

Resolution on the splits of the CWI and the ISA

The context

1. Our epoch is marked by multiple crises of world capitalism. The war in Ukraine and the wider inter-imperialist confrontation between the US and China blocks, the climate crisis, the new economic downturn and stagflation, the rise in class struggles across the planet and a generalised political crisis, are some of the key features of the period we are going through.
2. At the same time, there is a huge crisis of political representation of the working class. This is both true for the mass left (reformist) formations and also for the revolutionary organisations and currents. In reality, successful attempts at building mass or semi-mass left forces can be found only in a small number of countries at the moment. In most cases the Left has lost the momentum it had gained in previous periods or is marginalised.
3. The anticapitalist Left is faced with a generalized crisis. At first, this might seem difficult to grasp. The crisis of the system should open inroads for revolutionaries to grow and expand their influence. At closer examination, this is what usually happens when there are big changes in the objective situation and political turmoil puts huge pressures on anticapitalist organisations exposing their weaknesses. Moreover, our epoch is characterised by extreme volatility and huge contradictions. Uprisings of historic character (like the ones we saw in 2019) co-exist with the rise of the far-right; big movements in numbers go hand in hand with a generally low political consciousness compared to previous historical periods when a widespread socialist consciousness dominated the mass movements; the rise in progressive ideas such as feminism, environmentalism and internationalism is accompanied by the absence of mass left formations or other forms of class organisation in the majority of countries, which leaves room to petit bourgeois identity politics to often dominate in these movements.
4. These features of the situation are taken up extensively in different documents. While all the above certainly play a role in the crises that different revolutionary currents face, they cannot by themselves explain the depth or the character of these crises. In this text, we focus on the subjective factors that were, in our opinion, a crucial element leading to the crisis of the traditional current where most of us come from, that of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI).

The plane crash of the CWI

5. During the last years before the crisis in the CWI (which started in the last months of 2018) the CWI had managed to become the most significant in many ways Trotskyist international. It had a presence in about 45 countries, on all continents, and a number of its sections were quite influential on a national level.
6. Today, these forces lay scattered and fragmented. The initial triple split of the CWI was followed by very serious internal problems in its bigger successor, the International Socialist Alternative (ISA).

The historic leadership of the CWI, in a degenerate bureaucratic coup, stole the name and all the resources of the organisation while clearly being in a minority, and is left now with mainly small and marginal forces, with the only exception that of the UK.

7. How did this happen? How did a powerful and long-standing international organisation end up like this? Are the objective factors enough to explain this development? We think not.

Internal regime and the dangers of bureaucracy

8. In fact, the multiple splits and the crisis in the CWI tradition could have been avoided if a different internal regime and culture existed.
9. In the initial split of the CWI, but also in the crisis that developed in the ISA, important political differences came up. In the CWI, differences emerged essentially over the approach towards the way Marxists should intervene in the feminist movement and the movements against climate change and environmental destruction.
10. In the ISA, differences emerged over questions of analysis (for example the tendency of over-optimism in analysing the objective situation), over questions of the characterisation of our epoch (the debate around whether neoliberalism is dead and a new Keynesian period opens up), and over our attitude towards identity politics, among others.
11. It is only natural that differences of that character exist in a revolutionary organisation, even more so in an international one, where different traditions, pressures from different political situations, ect, are at play. In our opinion, none of these differences in themselves should justify a split.
12. The key to dealing with these differences, which are important but not of a principled character, is the attitude of the leadership towards internal discussion and the structures in place to organise it. The most contentious issues were the ones regarding internal democracy and how it is implemented.
13. In the CWI, while the statutes allowed for democratic debate and differences, the actual experience was that the differences that emerged during the crisis were treated with extreme hostility. The bone of contention was an incident in Ireland, which sparked a spiral of events that led to the split. Although we cannot in this document go into the details of the debate, we can say that it was clear that the main reason behind it was the refusal of the International Secretariat to accept that it had made a mistake and that it found itself in a minority inside the elected international leading bodies and the international organisation.
14. Tragically, even though the Trotskyist tradition historically stood firmly against the Stalinist cult of personality atmosphere, features of “messianism” appear in most international Trotskyist groupings. A feature which is also quite common is the complete domination of one national section over an international organisation, and/or the domination of one person (with a small group of loyal supporters) in the leading bodies, which if challenged by the rise of other sections or other cadre leads to splits. *Internationalist Standpoint* fights determinedly to break with this tradition, particularly as we are convinced that the future mass revolutionary international can only

come about as a result of the amalgamation of different revolutionary currents and organisations internationally.

