist politics. For if the goals of communist activity are not validated and re-defined in an interaction with the developments in the real world, then they can only

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(+) See footnote on next page.



be proclaimed in opposition to and in defiance of that world and its developments (e.g. the Stalinist states in the last 30 years). They must be proclaimed and defended within current and recent world history - or they can only be validated outside of it. Like everything else about LO its moralism fits logically into its whole outlook. Here as elsewhere LO has catapulted itself backwards in history to beyond the starting point of Marx and Engels. The goal of "an organisation of militants in the working class" is preserved at the cost of abandoning, implicitly or explicitly, all that Marxism has done in one-and-a-third centuries to make communism rational and scientific.

It takes LO right outside not only Marxism but also rational and scientific thinking. It raises sharply for the I-CL the question of whether it is in fact possible to have an ideological and political dialogue with LO. For clearly we speak a different language.

No Marxist could accept a retreat like LO's to suprahistorical moral principles as a "defence" of communism against the problems of the last decades: the very idea is itself an assault on communism conceived as anything other than an aspiration. LO's 'moralist' defence of communism takes us back not only to Auguste Blanqui but to any number of individuals and groups in 2000 years and more, in which there has been much advocacy of variants of communism as a desirable type of society. But LO's definition of communism derives from Marxism and relates to the proletariat in capitalist society? Of course, and therefore the logical absurdity of LO's position is not immediately obvious. But in so far as communism depends on LO to uphold its rationality and to defend its claims to be scientific now, in relation to the developments of modern history since Marx and since Trotsky (e.g. modern Stalinism), LO simply declines the challenge.

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L.O. AND THE U.S.F.I. ARE EXACT PARALLELS

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The I-CL has in common with LO a general contempt for the speculative scenario-mongering which has dominated most of post-war "Trotskyism". Not only is this the main feature of the USFI currents, it is also a serious and sometimes the predominant feature of some of those who split in 1952-53 (e.g. the OCI and, less so, the SLL). Even though we insist on a cold realism, we do not, however, abandon all "scenarios", that is all projections and extrapolations from a given reality to act as a guide for the work of the organisation. To do that would be to abandon all theorising, to abandon

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(+) The absurdity of all this can be seen if we follow it through logically. A morality that is outside of human choice and which is not an established ideological safeguard of a ruling class leads straight to one or other variant of the idea of 'God' as the fountainhead of the morality which is outside of history and society. The idea that it is a moral choice to maintain that the USSR continues to be a degenerated workers state is only tenable if we appeal to a source for the 'moral' choice outside of human society and human reason. If the USSR is a degenerated workers state as a result of a 'moral' decision that means because some force that is usually called 'God' says so!! - or rather because 'his' vicars, the LO leadership, say so!

all attempts to function as conscious Marxists orientating within a given reality according to a Marxist perception of it and of its potential for transformation by revolutionary action.

In fact if we do not do the latter, we can only grope along empirically; never rising to the possibility of conscious action - to the sort of action Marxism, and experience, tell us is necessary for the proletarian revolution. Trotsky wrote, "Without a theoretical conception revolutionary action is impossible". He meant that without an overview of the general trends and possibilities it was impossible to orientate as revolutionaries within a situation some of whose key features necessarily appear as stable and immutable to an empirical (and superficial) view, which takes the appearances for reality and does not attempt to grasp the active forces and dynamics which in fact dominate this reality. Without the ability to orientate the revolutionary organisation in such a way that it can transform the given reality because it sees both its context and its potential - that is, grasps it theoretically - without that ability no conscious revolutionary action is possible. At best we could hope for a lucky guess or rely on someone's intuition (given LO's structure, it means relying on the 'intuition' of the inner group). Without theory only a routine, supplemented by empirical adaptation, is possible: a routine, moreover, tuned to past experience and therefore almost certainly doomed to breed conservatism in a situation where new qualities are thrown up by the class struggle, and, certainly, new combinations can be expected to be thrown up in any serious revolutionary upsurge.

