

# The International Committee and Latin America (1958-64)

By Ken Moxham

FOLLOWING publication of our call for an international conference of Trotskyists I wrote to *Workers Press* to try to open a discussion on *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, the pre-split WRP's documentary history of the ICFI. For it struck me that the historiographical framework of the call is an updated version of *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, a work which I see as a travesty both of history and of internationalism. My letter pointed out that we attach the label 'revisionist' to other professing Trotskyists, among whom Mandel of USec and Lambert of the PCI are named. 'We do so,' I wrote, 'on the basis of the assumed correctness of the 1953, 1963 and 1971 splits in the world movement, the "authority" for which is the six-volume documentary history, *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, edited by C. Slaughter.' *Trotskyism versus Revisionism* presents the ICFI set up in 1953 as the living continuity of world Trotskyism and equates self-proclaimed Trotskyist rivals of or splitters from it (who in 1963-4 came together in USec) with 'Pabloite revisionism', whose goal is to liquidate the Fourth International. With hindsight and with the benefit of access to the WRP archives I questioned this interpretation, citing the following facts:

- (1) The IC's reputed struggle to uphold Marxist internationalism cost it most of its sections and reduced it to an anglocentric rump.
- (2) Having overthrown Healy the WRP itself deserted the IC.
- (3) Our call hints that the IC erred in its analysis of Cuba as a bourgeois state.
- (4) The issue of *Workers Press* that ran the call also ran an obituary on N. Moreno saying that 'In 1963 the Fourth International was reunified'.
- (5) *Trotskyism versus Revisionism* relies on a politically and geographically partial selection of documents to 'prove' its thesis.

My letter was in the end refused publication on the grounds that it was critical of the international call, but not before a copy went to Cliff Slaughter, who penned a 1600-word reply. (Originally it was agreed that this exchange be published in the paper, but the editorial board changed their minds.) Cliff denied personal responsibility for the selection of the documents published in *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*. To me this was beside the point, as I am not interested in allocating blame – the 'bad men theory of history' departed this party with Banda – but in determining where we stand today on the history of the ICFI. On this question Cliff reiterated that 'the WRP has never at any time . . . declared that it breaks from the positions established against the liquidation of Pablo, the "theoretical" leader of which is Ernest Mandel'. The 1953 split had been correct, whatever its inadequacies. But on the 1963 IC split, which had taken the majority of sections, including the SWP and Morenists, back into the 'Pabloite' fold, Cliff was conspicuously silent. He would not expand on the formula that our position on Cuba is 'to be urgently reviewed'; and chose to ignore the glaring inconsistency between the implacable anti-'revisionism' of the call and the Moreno obituary line that 'In 1963 the Fourth International was reunified'. But that contradiction will not go away, as was shown by the issuing of a 'correction' by *Workers Press* on 21 March. This was a belated and grudging concession to pressure from GOR comrades – who have been beating our leadership over the head with the same contradiction as my letter pointed out. Since the 'correction' does not help resolve it by dogmatically reaffirming that we were right (and the Morenists by implication wrong) in 1963, I wrote this document, which reveals something of the Latin American side of the 1963 split. I hope that it will contribute to correcting our perspective on the IC tradition, so distorted by Healyite official history.

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The contents pages of *Trotskyism versus Revisionism* are its most instructive part, being an index of the built-in great power chauvinism of the federally structured ICFI. The list of documents on the 1963 split, which occupy most of volumes 3 and 4, consists

THE FOLLOWING document was written by Ken Moxham as part of an incipient factional struggle within the WRP/*Workers Press*. Originally entitled 'History versus *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*', its value lies not least in the fact that it makes detailed reference to correspondence between the Socialist Labour League (predecessor to the WRP) and the Latin American sections of the International Committee which has never been available to English-speaking readers, and is an important addition to the scant literature on the IC and Latin America.

The author had been put in charge of reorganising the WRP's archives, but the results of his research threatened to upset the shotgun wedding with the Morenoite tendency, the LIT, proposed by WRP leaders in 1987. In opposition to this fusion, the Internationalist Faction was formed, of which Comrade Moxham was a member. The upshot was that he was removed from investigating the archives, which were placed under wraps, where they have remained. The IF split from the WRP in 1988.

In documenting the atrocious indifference and incompetence displayed by the SLL in its relations with the Chilean and Argentinian sections of the IC, Comrade Moxham reached similar conclusions to those independently arrived at by the WIL (see *Workers News*, No.14). Not only does this document shed further light on the WRP's pretensions to represent the 'continuity' of Trotskyism; it also underlines how ridiculous are the claims of David North – current proprietor of the IC franchise – that the SLL led a 'renaissance of Marxism' in the period covered by this article. It is here published for the first time, with the permission of the author.



