Denis Freney

Within the Fourth International* there are a number of tendencies on both a world scale and locally. Space does not permit a general survey of them all, so I have confined myself to an analysis of the main lines of development, thought and practice of three major Australian Trotskyist groups — the Socialist Youth Alliance (SYA) which is linked with the Socialist Workers’ League (SWL); the Labour Press group (the “Healyites”); and the International Group which publishes the monthly International.

Intercontinental Press (Jan. 24, 1972), which is published by the United States Socialist Workers’ Party for the United Secretariat of the Fourth International as a general world-wide weekly information magazine, has a report of the Founding Conference of the Socialist Workers’ League, by David Holmes, a member of the League. This report is almost identical with one which has become the organ of the SWL. As for fast growing — there is certainly a rapid turnover, but the Melbourne membership is still around the 40 or 50 it was a year ago with a hard core of 20, and the position in Sydney is much the same.

The SYA-SWL concept, which they have taken directly from the USFI, is that only the FI — their FI — will provide the basis of the mass revolutionary parties of the future within the structure of the FI. David Holmes, writing in Socialist Review, quotes the Belgian Trotskyist leader Mandel: “... it (the FI) is still only the nucleus of the future mass revolutionary international, of the future general staff of the world revolution...” “The future belongs to Leninism, and that’s why it belongs to the Fourth International.” The Healyites make the same claims, but of course they mean their Fourth International.

Both groups adhere to this concept and quote the first line of Trotsky’s Transitional Program: “The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.” They claim to be the true leadership and it follows that the main emphasis must be on building their leadership — “building the revolutionary party”. The party leads the workers, the party takes power. It is a question of the party — the section of the FI — gaining “hegemony” over the youth and working class movement, and this becomes the main task, in fact if not in words.

Spontaneous upsurge of the masses is something to be regarded with suspicion for it may upset the “hegemony” or the attempts to impose that hegemony. Similarly it becomes desirable to impose “democratic centralist” norms on mass movements, solidarity committees and so on to help towards hegemony in them for (their) party.1 The SYA-SWL line really adds up to the “numbers game”, to an attempt to centralise all mass or solidarity movements regardless of the harm done to the development of self-action by the majority of militants who, unhappily for SYL-SWL, do not realise that they should fall under the majority of the proletariat.” They lead the workers, the party takes power. It is a question of the party — the section of the FI — gaining “hegemony” over the youth and working class movement, and this becomes the main task, in fact if not in words.

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* The First International was formed in London in 1864, Karl Marx being the main author of its Inaugural Address.

The Second International was formed in 1889, collapsing at the outbreak of the first world war.

The Third (Communist) International was formed in 1919 and dissolved in 1943.

The Fourth International was formed by Trotsky.

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1 “Our whole raison d’etre flows from this (building the revolutionary party)”. (Second National SYA Conference document, Direct Action No.8, page 11. “Everything we do must be aimed at helping to build such a party”. Same document, page 13.)

It is of course true that building a revolutionary mass party is a vital task, but to see that narrowly as promoting the sect’s advance over the vital role of the mass (spontaneous) movement, is in fact to negotiate the task of building a mass revolutionary party, able to give leadership in time of crisis.
stages — in Sydney at least — and in the SYA criticism of the highly successful Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Stop the Tours Campaign because of its “decentralisation” and stress on self-action.

This basic concept of the SYA-SWL results from an incorrect understanding of a revolution. The Communist Party of Australia in its documents and action stresses the need to encourage self-action by the masses — for them to take control over their own lives and seek power for themselves. The view of the CPA is that the role of a revolutionary party is, in conjunction with other revolutionary tendencies and movements, to help the workers and students to do precisely that. A revolutionary party must lead by encouraging the masses to take power, not by attempting to gain hegemony.

In all fairness it must be said that in the Transitional Program Trotsky emphasised the development of workers' action even in limited circumstances: “It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution.” It is from this perspective that we differ basically with the SYA-SWL. It is true that the SYA-SWL does raise the question of workers' control in many of its articles and adopts positions which are ostensibly very close to those of the CPA. The Atlantean bus dispute is an example of this, but the words are contradicted by a concept of revolution which, in practice, stresses not the self-action of the masses but the building of the “revolutionary party”, and the slogan of workers' control is negated by the way in which the cadres of the SYA-SWL work.