LO doesn't just abjure the wild speculative flights of imagination characteristic of vulgar "Trotskyism". It doesn't just refuse to be pulled into "revolutionary Micawberism", into optimistic and passive "revolutionary expectations" such as have dominated "mainstream" post-war Trotskyism. In fact it abandons all "scenarios" - that is, all perspectives, all theorising as a guide to action. (For example, on Portugal recently - and more pointedly on France during the general strike of 1968 (+)). LO abandons all theory as a living guide to action. Thus, again, it differs from a root idea for us of what the revolutionary party is to do, apart from "building" itself "in the class". It replaces Marxist theory and the role of theory in a revolutionary party on the Marxist model by instinct, empirical shifts, and a routine for maintaining and expanding the "party rooted in the class".

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THE ORGANISATION - OR THE CLASS?  
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In fact LO quite logically will wind up as a 'substitutionist' grouping, focused on itself, on its project of 'developing an organisation of militants in the class', and not on the working class. For us the idea of a "spontaneous communism" (not spontaneous Marxism, not spontaneous scientific consciousness) as an attribute of the working class in modern conditions at a certain level of mobilisation in conflict with the bourgeoisie, is a vital part of our belief in the possibility of a working class revolution. One of

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(+) LO declares that the situation in May-June 1968 was never anywhere near revolutionary, and that all the more general slogans used by the revolutionaries were meaningless until genuine strike committees had been built on a wider scale - (Typist's note.)

our central concerns is how the revolutionary organisation can link up with the class during a mass upsurge. For LO, however, the focus is on 'building the organisation'. Just as the raising of certain political questions can be disruptive, so also can events in the class struggle disrupt the work of the 'party builders'. Thus LO related to the General Strike of 1968 and to the Portuguese events as things that had no potential because no LO type organisation existed (Portugal) or was big enough (France). This logic was already displayed fully in the best period of the 2nd International. Building the organisation was the purpose of activity. Working class activity could in fact make that task difficult, could disrupt the work. Like the 2nd International, LO has no use for transitional demands (though it does 'bow' to the Transitional Programme) - that is, for the use of demands that have as their goal the mobilisation of sections of the working class, or of the working class, which have not yet understood socialism, or have not yet accepted communist goals (see I.C. no.2/3). LO's focus on "building the organisation" quite logically distances it from the working class as a creative force in action, just as it distances it from grappling with the political problems - that is, from Marxism. "Building an organisation of militants in the working class" can be counterposed to revolutionary direct action by the working class just as easily as it can be counterposed to tackling the problems of politics which for militants using the approach of Lenin and Trotsky are the to-be-or-not-to-be of party-building. If "building the party" is the central objective and the precondition for revolution, then the counterposition is as logical for LO as it is for the WRP.

The LO "nitty gritty" day-to-day routine forms the exact parallel of the imaginative scenario-mongering of the USFI. The practical result for their adherents of these two approaches differ markedly, and the lessons to be learned from either are not the same. In terms of political method both are equidistant from the I-CL - and from Marxism. (Though at least the USFI, and even those groups with which LO has a lot in common such as the RSL, the WRP and the OCI, attempt to be Marxists in that they attempt to theorise and to establish "perspectives". LO is content to be 'revolutionary'. LO in practice believes it is possible to be revolutionary without a living Marxism, in communion, so to speak, with the shades of the Marxism that mysteriously ceased to develop in the 1940s, after 100 years of development...)

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L.O. IS A CULT  
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Given its organisational character it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the LO organisation is a form of cultism. But instead of an ad hoc cult having grown up around a given individual, LO is a fixed, standardised and consciously processed cult around the existing leadership. The lack of any political life, any decision making, outside of the inner group of perhaps 3 people, together with the apparently deliberate creation and re-creation of non-political organisational relationships, adds up to an implicit but scarcely avoidable assumption of the infallibility of the existing leadership. The education of its members to take a given political line passively, together with the active discouragement throughout the whole organisation, at all levels, of the formation of political opinions other than those of the leadership (perhaps 3 people)

add up to an assumption of infallibility for the future too. For there is no provision whatsoever for coping if the entrenched leadership is not adequate, if it is slow, unimaginative, or for when it simply gets old.