Nahuel Moreno

almost exclusively of SLL and SWP documents and Anglo-American correspondence. The editor concentrates obsessively on this fragmenting 'special relationship'. The North Americans apart, the only 'foreigners' we get to hear from are the Chinese S.T. Peng (one document), Pierre Broué of the PCI, 'Hugembert-Valdes' of Chile and Capa alias Moreno of Argentina (one token letter each). So much for the Marxist world outlook, the struggle for whose continuity we are asked to believe is embodied in this IC anthology!

The WRP archive contains a file of late 1950s and early 1960s Latin American correspondence. A study of this shows the British imperial arrogance apparent in the selection of 'historical' documents from this period to have been something painfully experienced by the Latin American IC sections at the time. Their letters, even when written in English, habitually went unanswered (in contrast with the regular correspondence maintained by Healy with the SWP, the US sympathising section); and they were left in ignorance of happenings in Europe, including IC meetings and conferences, for which Europe was invariably the venue and which they were not usually able to attend. On 25 July 1959 Jose Valdes of the Chilean POR wrote to Healy:

'We know nothing about french section. Latin American pabloiste say that our French section disappeared, is it true? We need news on European Comrades . . .'

He complained in another letter on 3 February 1960:

'I wrote you several times, but we are yet waiting for an answer. All our latin-american sections are worried with your silence . . . Our sections feel the lack of an International leadership, who really drives our international policy line . . . The lack of interchange is so real that for knowing about the last January (1959) IC meeting we must read the news on pabloist paper. Which were the resolutions on it? Why did you not write anything about it?'

Again at the end of 1961 the Chileans had to draw Healy's attention to their existence: 'The Chilean Section is growing and now we



Cliff Slaughter

have formed . . . a movement of revolutionary reagroupment according to the strategy of the Revolutionary United Front presented by us in Leeds. The Chilean pabloism is practically zero after their last split at the middle of 1960 . . .

'We wonder why you don't inform us opportunely – because we are also members of the IC – the matters of discussion and the meetings you have had. If we cannot send a comrade to these meetings in every case we can send you some suggestions or proposals.' (Hugembert and Valdes to Healy, 18 December 1961.)

But Healy as IC general secretary persisted in treating Latin America as a colonial outpost. This hostility in practice to internationalism must be given due weight in any serious analysis of the alienation of the Latin American sections from the ICFI and their enthusiasm for reunification in the conditions created by the Cuban revolution.

Before describing how the IC came to lose the whole of its Latin American 'branch operation', it is pertinent to refer to an 'internal' struggle within the Latin American Secretariat of Orthodox Trotskyism (SLATO) over alleged revisionist positions being developed by Moreno's party in Argentina. The evidence of the file suggests that this struggle, which broke out at about the same time as the Cuban revolution, was more or less ignored by the British section. If this is the case, it cannot have been due to the SLL being engrossed in the subject of Cuba, as hostilities with the SWP over that question did not commence till the start of 1961 (see *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, vol. 3, p.45). It was in August 1960 that the Latin American Congress of Trotskyism saw differences come to a head between the Chilean and Argentinian sections over the latter's alleged capitulation to Peronism. Carlos Hugembert, whom the Congress re-elected SLATO general secretary, gave this account to 'Comrade Fer' of the SWP:

'The situation is as follows: For more than a year, we have been noticing that the Argentinian comrades have trended (sic) more openly to capitulate before the Peronists and the national bourgeoisie. All their political

and programmatic alignments in general indicate this, particularly their newspaper.

'Even you at one time asked me if this newspaper had anything in common with our people, since in its content there is nothing to identify it as pertaining to the Fourth. In this sense, the comrades have not carried out even one of the agreements made at the 1958 conference in which the entrust line was spelled out in a clear and solid way.

'At that time it was clearly established that we enter in order to develop lines of cleavage, trying to separate the workers' base of Peronism from its bourgeois leadership. We calculated that given the contradiction between the bourgeois leadership on one side and the workers' base on the other, with diametrically opposed interests, the power crisis would develop as the class struggle became more acute.

'In accordance with this our comrades should create a current which would serve as a catalytic pole for the worker base, especially its left wing. For this, it is necessary to present political and programmatic positions, not only against the bourgeois leadership but against the union bureaucracy, as we press immediate demands in the mass struggle. The paper should follow this line, but up to now we have seen absolutely nothing developed in accordance with this general orientation. What we have seen is a policy of capitulation before Peron and his commando tactics, and in general before the national bourgeoisie.