15. The CWI tradition was no exception to the above mentioned deficiencies. The authority of the leadership was considered a given, and loyalty to it was considered as a virtue for the membership. That was the reason behind the quick degeneration that led to despicable practices, such as stealing the resources and disregarding all structures.
16. While the ISA started off claiming to distance itself from these practices, its leadership ended up establishing an even worse internal regime. Even though on the surface a democratic veneer was installed, the actual attitude of the leadership was that it should present itself as a united “iron fist” and do away with dissenting views (read more [here](#), esp the documents of the “Federalism” debate and around the creation of TIDU). Debates were organised and minority rights were granted, formally, but there was no real discussion as the aim of each debate was to “crush” minority views. In discussions in front of members a “moderate” and “open” face was presented, while in smaller meetings intimidation and bullying practices were employed. This led to a toxic atmosphere which pushed out everybody that had different opinions. The majority in the international leadership, instead of adopting a patient approach towards solving the differences that inevitably existed, particularly in a newly formed international organisation that needed time to achieve homogeneity, attacked different opinions as reflecting “federalism” (and abandoning “democratic centralism”).
17. All these probably sound familiar to comrades from other traditions in the wider movement. It is an established fact that even in our epoch, where new ways of communication open new possibilities in the way democracy can work, and where the historic knowledge of the problems of bureaucratisation is widely spread, left organisations and parties, trade unions and movements still work under the grip of bureaucracies and problematic (to say the least) internal democratic processes. We are determined to publicly open up this debate, aiming to overcome this burden laid on the working class’ back.

For a real internal democracy

18. *Internationalist Standpoint* believes there is “another way” in building and functioning a revolutionary organisation. Political differences between revolutionaries will always spring up over and over again. Political pressures from different classes, internal contradictions inside the working class, differences in traditions, changing situations, new tactics, difficult decisions, will always provoke debates. When different views on how revolutionaries deal with tasks are not of a principled character (that is, they do not put into question the strategic goals of Marxism) they should be handled with an open mind and should not lead to splits. Otherwise, revolutionary socialists will constantly be building on sand.
19. The character of the internal regime of an international organisation is absolutely crucial in establishing the basis for a mass militant force. Internal democracy should be an essential element in the building of a revolutionary organisation. First, because there is no other way to convince the best of the most militant layers of the mass movements to join a political party particularly in the present epoch. And also, because without a wide democratic discussion making process there is no

way to achieve the level of clarity needed to analyse and intervene in the complex situation of today. Debates over differences can help calibrate positions. In fact, especially today, there is no way that a mass international force will be built without a collective process of discussing the contradictions and the difficulties of the period. Individual leading comrades can and will have crucial contributions to make, but they cannot, as talented as they may be, replace the wealth of a living organism.

20. Moreover, the task of overthrowing capitalism and establishing a socialist society is so monumental that it cannot be fulfilled by any organisation which is accustomed to “following loyally” any leadership—even if this is tested out in events and difficult conditions— or mechanically repeating formulas. Internal discussion and democracy are crucial to fight off routinism and conservatism, which may take hold on revolutionary forces or sections of them in changing conditions or different stages. The foot soldiers for the battle for socialism need, by necessity in our opinion, to be independent thinkers, innovative, politically confident and trained to exercise true democracy and link this to providing leadership to mass movements.