To say that it is a cult is to focus on the essential relationship, which is of an a-political kind, that in fact exists between the membership and the leadership. With the given organisational structure and way of functioning the relationship between the leadership and the membership could not be other than cultist. The apparently collegiate leadership of the 3 or so leading LO comrades does not change the essential character of its relationship with the rest of the organisation. The relationship is one in which the centre of the cult is subject neither to democratic checking (it seems they are not regularly, if at all, submitted for re-election), nor even to any political or ideological constraints other than what they themselves choose. This is true even of "Trotskyism". For it is, at the least, strange to find LO resting its case for its sociological orientation heavily on Trotsky's comments on the class composition of the SWP at the end of the 1930s, as contained in "In Defence of Marxism"; and at the same time ignoring the pioneering analysis in this book of the Baltic states and Eastern Poland's structural assimilation into the USSR. Not arguing with, or rejecting, Trotsky's case - just ignoring it. Such arbitrariness is probably only possible where the political ideas are not actually related to as ideas. The talk of the rebirth of LO is also, unavoidably, cultist and mystical.

Marxism holds that the right to form tendencies is not a luxury but the necessary safeguard for the organisation in face of a complex and changing reality, towards which there can be no guarantee that the given leadership of an organisation will be adequate. The structure of LO implies that the leadership is and always will be omniscient. The implication is even that everything is known at the beginning; at least everything that will be needed from now until the organisation has been built and has carried out the revolution. If it isn't then there is no way of taking account of it unless the 3 take account of it. Should they refuse or be unable to, then the tightly-controlled organisation with a one-way flow of ideas, has no provision for rectifying this. The organisation militates enormously against this very possibility. The central value - build the organisation - and the whole range of moral and psychological pressures which add up to a totalitarian regime - means there would have to be a revolt for it to happen.

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 L.O. AND THE "TROTSKYIST FUNDAMENTALISTS"  
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The combination of tradition, dogmatism based on an early "snapshot" (1940, 1953) of Trotskyism, empirical makeshifts in relation to current political problems, and a routine activity, usually accommodationist (here LO may be the exception) (bulletins, LP entry, 'campaigns') are all common to the RSL, WRP, LO, OCI, partly the SWP-US. They differ in the 'dogmas' according to when they became ideologically autonomous, and thus they differ on the question of post-war Stalinism. Common is a theoretical sterility, behind the 'tradition', 'compensated' for with makeshifts empirically adopted according to the 'values' of the organisation,

according to its orientation (LP, industrial, or both as with the SLL), sometimes according to its brainstorm (WRP).

The high level of irrationality in some of these groups (OCI, WRP) is the by-product of a fundamentally religious way of thinking. Typically key parts of the world are sealed off from rational examination because the basic dogma of the sect has it that everything is already known about them (and facts are ignored - or falsified - when they don't fit). LO's procedure, though very 'reasonable', dispenses with rationality outside of a limited area of practical work. It has streamlined down the 'dogma' to a few basic positions - its position on the USSR is obviously now no more than a product of a historical accident, for it has no real meaning (and could not have outside of a situation of a Russian - American clash) in practical politics or in ideological coherence.

What is remarkable about LO is the rigorous systematisation, and "development" with a quite acute intelligence and self-awareness, of things to be found in the other named groups. LO differs from the others in its explicit position, for practical purposes, that technique has rendered theorising and even ideological combat work obsolete. The other named groups battle and squabble about their inherited ideas and some they make up as they go along. LO is far more 'economical' with its time and resources. In doing that however LO passes beyond the spectrum of politics, in which even the OCI and WRP pay lip service to the Trotskyist conception of politics, and into what is probably best described as a sort of syndicalism.

Common to these groups also is the approach that comes down to the view that 'the party' must be built and theory is sufficient already. The OCI and the WRP add political doodles (e.g. on Cuba (+)) but even they hardly take them seriously. Implicit is the view that it is all "finished", "the books" exist already, needing only "the unity of theory and practice" to come alive - not just that there is a sufficiently political basis for communists to build in the class.

LO appears superior to the other named tendencies in its no nonsense seriousness and focus on work which we can readily agree is necessary. Politically it appears to present a modest almost blank slate. This can be disarming. The point is that if LO appears to be free from the convoluted politics and 'theories' of the RSL/WRP/OCI etc. it is because it has chosen to relapse back beyond Marxism, whereas the others have at least attempted to stand on Marxism - and therefore felt the need to attempt to develop it, to attempt with it to answer the political problems posed in the last third of a century. LO's apparent superiority here is an optical illusion. LO is only 'superior' if the work the Trotskyists as a tendency have been doing since 1923 is an irrelevance. LO is "different", not superior.