'But that's not all. There is worse yet. In the 1958 conference we also agreed that the party should continue to exist since no other means existed of supervising the application of this line . . . It is also the only way of keeping abreast of all opportunist variants that arise in applying such a line – a dangerous one in itself – and being in a position to make corrections in time. Finally, an independent party following and carrying forward entrism is also necessary for the political education of the new militants who are won in their relations with the Fourth on a world scale as well as in Latin America.

'But what has happened, dear comrade? I think I informed you towards the end of last year that a congress of the Argentine comrades was held, a congress which we thought was a party congress but which we discovered was a mixed congress; one could say "Trotskyist-Peronist", which gave birth to a new organisation which the Argentine comrades call the only orthodox Trotskyist organisation. We will see what truth there is in this. We have carefully examined the statutes of this new organisation, and have not found one line that says that it is a section of the Fourth. In none of its articles is affiliation to the Fourth claimed. But it does say that "It is guided by the discipline of General Peron and his high command". An organisation that is bound by such discipline and not by that of the Fourth has nothing to do, in our opinion, with the Fourth and Trotskyism.

'But as if this were not enough, in the political report approved by the supposedly Trotskyist congress there is not one line of criticism of Peron's own bourgeois leadership. On the contrary, it is declared that "There is no other possibility of a workers' government without the return of General Peron to the government". And these things add up and continue. In the program elaborated in the congress and which came to light in the newspaper, the program of the Fourth was changed. Thus we see, "Expropriations with pay, the struggle for the trade-union government administration of the economy by the unions – the unity of the countries of Latin America", without clarifying the class content of such unity.

'All these things led the Chilean section to declare – and, as general secretary, I agree – that it ceases to recognise the newspaper as Trotskyist and belonging to the Fourth . . .

'We have been arguing with the Argentine comrades for almost two years but it has led to nothing. They continue with their policy. We hoped that this problem would be solved in the recent congress, but it was not possible. The Argentine comrades maintained their positions and the Peruvian delegation said that it had not been discussed in their section . . . As you can understand, dear comrade, the situation is very delicate since it concerns a split in the Latin American leadership to which we have devoted so much effort and sacrifice in hope of strengthening and developing Trotskyism.

'If the Argentine comrades do not re-establish the Trotskyist cadres as an independent organisation, even though they continue the entrust line; if they do not rectify their political and programmatic line, a break with our section is almost inevitable.

' . . . We characterise the policy of the Argentine comrades as Pabloist backsliding in our ranks.'

Now this is a very topical indictment: its main points are repeated today by groups interested in driving a wedge between ourselves and the LIT. No doubt the Morenists made a fighting defence of their programme

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and policy at the time – this I cannot quote as it is not in the archive – and no doubt they would do so today – or would explain how and when they had broken with past mistakes – if the WRP were to risk upsetting ‘diplomatic relations’ by asking them. The raising of this and all other salient questions of the Morenists’ history is in my view a positive necessity if we are to achieve a principled relationship with them. Only in terms of their history understood correctly, which means taking account of all its contradictory aspects, can we reach a valid assessment of them. With respect to the regional struggle over the policy of Peronism, it would also be educational to be told what role the IC leadership played. I strongly suspect that it was passive, leaving the Latin Americans to fight it out between themselves. It seems that the upshot was that the Chileans were outmanoeuvred, Hugembert being ousted as SLATO general secretary at a meeting in Buenos Aires a few months after the Congress. The Chileans then severed their links with SLATO. (Both groups continued to be recognised by the IC, however, till separately joining USec.) On this split Healy wrote to Valdes (10 July 1961):

‘I have just received your letter regarding the split with Moreno. This is not a surprise to us. Pabloism will continue to ravage the ranks of the International Committee just so long as we hold back from clarifying what is involved.’

In other words the fight against the SWP was primary, that against Latin American ‘Pabloism’ secondary. As for the editor of *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, so oblivious is he to the basic facts about the history of the Chilean IC section that he represents its leaders Carlos Hugembert and Jose Valdes as being one and the same person – the composite ‘Hugembert-Valdes’. The glossary also gives the misleading impression that the Chileans ‘joined with Hansen and the SWP in the “reunification” with the Pabloites’ in 1963. Again this is great power chauvinism talking. In fact they denounced the form of the SWP’s reunification and joined separately in 1964.