There is also a basic failure to understand how vital the concept of self-management is to any vision of socialism to be propagated among workers and students. The emphasis on centralisation of control in the hands of the “revolutionary party”, before and after the revolution, is the antithesis of the need to stress the self-management of all social life by the workers and students themselves from the grass-roots to the national level, through workers' and students' councils. After the revolution power is in the hands of the workers and students directly through these councils, not in the “hands of the Party.” The role of the Party (or parties) is to protect the workers' power, to seek to help the workers, to work out policies for socialism and to protect workers' democracy. Dictatorship of the proletariat must mean of the proletariat, not the Party, be it stalinist, trotskyist, maoist or what-have-you, on behalf of the proletariat. Otherwise the rise of bureaucratic dictatorship is inevitable.

From the SYA-SWL concept that they are the one true revolutionary party flows their need for “democratic centralism” interpreted in what can only be described as a brutally bureaucratic manner. Inside the SYA-SWL decisions taken collectively, by caucuses or any higher body, are absolutely binding on the membership, even in relation to the most trifling tactical question in some committee meeting of a solidarity or mass movement.

In a recent example, a woman member of the SYA who arrived late for a Women's Liberation meeting and thus missed the caucus held before it, was told what line to follow on a minor tactical question. Because, using her own judgment, she did not follow the caucus decision and later refused to recant she was suspended for breaking “democratic centralism”. A number of other SYA members placed themselves under suspension in solidarity with her. It is not insignificant that this woman was a member of the minority tendency in the SWL which presented a separate document to its founding conference in Australia.

This minority, which differed strongly over the failure of the majority to stress the work in the ALP, was treated roughly at the founding conference, its document has not been summarised in any of the press releases (the usual custom in the FI) nor has it been given full internal rights. Instead, it has had one of its leading members suspended for a trivial offence. This rigid “democratic centralism” parallel to that in the CPA in its most stalinist days, flows from the concept of the need for a highly centralised revolutionary party striving for, indeed “in striking distance” of, “hegemony” of the youth and revolutionary movements.

Democratic centralism of course must rest essentially on ideological conviction, on united action on vital issues, with full freedom and even encouragement of militants to interpret the general line in relation to specific conditions and tactical situations. To see this as meaning bloc voting on every issue, every tactical decision that arises is ludicrous, and certainly not leninist.

It may be that in abandoning the stalinist bureaucratic centralism, of the past the CPA has lost too much democratic centralism, particularly on such vital union issues as redundancy and rank and file control, but it is undoubtedly true that, in Australian conditions today, it is better to err in being too democratic than too centralist. Moreover, the pro-stalinist minority of the CPA have much less to complain about regarding their treatment than the SWL minority which was faced with expulsion only a couple of months after the SWL was formed! The minority has now left the SWL-SYA.

The SYA-SWL blindly adapts to Australian conditions the line of the particular Fourth Inter-

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2 The SYA-SWL method is not quite so bureaucratic as that practised by its mentor, the SWP in the USA, which, when it attends Moratorium-style meetings and committees in the USA, appoints a floor-leader who makes the decisions on all tactical questions during the meeting. The SWP membership is obliged to vote en bloc.
national group that it supports — the Socialist Workers' Party in the United States — and takes it as its mentor. It also places undue emphasis on Trotsky, who, undoubtedly one of the great marxist thinkers and activists of our age, always acknowledged Lenin's supremacy in theory and practice and often put the word "trotskyist" in inverted commas to indicate his desire to overcome any trend to cultism. To built a cult of Trotsky is as wrong as building one of Stalin or Mao, or even Lenin or Marx for that matter. It is the hallmark of dogmatism.

This simplicity of thinking, comparable to that of the CPA when the "line" came direct from Stalin and Moscow, has a certain attraction for young people and workers just coming to marxism. No great demands are made on intellectual effort and no problems of "contradictions" are posed. All that is required is to read the latest Militant, Workers' Press, International Press, Peking Review or New Times; the line is there and needs only slight adaption to fit local conditions. It is much more demanding to have to think independently, to examine every situation concretely, scientifically and in detail. In following a "line" there is a certain religious dogmatism and fundamentalism which can be personally satisfying and, like religious dogmas, it all hangs together — the schema is "logical" and everything falls into place.