Even that most disgusting trait of the OCI-WRP, systematic and deliberate lying and misrepresentation of their factional opponents, is not entirely absent in LO. The assertion that the FI collapsed because of the chauvinism of the European Executive

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 (+) While describing China, Yugoslavia, etc as workers' states, the OCI and WRP consider Cuba capitalist - (Typists note).

in 1940 is so demonstrably false that to continue asserting it is lying (+). LO is urbane, where the others are usually hysterical. But then it is very urbane about the whole range of problems of the Trotskyist movement. If it is less strident that is because LO is less concerned with things like that. In any case the germ is certainly there. Explaining one of its central positions by an assertion which a responsible investigation would show to be untrue - that is not qualitatively different from the Healyites and the OCI on "Pabloism". The difference is in style, not substance. It must serve the same function with LO members and for the leadership; that is, the manipulation of the members.

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L.O. AND THE IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE  
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The focus on building an organisation of militants in the class, which arises from a fundamentally organisational understanding of the problems of the Trotskyist movement and an organisational explanation for the supposed collapse of the FI in 1940 (which in turn implies an organisational *raison d'être* for the FI in 1938 - and is a gross misunderstanding) has taken LO to a condition where it has no use at all for political and ideological struggle, or for propaganda beyond a minimum based on 2 or 3 basic ideas. There is no "battle on the ideological front", no theorising, no serious polemic, no serious dialogue with the revolutionary left, nor even with what LO calls "the family of Trotskyism". The selection of cadres is not ideological/political selection, nor is what is required of the 'party' ideological work. Not having concerned itself with the living political questions - not even to the extent of having discussion-worthy answers to such central problems as the expansion of Stalinism after world war 2 - LO cannot do ideological work - at all.

The conception of building a fighting propaganda group is totally alien to what LO is and does. It would seem to have been alien to LO as far back as its decision that the problems of Trotskyism were problems of organisation rooted in the petty bourgeois composition and methods of functioning of the Trotskyists in the 1930s and 40s.

Even if that was more or less the central truth in the 1930s and 1940s, it pales into a minor detail in the period after 1948 (roughly) for then the problems of the Trotskyist movement were problems of an enormous political and theoretical magnitude. If one can demonstrate that the political chameleon-like instability of the mainstream (and even of the IC tendencies) has some analogy with petty bourgeois "methods", petty bourgeois instability, and petty bourgeois lack of a stable centre of gravity, nevertheless a focus on that analogy with petty bourgeois methods, or even pointing to recognisable petty bourgeois traits within the Trotskyist movement - that is to confuse the issue: fundamentally it is even political evasion.

From the late 1940s the problems of Trotskyism were problems of ideological self-reconstruction in relation to the 'new reality' in

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(+) According to ed Reynolds, when you get really close to LO the question does not seem very important. It is, nevertheless, one of the central ideas you get when you rely on "discussion", that is, an exchange of "reasons" and ideas as we understand them.

the world. By then, and after it was re-formed in 1956, LO did not bother with these problems at all.

In fact its 'solution' to the problems of Trotskyism is simply archaic.

At best it has meaning in terms of the '30s and '40s when "the politics" could be said (though with serious reservations in the 1940s) to be adequate. Given LO's concentration on the party as organisation after the war, and after 1956, together with the failure to keep abreast politically (instead having the pretence that everything ceased developing around 1940, at least everything worth noting and subjecting to Marxist analysis) we get the gradually more complete depoliticisation of the organisation. Centrally, given the organic character of the organisation, and the focus on a tiny group as "the brain", as the only people who are politically alive in the I-CL sense, this must mean the depoliticisation of the leadership of the organisation.