The Bolshevik experiences and the way forward

21. The Bolsheviks, more than a century ago, had a truly democratic and vibrant internal regime, which allowed disagreements and debates to be aired freely, not only internally but very often also in public. The right to form groupings, tendencies and factions was firmly established, and disagreements were common. This did not stop the Bolsheviks from leading the most successful socialist revolution. In fact, this free and open internal atmosphere was a precondition for their success. In documents written as part of the debates in the ISA, a lot of examples were given, in which the Bolsheviks were shown to be very open to democratic debates internally (you can see them [here](#) in the section “Democratic centralism and the Bolsheviks”).
22. All revolutionary socialists, in words accept democratic centralism as the formula which defines their internal regime. In practice though, more often than not a form of bureaucratic centralism is applied. This is clearly revealed not in periods of relative internal agreement, but when there are serious disagreements. The apparatus then is quick to declare any disagreement as one of a “fundamental” character in order to close ranks and mark the opposing view as “counter-revolutionary”. This is in fact an influence of the Stalinist playbook in the ranks of the Trotskyist movement.
23. How can these dangers be addressed? To state the obvious, there is no magic formula to deal with all these problems. At the same time, *Internationalist Standpoint* believes that there is enough experience in the revolutionary movement to allow for a different path to be carved.
24. Based on the study of the Bolshevik tradition and our experiences during the splits we went through, a number of points can be put forward as a contribution, on our part, to this debate that should take place internationally.
 - Apart from formal statutory clauses, which should guarantee democratic rights and free internal debates, the internal “atmosphere” in an organisation is absolutely crucial. Differences should not be treated with hostility, but should be understood as something natural, and as a

way to clarify positions. If there is no agreement, then different positions can co-exist in the same organisation for even extensive periods of time, as long as they are not of a principled character.

- There should be an internal culture and practical measures should be taken to guard against the dangers of bureaucratisation. There should be an atmosphere of freely criticising the leadership. Processes of control and recall should not only be established, but regularly updated. A process of rotation at key leading positions should be aimed at, after a certain stage of development of a national or an international organisation.
- The right to form informal groupings as well as formal tendencies, factions, ect, should be accepted as normal and not treated as a prelude to a split. In the Bolsheviks and the 3rd International, different factions and currents co-existed for years without this necessarily jeopardising the unity of the party.
- The political level of the membership is crucial in order to counter the dangers of bureaucratisation. Members should not only be well “educated” and involved in decision making, but they should be given free access to all information, **in an objective and depersonalized manner**, that the leadership has (except of course when there is sensitive material involved, or conditions of underground work apply).
- **Branches should hold the key to this democracy, with all significant political policies and processes being discussed and voted on.** These perspectives can be fed into the structures of the wider party, so that the branches and individual comrades hold as much responsibility as possible in decision-making alongside the democratically elected leadership. Different comrades will have different strengths when addressing different aspects of policy and process, but the principle that all comrades are involved as much as possible in the process of formulating policies and processes within the organisation is very important. Details about how each section should be structured can be agreed by each section according to local circumstances, but the principle of authority coming from the broader membership and not simply the elected leadership (except with the support of the wider membership) must be recognised in practice as well as in words.

The need to build a new –and different– International

25. At the same time, *Internationalist Standpoint* believes that a new mass revolutionary international will not be built out of one tradition, or come out of a linear growth of one of the forces of the Trotskyist movement. It will undoubtedly spring out of a process of different forces coming together, under the same principles but carrying different traditions or schools of thought. The historic bet we are faced with is figuring out how to proceed in order to turn this wealth of ideas into action and to build out of it a powerful force that can change society.
26. All of the above do not mean to say that the tradition from which most of us come from did not have strengths aside from its weaknesses. On the contrary, the CWI made very important contributions to the working-class movement, and have left some essential traditions for revolutionary activists. *Internationalist Standpoint* seeks to critically uphold these traditions and keep their best parts.

27. Today there is a burning need to create a mass revolutionary international force, and there are openings which allow such a development to take place. Individuals and groups that feel this need and are ready to work to overcome the failings of past attempts, have a duty to come together in order to lay the ground for the building of an international organisation on new foundations. As *Internationalist Standpoint*, we are engaged in this process, without the illusion that we are keepers of the “one great truth”. Already, after our split with the ISA, we have met groups from different parts of the world and different traditions that have come to similar conclusions with ours. We are confident that we will meet more of these forces along the road to change the bad traditions of the revolutionary Left and establish a mass revolutionary socialist International.