This desire for a total pattern of thought is a very common phenomenon in all fields of human thought, but it is the negation of the scientific method and is, therefore, anti-marxist. Marxism, if it is anything is always critical, realising that everything is in constant change and that re-evaluation is the key to scientific thought. Trotsky, in a neglected series of writings when he was head of the Red Army (Marxism and Military Affairs), had some excellent things to say on the distortion or limitation of historical materialism and the marxist method:

... it is much easier to possess a passe-partout, that is, a master key that opens all doors and locks, rather than to study ... This is the greatest danger in all attempts to invest the marxist method with such an absolute character ... Marx (did not) intend to replace all other fields of human knowledge by his social-historical theory ... Man must keep cleaning his concepts and terms like a dentist cleans his instruments. But what we need for this is not a Kantian epistemology which takes concepts as being fixed and forever. Terms must be approached historically. But in a history of terms, hypotheses and theories do not replace science itself ... .

This does not mean that some of the material the SYA assiduously copies from abroad is not correct to some extent, but it must be evaluated critically, scientifically, and not taken as gospel truth. And the SYA must not assume that other groups, including other trotskyist groups, are completely wrong because they do not follow the line of the SYA's mentor. An illustration of the ways the SYA slavishly follows its US mentors can be seen in the results of its close adherence to the orientation of the SWP in the anti-war movement. Although it had a healthy emphasis on mass action, on building a mass movement, in its attempts to gain hegemony of the Moratorium, it stressed centralism and helped thereby to kill it (at least in Sydney). But it also took a conservative line and opposed any advanced action.

Now the SWP is often quite correct, in my estimation, in opposing the ultra-leftist adventurism in the USA, which scorns the mass movement. But I believe there is a role for minority militant actions such as the occupation of the Sydney Stock Exchange in July, 1970, within the framework of the mass mobilisation, if such militancy is aimed at informing, strengthening and making more radical the mass movement. Yet SYA conservatism was even more evident in the anti- Springbok demonstrations last year. Again, the SYA has been opposed to draft resistance, and particularly non-compliance, as a method of fighting conscription and the war. Their line is that the struggle should take place within the army. This overlooks the vast difference between the US army, a mass conscripted force, and the few conscripts in the Australian army. Of course work inside the army is necessary, but there is little evidence that much progress has been made, and where it has it has been a result of the draft resistance movement outside the army.

Having taken to heart the opportunistic compromise reached by the SWP and the "Europeans" of the USFI on the attitude to the anti-war movement (in countries with troops in Vietnam a broad movement around a single issue demand of "withdraw all troops now" is correct, while "solidarity with the NLF" is correct for countries not directly involved there, which leaves the way open for the SWA to follow its orientation of a mass, single-issue movement, and the Europeans (theirs of solidarity actions) the SYA is turning increasingly to maximum demands around issues such as Papua-New Guinea, Bangladesh and Palestine, which they estimate cannot become mass issues, while they maintain the broad mass movements like Black liberation and Vietnam still must have single issue demands. Sometimes they are correct but what is totally wrong is the way in which they reach their conclusions. They use a rule of thumb method applied without concrete and detailed examination of the facts. As well, most of the SYA cadres are beset by an infantile dogmatism which prevents them from understanding correctly even the SWP line on issues such as Bangladesh.

The fundamentalist simplicity of its line is first among a number of reasons for the SYA-SWL's relative progress among youth. Its apparent schematic cohesiveness and "correctness" provides the means for a strong measure of dedication and even fanaticism which permits a strong organisational structure with a firm, even bureaucratic, discipline, which most accept, and thus a lot of hard work, reminiscent of the CPA in its stalinist
of a pre-revolutionary situation, and to advance it as the solution to a governmental problem of replacing the Tories by Labor is wrong. In any case it is not enough for the ACTU or the TUC to "call" a general strike, such a strike would have to be based upon a suitable situation and the consciousness and desires of the rank and file workers.

The local Healyites combine their generalised and demagogic calls for "general strike" with a deep hostility to the initiatives, largely flowing from the work of CPA militants, for sit-ins, work-ins and so on, as a response to redundancy and the bosses' power to sack. This work-in response, in fact, falls into a long marxist tradition although it has a new aspect in the present crisis and is and must be put in a framework of self-management.

For the Healyites even workers' control is subordinated to the main slogan "elect a Labor Government on socialist principles". It is difficult for them to deny the validity of workers' control, given the prominent place it occupies in Trotsky's Transitional Program, but they seek always to deprecate it and accuse the CPA of using it to divert attention from the struggle to . . . elect a Labor Government on socialist policies!