It is therefore misleading to say simply that LO has the respectable conception of building an organisation of militants without seriously qualifying it. They reject - and LO's entire structure and mode of functioning militates against - the project of building a propaganda group, in the sense of a political vanguard fighting for political and ideological hegemony: technique renders this irrelevant. The party as technique is one-sidedly counterposed to the party as ideological centre. The notion of building a propaganda group seems to be categorised by LO as something from the "petty bourgeois" period of Trotskyism against which it reacted. The argument is quite logical. The selection of militants is not - and could not be - selection by a proven political hegemony, but by an organisational technique. It is recruitment into a technique and a way of life, not to politics other than traditional Trotskyism. The political and ideological struggle is replaced by the struggle for a party conceived of as separate from such questions, except in so far as they exist in a past period and are recorded in "the books" which form the tradition. Because the tradition is by no means dead it allows LO to relate to the Communist Party pertinently. And no doubt that fact helps perpetuate the belief in its own political sufficiency. From this necessarily follows a psychological selection and permanent psychological conditioning within LO, together with the maximum regimentation of the lives of their militants.

The position is entirely logical: when an organisation is seen as everything and the politics necessary to its construction as largely already in existence - then no political life is necessary. LO is not a case of a group structured so as to be an organisation of militants fighting for a place inside the working class and rationally compartmentalising its functions and streamlining its activities. It is a case of a whole organisation being consciously and systematically structured so as to do without politics other than the tradition - which is a form of political ancestor-worship - and to be a fundamentally inational formation. LO's politics are remnants rather than something alive: its 'party' machine is not in the service of its politics - other than its positive ideas, which are probably best described as a sort of syndicalism. Against the other left tendencies it builds a machine instead of engaging in ideological demarcation and struggle.

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LO AND THE EXISTING WORKING CLASS ORGANISATIONS

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LO produces 250 factory bulletins. These deal with general political questions and with events concerning the factories (or sections of factories) they go into. Now it is sensible and necessary to talk to the whole workforce where the organisation has an implantation. Taken together, however, the sum total of this work seems to me to be mass work - a whole number of specifically directed bulletins which add up to an attempt to address the whole class: and in so far as the objective is to expand and duplicate this work in more and more factories (and more intensively by producing leaflets for as many sections of a factory as possible) the implication inescapably is of a steady growth of the organisation in the class - of an organic expansion from the existing base. This links clearly with LO's selection of basic issues. It may not necessarily demand an abstinence from the political questions and from concern with the major political problems presented to Marxists since world war 2. With LO, however, it is linked with this. The combined result is an attempt to build a party which relates to the whole class (and recruits largely, it seems, previously non-political people - and this in a highly politicised country, where nominal communism has for long been a mass movement, and where even the far left is large); which does not relate politically to the left other than by the general ideas of Trotskyism on reformism and Stalinism (and Stalinist reformism); which uniquely offers a technique for 'building a party'; and which has a perspective of building the revolutionary party as a linear development of itself.

LO's substitution of an organisational project for ideological work, its reliance on an organisational technique instead of the ideological work without which it cannot hope to establish ideological hegemony on the left, leaves it little possibility other than this perspective. Thus it acts as if there were not in existence in the working class movement the wide number of left wing forces that do exist, with its factory routine and low profile general propaganda. (which is necessarily part of a political sinking fund if it is not linked to ideological development and a struggle to develop the 'tradition' and focus it). Even in relation to the CP the LO perspective seems to be of an accretion of strength against the CP - of conquest through the development of its machine from factory to factory. LO has evolved as a formation which tries to 'build the party' directly in the masses, ignoring the problems of post-war Trotskyism, and building outwards from one factory and from factory to factory. For such a project and such a perspective to succeed it requires stability and a routine and time. LO, it seems, did not think in the '40s that there was much time, and even now it only gives itself 10 to 20 years before the Third World War. This outlook must have contributed to the drive to minimise "difficulties" by "building the party" as a depoliticised routine - becoming progressively depoliticised over time as a cumulative result of political neglect in a world that posed complicated questions.

Now the serious working class focus and the responsible attitude to the construction of an organisation and to the recruitment and education of militants (the type of education is a separate question) stands in favourable contrast to the 'speculative Trotskyists', whose 'spot the trend' general approach meant speculating on this or that split occurring in the established parties of the working class, and on the possible emergence of this or that current in which they might



immerse themselves. LO's initial drive to build was correct against these people.