The Chilean Trotskyists did not owe their position on Cuba to Hansen and the SWP. They defined Cuba after the expropriations of October 1960 as a *deformed workers’ state*, not a socialist state, and called for the formation of workers’ councils and a revolutionary Marxist party to transform it. At the same time they perceived the need to reunify the Fourth International not on the basis of uncritical support for Castro but in order to take advantage of the ferment on the left created by the Cuban revolution, especially in the Pabloite and Stalinist movements. Ultimately these positions on the class nature of the Cuban state and on reunification were unacceptable to the SLL. Without internal debate (Healy’s purges of 1959-60 had ensured that democracy ceased to function in the organisation) the SLL had achieved unanimity on the line that Cuba was capitalist. Nor is it likely that the Healyites had any real intention of dissolving the IC to meet the situation created by a ‘bourgeois’ revolution. Instead they agreed to IC-IS Parity Committee talks, to which the Posadists (a right-wing split from the IS) were also invited. The aim was to buy time and perhaps sign up some new sections for the IC to compensate for the impending SWP-led split. At the same time Healy encouraged the Chileans to believe that he was willing to open-mindedly discuss Cuba (Healy to Valdes, 28 February 1962). Again this was a delaying tactic aimed at keeping them from joining the secessionist bloc round the SWP. In practice Healy as IC general secretary prevented circulation and discussion of the Chilean positions. In consequence Hugembert and Valdes proposed to the October 1962 IC meeting (by letter):

‘That the IC publish the international theses of every one of the sections; we urge, for example, that it should publish the theses on international policy approved by the XII National Congress of the Chilean POR in January 1962, which we sent some months ago to the IC for publication. This contains our differences with Pabloism, as well as some disagreements with the international theses approved by the IC, especially on the Cuban Revolution . . . . That the errors of the IC on Cuba are due fundamentally to either lack of knowledge or to being ill-informed on the reaction that has occurred among the Latin-American masses since the impact of the Cuban Revolution. If the Trotskyist sections of Latin America should make a mistake on Cuba, and deny the character of the Workers State in Cuba, of the socialist conquests made by the proletariat since the effective liquidation of capitalism, of the struggle against the sectarianism and bureaucratism of the CP, of the insurrec-

tional line which the Workers and Farmers Government of Cuba poses for all the Latin-American peoples; if we should deny all this, we repeat, the Latin-American Trotskyists would be committing the swiftest political hara kiri. In view of this, we are of the opinion that some European sections of the IC should restudy the Cuban experience . . . .’

Healy answered evasively (1 November 1962): ‘The IC will do its best to publish the theses of the various sections, but we must stress that there are severe technical and financial difficulties in this respect.’

The suicidal policy on Cuba prescribed for the Latin Americans from a safe distance by the British brought into sharp focus the related questions of great power chauvinism and international regime. Moreno now reminded Healy in a letter of 28 April 1963: ‘We have always criticised you and the SWP for not having done anything serious to organise orthodox Trotskyism on an international scale.’ Reunification in the circumstances given by the Cuban revolution promised to create conditions in which that could be achieved. If the SLL stood out against it, Moreno warned, ‘for us there will be nothing obscure about it: it will be a consequence of the insular pressures of the English vanguard and working class on your cadres and leadership. It will be a pity, but also a consequence of your incomprehension of the revolutionary process which has opened with the triumph of the Cuban revolution’.

The Chilean POR’s message to the IC World Conference scheduled for April 1963 (but postponed until September) marked a definite shift towards the SWP and Castroism, the line of least resistance, in reaction to Healy’s ultra-left line and in response to the Castroite ferment in the Latin American CPs:



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‘. . . to come out in favour of the Cuban Revolution signifies coming out in favour of socialism and of the preparation of the Revolution; it is not the same as coming out in favour of some nationalist movement like Peronism, etc. Consequently the Cuban Revolution in our continent has been what the Russian Revolution of 1917 was for Europe and the entire world.’

Nevertheless, when the SWP and IC sections in Austria, Canada, China and Japan went their own way and reunified with the IS in June 1963, the Chilean section condemned their action in pre-empting the decision of the IC World Conference. At the same time the Chileans made it clear that further foot-dragging by the IC would be intolerable: ‘For us it is no longer a question of another Parity Committee, which puts off the problem indefinitely. No, it is a question now of the IC Conference deciding to draw up the bases for unification with the IS.’ (Hugembert and Valdes to Healy, 2 August 1963.) Their patience snapped when the rump World Congress failed to declare for reunification or

even to comment on the Reunification Congress documents. To make matters worse Healy tried to fob the Chileans off with a synopsis of the IC resolutions instead of the full text. On 12 February 1964 the Chilean POR passed its verdict:

‘. . . that the resolutions of the September conference of the SLL and the L(ambert) group do not constitute a serious and decided step towards the unification of the FI as sought after by the majority of the sections of the IC of the FI. The most recent actions of the SLL show that it has no real intention of arriving at the unification of the FI. Besides, the said conference rejected “de facto” the proposals of the Chilean POR with regard to the unification of the FI, approving a mistaken line with respect to the colonial revolution and a politically sectarian line with regard to the Cuban revolution, the strategic axis of our propaganda in Latin America to construct mass revolutionary parties.’