Despite their assertion of orthodoxy, when their factional interests demand it, the Healyites can deny Trotsky's position on any question. Their stand on Black Power and Black Nationalism is a good example of this and one relevant to the rising black movement in Australia. In his fight with the SWP — they are mortal enemies now — Healy attacked the SWP for its "uncritical" support of "Black Nationalism", and the Healyites even went to the extreme of supporting the reactionary teachers' strike in the USA last year against black community control of schools. Their demagogic worker-orientation led them to the premise that Black Nationalism is reactionary and bourgeois and that teachers are workers and their strike was, therefore, progressive.4

This conclusion is based on the distortion of Lenin's policy on the national question by the handful of American Healyites. They have out-Luxemburged Rosa Luxemburg on the national question. Because Lenin, in his dispute with her stated that "the right of "self-determination can only mean the right of secession", the Healyites assume that any demands for anything less than self-determination, such as autonomy, are wrong; it must be secession or assimilation. This is a total distortion. Lenin always stood for autonomy and spoke of it as a "general and universal principle", something taken for granted. Trotsky, too, during his exile wrote a great deal about the negro question and stressed the right to self-determination and autonomy — black community control

3 See the correspondence in Direct Action on their distortion of the CPA position on Bangladesh. (Direct Action, January 17, 1972 for original article and Direct Action, February 7, 1972 for my reply.) A further reply for D.A. has been published, but my correction to an outright lie in that reply has not been published.

4 See the article "Black Nationalism and Marxist Theory" by Graham Bradley in Labour Press, February 8, 1972. Also note my report on the Brisbane Action Conference on Racism in Tribune which deals with the Healyites and their rejection by Black militants.
Faithfully following Healy, the Australian Healyites reject any separate demands for Australian Blacks, seeing them only as a sub-section of the working class, and the solution to their problems as the same old one . . . "election of a Labor Government on socialist policies" with the Blacks joining the unions and the ALP.

This group has its own brand of "entristism" which first of all involves their cadres using nom-de-plumes when writing in Labour Press, although paradoxically they sell it openly where they can be identified, although it is not the leaders who expose themselves in this way. They are able to make large first sales of Labour Press to workers who, initially, are deluded into thinking they are buying an ALP paper. Second sales are much more difficult once the buyers realised they have been "conned".

Their emphasis on allegiance to the "Working Class" and their demand that everyone must subordinate themselves to it has led to an idealisation of the working class and the categorisation of students, for example, as bourgeois or petty bourgeois, rather than relating them to the social role they have as workers-in-training. They fail to grasp the importance of such social strata and remain content with the "big bang" theory of an impending depression. Their thinking is still in terms of the thirties and their reliance on an imminent depression adds an ultra-left aspect to their opportunism on the ALP and electoralism. They are waiting for the Big Crash and now that the most serious recession for thirty years has hit, it is assumed that THIS IS IT and that other concepts such as alienation, self-management, etc., have been proved wrong and all that is necessary is to wait for the depression to deepen. The Healyites are not alone in holding this view. Now there are no signs at present of the recession deepening into an all-out depression and, moreover, there are few indications that depressions are automatically favourable to revolutionary upsurge.

What is much more likely is that any continuation and worsening of the recession will shake up the lasting conservatism and sense of security of the majority of workers and open the way for the penetration of ideas of workers' control, self-management and a revolutionary approach to life-style. And it will be women workers, young workers and black workers who will take the consciousness of the need for a new life-style, which has developed largely outside the organised working class, into it.

The Healyites, therefore perform a grave disservice by stressing in demagogic terms "elect a Labor Government" and advocating a general strike to achieve this goal while in practice opposing workers' control and self-management and denigrating such things as the emergent rejection of consumer capitalism and authoritarianism, by the youth, women's liberation and black power.

There must be a struggle against unemployment and other current social ills, but this should be carried on in a way which raises the question of power — workers' control, self-management, questioning of the bosses' power to sack — rather than in the traditional ways which are based on the concept of those who substitute themselves for the class — the ACTU and the ALP — taking action alone. The answer is for workers to take action now, asserting their power in the workshops and in society and to demand union and ALP support for such action.

Space prevents further analysis of the Healyites' position except to refer the reader to my views of their dogmatic and philosophically idealist interpretation of dialectical materialism in my letter to Labour Press on January 25, 1972.

The International Group is composed of the oldest trotskyist cadres in Australia and it still bears a strong antipathy to the CPA carried over from the past. Today they grudgingly admit in principle the CPA's rejection of stalinism but very seldom are any of the actual changes and progressive stances given acknowledgment.