Nevertheless the 'speculators' did take account of the fact that, going by all experience since the emergence of the CPs after world war 1, the establishment of revolutionary communist (Trotskyist) organisations as dominant forces in the working class presupposes splits, divisions, and the movement of sizable, major sections of the traditional parties' militants towards fusion with the Trotskyists (the mechanics can vary). LO does not take account of this, nor could its whole project allow it to. First of all the possibility of political hegemony for the Trotskyists demands that the political work LO neglects be done. The Trotskyists cannot, by definition, establish a political hegemony by reference to the traditional "Trotskyism". Even if LO can deal more or less adequately with the PCF using the tradition, any political elements breaking from the PCF to revolutionary politics would surely want to do more than worship the Trotskyist tradition - which mysteriously ceased to function in relation to the real world after 1940. And the whole sect-like structure of LO means that its possibility of amalgamation with other forces is almost nil. It can only grow and develop by the 'conquest' and integration of individuals into the given structure. The balance of tensions and pressures through which the existing LO organisation keeps going would certainly be disrupted if LO fused with other major forces. And LO would not have a coherent political presence in such an amalgamated organisation.

If it is not possible for the revolutionary party" to be built as a linear extension from the given LO (and would even LO openly claim that it is?) then what role LO can play is difficult to imagine. In the 1972 document "Fusion of Education and Organisation" I dissociated any attempt to adopt LO technique from the unavoidable implications of what LO is as a totality. Here and now it is important to reiterate that. LO's drive to build now is serious as compared to vapid ersatz-Trotskyist speculations. Indeed an organisation that actually builds itself in the class is likely to be able to take best advantage of opportunities that develop in the established working class parties (e.g. the proto-SLL and the CPGB in '56-7). LO however has built a de-politicised sect which leaves itself no possible perspective that is compatible with what it has built and is building, other than a linear development for itself, recruiting individuals.

That is actually on a tangent away from what the experience since the Second International leads us to believe is a realistic perspective for the development of the Trotskyist party. Here LO is a diversion. Its apparent strengths are weaknesses - even its party building is the construction of a sort of 'white elephant'. LO's project could only make sense in terms of 'building a revolutionary party in the working class', a party that could make a revolution, if the situation were the same as when the Second International was being constructed. It is not the same. It is not now possible to "rebuild the labour movement" in any 'developed' country without allowing for shifts and breaks in the existing movement and for their amalgamation with the previously Trotskyist forces. Any project for 'building an organisation of militants in the working class' which does not allow for this is likely to be an illusion and a diversion.

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 CONCLUSION: L.O. AND THE I-CL  
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The central fact to grasp about LO is that it does not work with political ideas as we understand them. It has quite a different conception of politics from what we have. It constructs a way of life politics fuelled not by political consciousness in the Trotskyist sense but by moralism and psychological conditioning. Such an organisation cannot be expected to lead a proletarian revolution. Its strengths are the strengths of a sort of secular Loyolaism (+) - dedication, obedience, faith, hierarchy, submergence of the minds of its militants, so that for purposes of politics, outside a narrow practical range of operations, the only political intelligence operating in the organisation is the centre.

Loyolaism could serve the Counter-Reformation as a militant arm because it rested on religious certainties and on an established Church and tradition which it defended. The proletarian revolution needs and presupposes the conscious awakening of the creative and critical faculties of the proletariat. It needs not faith, outside rationality, but faith and commitment derived from and sustained by reason, not hierarchy based on ascription and deference but political solidarity and discipline based on the awareness of the militants, not based on a blind faith and 'trust' in an infallible leadership.

It would be a mistake however to shrug off the possibility that the I-CL could be subverted by LO because of the political poverty of LO. That political nullity can be and has been disarming. LO could not proselytise the members of the I-CL politically. It has no ideas or proposals to offer, and if it had we might usefully discuss them. But LO can proselytise on the basis of its professed solution to a problem we believe to be central. It appears to offer solutions for organisational problems.

We can probably learn from LO and benefit from some of its organisational methods. Where a conscious attempt to learn from LO's technique would be indistinguishable from being proselytised to LO politics would be at the point where the goal of building an organisation began to displace our framework of political conceptions as to what that party must be, and to displace our ideas on the necessary achievement of certain essential political and ideological preconditions as essential to a Leninist party by an urgency for 'building the party' which detaches itself from our overall understanding of what a Leninist organisation is and is not.

For central to LO is a political mistake: the error of allowing the project to build an organisation to grow away from all the political qualifications and prerequisites and to become an end in itself. To allow that to happen is to move away from Marxist communism and back towards the primitive communism of Auguste Blanqui.