It accordingly resolved:

‘1) To approve in general the resolutions adopted by the reunification congress of the FI.

‘2) To communicate to the IS our particular observations on these resolutions, in an enclosed document.

‘3) To reject the minority report presented by M. Pablo.

‘4) To accept the resolution of the reunification congress and of the IS in which it states that those sections of the IC of the FI who approve the resolutions of the reunification congress may be integrated into the unified international. Consequently the Chilean POR (ex-section of the IC) should seek incorporation into the unified international.

‘5) To reserve the right to criticise all those positions which have a Pabloite content. We shall persist in our task of unmasking inside the unified FI any line which tends to consider the Transitional Programme out-dated and superseded. We shall struggle against any orientation containing the conception of

the L group in order to politically convince them of the need to incorporate themselves into the unified FI.

‘8) To ask the IS to arrange a Latin American congress of the Trotskyist parties and groups which recognise the present leadership of the unified international. This conference, which is urgent for the unity of the Latin American revolutionaries, *should not necessarily have to lead to the setting up of a bureaucratic apparatus, like those created in the past by Posadas and Moreno. We aspire basically to the interchange of ideas and positions on the different sections of the continent in order to co-ordinate and accelerate the Latin American revolution.*’

Enclosing this resolution in a letter to Healy and Lambert (14 February 1964), Hugembert and Valdes paid their respects to the IC tradition:

‘We acknowledge you as the champions of the struggle against Pabloism and we shall make use of your teachings in this field as we fight inside the Fourth International against any Pabloite position whatsoever . . . . Pabloism has retreated, but it has not yet been definitely destroyed.’

At the same time they recognised that in splendid isolation from the international movement the IC could never fulfil a world historic role:

‘We believe that your attitude gives no effective help to the struggle against Pabloism because, instead of fighting it from within, where the overwhelming majority of Trotskyists are to be found who can be argued and discussed with, you take off outside, far away from all contact with the Trotskyist rank and file of the various sections . . . . We shall continue to uphold the principles which motivated the IC of the FI, but the struggle against Pabloism has at this moment to be carried on where the majority of the Trotskyist sections are.’

I think that the material I have presented here provides the beginnings of a more complex picture of the 1963 split than we get from *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*. We should recognise that that work, like any other sectarian self-portrait, necessarily fails any test of objectivity. As to the rights and wrongs of the 1963 split, of course one cannot jump to conclusions on the evidence of a few bits of Latin American (and Chilean-biased) correspondence. Much more research must be done and no doubt a host of conflicting interpretations taken into account. For instance, an intriguing reference was made by the LIT representative in Britain, in the course of a recent address to a London aggregate on the Simon Bolivar International Brigade, to SLATO having applied, as a ‘faction’ within the IC, what the rest of the IC refused to apply – democratic centralism as opposed to national Trotskyism. I assume that the WRP leadership disagrees. Then let it thrash out such differences. This will conduce to clarity, unlike the obscurantism of its present promotion of a mutual admiration society based on the avoidance of past differences.

A thoroughly rotten plank of the *Trotskyism versus Revisionism* thesis that cannot be abandoned too soon is the idea that the formation of USec was some kind of conspiracy to liquidate the Fourth International. This idea bears no critical examination yet recurs in our international conference call, where it says that ‘revisionist capitulations to Stalinism . . . have always sought to liquidate the Fourth International’; and in a Draft Resolution for the WRP Conference which says that ‘Revisionism in the Fourth International has worked for nearly 40 years to liquidate the Trotskyist movement’. This is symptomatic of the paranoid confusion between objective tendency and subjective intention which lies at the heart of the Healyite method and which led the IC into the gutter with the Security and the Fourth International ‘investigation’. It is time to be rational and admit that the USec, like the IC, sought to play a world revolutionary role. This does not alter the fact that the verdict of the historical process has been against both organisations. None of the claimant centres of world Trotskyism has ever stood on the shoulders of Trotsky. We shall only build something that can on the basis of the lessons of that failure, which means:

(a) being willing to substitute an objective study of our history for the Healy school of falsification;

(b) discussing *open-mindedly* but in a *critical* Marxist spirit with other Trotskyist organisations, in relation to which we have a legacy of staggering ignorance to overcome.

In this process we have nothing to lose but our sectarian illusions.

Ken Moxham  
30 March 1987