The main difference in concrete policy between the International Group and the CPA revolves around the attitude towards the ALP. The International Group denies any real future for the CPA, or any other independent revolutionary party, in Australian conditions, The ALP, according to their thinking, is the mass party, and flowing from this is the denial that the Moratorium and the Anti-Apartheid campaigns or any other big extra-parliamentary protest campaigns are mass campaigns. They are only seen as having worth in relation to the degree they are under the aegis of the ALP or how they affect the ALP. They are seen as "vanguard" actions, not mass actions. As they are vanguard actions they are betrayed if they have anything less than solidarity slogans, because for them it is not a question of mobilising the masses, but the vanguard. This concept can be seriously questioned on a factual basis, not to say theoretically.

The 100,000 who marched in Melbourne can only be classified as a mass, but their answer to this is that the numbers were so large because Cairns and the ALP took part in the action. On the other hand where a "solidarity" movement got 3,000 in the Adelaide streets in the last few Moratoriums, they attribute this to special conditions (Labor Government, active student movement, liberal traditions) it was a vanguard action. Curiously, the Sydney effort to get masses onto the streets (and we only managed 20,000 at the peak) is condemned because supposedly the solidarity slogans would have achieved the same. Given the entrist orientation the logical thing to have done, surely, would have been to try to imitate the Melbourne example and attempt...
to win ALP patronage for the Sydney Moratorium!

The other major difference concerns entrism. The Australian theory of entrism, which originated in the International Group and was their interpretation of a more general policy internationally, starts from the fact that the ALP is the workers' mass party. Workers do not change their allegiance simply when the reformist party "exposes" itself, but rather stay with it while looking to a leftwing in it, or they turn to bourgeois or even fascist parties, depending on socio-economic conditions. Workers do not and have not turned to a minority revolutionary party.

From that conclusion is drawn that independent revolutionary parties have no prospects unless they seek to develop a revolutionary leftwing within the mass ALP. Hence the crucial thing for those who support entrism is work inside the ALP to build a revolutionary wing there of such magnitude that it would either be impossible to expel it, or that if it could be expelled then it would take a large mass base with it.

I have many objections to this scheme, but the main one is that it does not look concretely at the new type of revolutionary crisis exemplified by France in May 1968, that it neglects the importance of independent revolutionary work in the unions with the raising of consciousness and activism specifically around workers' control and self-management and that it practically reduces the whole struggle to one within the ALP electorally-orientated party framework. As well, it fails to recognise that it is not a question of building an alternative Party to "take power", but of the masses themselves taking power in factories, schools and universities. Development of dual power situations is the only alternative to reformism: in a crisis workers and students begin to occupy and then run their institutions. Only then does any revolutionary element have the hope of giving leadership to the masses to enable them, themselves, to take over full power. Though the importance of building a revolutionary left in the ALP is not denied, the crucial question is the development of dual power. This implies a major orientation towards unions and factories and the corresponding institutions of people such as students, as well as raising the consciousness of the totality of the revolution including women's liberation and black power as it fits into a self-managed socialist society. Experience in Australia has shown that entrism in the ALP by revolutionaries generally means a gradual but very definite political degeneration into ALP reformism. This applies, with very few exceptions, to all brands of entrism.

Despite these shortcomings International is the most positive of the Trotskyist groups in Australia and many of the critiques and actions of its cadres are worthy of study and praise. Moreover, there are hopeful signs of its overcoming at least to some extent its oldtime sectarianism in relation to the CPA. Its healthy stress on self-management is particularly good.

It is difficult not to be sectarian in relation to sectarians, and although much of this article has been critical it should not be misunderstood as a blanket rejection of "trotskyism" or the different trotskyist groups. United action is possible on a whole series of issues and, of course, has been carried out. Nor are our differences with them necessarily more important than our agreement or possibility of agreement, so our criticism must always be seen in perspective.

We should not see the CPA as the embodiment of all wisdom and as the one and only revolutionary party. The CPA has emerged from its stalinist period but many of the old ideas remain. Not only has stalinism to be overcome but a total strategy and even a philosophy has to be worked out to tackle the complexities and newness of the modern world. This includes a constant re-evaluation and critique of marxism past and present in all its forms and interpretations. However, we can say that the CPA is, as a whole, further along the road of really working out a new strategy and a new philosophical approach to the changing world today than any other group in this country.