Rigorous adoption of LO's technique, in association with or under the supervision of LO, especially, is itself a giant political

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 (+) Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) during the Catholic "Counter-Reformation" of the 16th Century.

step towards LO (which is fundamentally a technique) unless it is accompanied by a clear assessment, understood throughout the organisation, according to the politics of the I-CL - fundamentally according to our conception of what a real revolutionary party must be. We must scrutinise the techniques from the awareness that they are from an entirely different type of organisation, and be clear exactly how any techniques we adopt from LO fit into our political conceptions and relate to our goals.

Given the mutually alien conceptions of politics and political activity of LO and the I-CL, the organisations can probably relate to each other only in an antagonistic way, as soon as we go beyond superficial contact.

For example, any group of comrades in LO who began to view politics in the Trotskyist or Leninist way wouldn't just develop different opinions on Eastern Europe or China. More fundamentally they would come into conflict with the whole spirit of LO. LO's routine would be unsatisfying and increasingly politically meaningless to them. They would surely find LO's retreat from Marxism and even political rationalism incompatible with Marxist politics. They would certainly fall foul of the charge of disrupting the organisation. It appears that the state-capitalist split-away from LO, Combat Communiste, was forced into an organisational conflict it would not have chosen because the leadership insisted that their position was intolerable. For ourselves it would be simply a blatant piece of political immorality if we failed to use any influence we gained in LO to attack the root irrationalism which is presented as Trotskyism.

Any comrades in the I-CL who began to think that LO has, more or less, the answer to our problems, would probably first see the political questions, and our central political differences with LO (that is, our differences of political position) as relegated to second place, not at all incompatible with adopting LO techniques. This is a quite logical position.

Even if LO had every one of our positions it would still be an abomination against any rational politics, not to speak of Marxist politics. However, I think that such a position would be an unstable one. LO's simplified positions are very convenient and in consonance with its central organisation-building drive. Its political blankness gives it a stability as compared with groups like the OCI and WRP whose approach is rather like LO, but whose political positions contribute to their problems. If building the party is a goal sufficient to itself, or sufficient to the basic work of communists, the LO simplicities recommend themselves. Any comrades who accepted LO's organisational methods (as opposed to adopting certain things to our political goals) would probably wind up also accepting LO's political positions. The LO leadership must think so. Otherwise their collaboration with arch-heretics like ourselves at the same time as ejecting state-capitalists from LO wouldn't make much sense. The LO leadership must regard the I-CL as 'an organisation of a different class', as they regard the LCR. And they are not stupid or unaware people.

For us there is an additional problem: we are in a position of having formulated consciously during our discussions on the FI, the idea that much of what has been accomplished by the post-war FI (of which we - both the original WF and the present I-CL - are part) is unsatisfactory to say the least. We have not formulated an alternative. LO have "an alternative" of sorts, to the degree

one begins to see technique - i.e. 'building the party' as the thing, even the 'moral' thing, then the simplicities of LO can seem an attractive 'interim solution' that allows serious political work to be done - that is the illusion of serious work. It is possible to settle for LO's "solution" as a result of an awareness that the political problems of post-war "Trotskyism" are very acute. On all our observations the LO leadership are not at all stupid or backward - yet they settle for ideological disarmament. We should not flatter ourselves that there is not a threat to the I-CL. I think we are not stupid. But we are acutely aware of problems to which we have not ready answers.

The only guarantee against an adaptation of some LO techniques turning into an embracing of LO is that the organisation understands LO - and understands what we are doing in terms of what we are not doing - that is, understands what we are doing measured against the totality of LO, which we do not want to copy.

It would be to misunderstand the political assessment made in this document to conclude that having criticised LO in this way we should sit back and wait until we have "developed theory", or for that matter adopt a pharasaical attitude to the comrades of LO. We can learn and should learn from the seriousness of the LO comrades - and if we think we know better, than LO does about Trotskyist politics, then it is all the more incumbent on us to act as Trotskyists in building the organisation. The point of this assessment of LO is not to counterpose a 'project' for repairing the gaps in the positions of Trotskyism to building an organisation. We must build the I-CL. The point about LO is that its very structure, way of operating, and the utterly distorted focus on "an organisation" rules out the possibility of thinking. We must preserve the right to think and theorise.