CRITIQUE OF THE MANIFESTO OF THE LEAGUE FOR THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL

The League for the Fifth International published a manifesto entitled: “From Resistance to Revolution” in 2011. This article is an attempt to evaluate whether this document is a principled basis for understanding the international class struggle and therefore is able to provide a strategy for the realisation of world socialism. Before discussing the contents of this manifesto, it is necessary to outline why we do not believe that it is appropriate to call for the formation of a Fifth International. It is true that the forces of the Fourth International entered into serious crisis in the period after the Second World War because they were unable to explain the development of the post-war stabilisation of capitalism and the character of the counterrevolutionary overthrow of capitalism by Stalinism. This situation meant that the programme of revolutionary Marxism was compromised and undermined. The result of this situation was that the major components of Trotskyism became centrist. However this process of degeneration did not mean that the parties consisting of the Fourth International, and its various fragments, became open defenders of reformism and adherents of capitalism. Therefore unlike the Second International, which accommodated to the interests of national defence in the first world war, and the Third International that became an expression of the interests of Soviet Stalinism, the Fourth International has undergone a degeneration and fragmentation which does not mean that its original aims and principles have been undermined by what has been a process of centrist regression. It is still possible to rebuild a principled Fourth International on the basis of the regeneration of Marxist theory and by the elaboration of the programme of Marxism. Furthermore, this process of renewal will occur in terms of relating to other currents that also consider themselves to be supporters of the process of the reconstruction of the Fourth International. In this context it is a sectarian mistake to define ourselves as the Fifth International. Such label can only obscure the necessity to regenerate the Fourth International. The process of centrist degeneration is not as serious as the process of betrayal of the interests of the working class that occurred with the Second and Third Internationals. Instead the advance of the theory and practice of revolutionary Marxism can bring about the promotion of the formation of a principled and mass Fourth International.

The above point can be confirmed by the knowledge that the Manifesto of the League for the Fifth International is based on the attempt to apply the standpoint and methodology of Trotsky's Transitional Programme in order to understand the class struggle and develop a contemporary programme for the present period. This approach implies that they consider that the founding document of the Fourth International is still the basis for evaluating the contemporary world situation, and in order to promote the politics of Marxism within the working class. In contrast, the programme of the Stalinist Communist International expressed the fact that this organisation had become the agency of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy. Hence the centrism of this organisation in 1928 was never overcome, and instead the Comintern became the reformist defender of capitalism in relation to events in Spain and France in the mid 1930's. This process of degeneration was in conformity with the process of continued bureaucratic decline of the USSR during the 1930's. This process culminated in the horrors of collectivisation, the purges, and the alliance with Hitler in 1939. In contrast, whilst the majority section of the Fourth International has accommodated to Stalinism since the 1940's, it has in an inconsistent manner not consciously undermined the aim of world proletarian revolution. For example, Trotskyism in general has still maintained its opposition to reformism, and maintained at least a formal adherence to the importance of the Transitional Programme. Thus accommodation to Cuban Stalinism did not result in open support for the more powerful Soviet Stalinism and its counterrevolutionary objectives. Furthermore, many dissident Fourth Internationalist currents have been critical of the centrist majority trend, which was historically led by Ernest Mandel, and have sought to regenerate the Fourth International. Also, it can be argued that despite his centrism, Mandel has made important contributions to Marxist theory, such as on the question of socialist democracy. Hence, even the centrist forces have sincerely attempted to uphold Marxism despite their serious flaws. This situation means that it is premature, and ultimatistic to call for the formation of the Fifth International. Instead of promoting what is a situation of self-isolation, the League for a Fifth International, would be more constructive if it accepted that the end of the role of the Fourth International is premature. What would be more appropriate would be to call for the reconstruction of the Fourth International on a new and principled programme. This programme would explain the period since the end of the Second World War, and elaborate why capitalism has continued to be dominant and provide reasons as to why Stalinism has effectively ended. Such an analysis would become the basis of a strategy for international revolution. Ultimately the political basis of this programme would be based on co-operation between a collection of groupings committed to the redevelopment of the Fourth International.

BRIEF REMARKS ABOUT THE PROCESS OF CLASS STRUGGLE BETWEEN 1945 AND 2008

The end of the Second World War resulted in the international domination of the USSR and the USA. The USSR was able to transform Eastern Europe in its own image in terms of the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism and the creation of party-state regimes based on the exploitation of the working class within the context of nationalised economies. The theory of structural assimilation is the most explanatory for understanding this development. In contrast, the USA stabilised its control over Western Europe in terms of establishing bourgeois democratic regimes. The unrest of the working class was undermined by the role of the Stalinist parties, and because of the weakness of genuine revolutionary forces. In order to oppose the rivalry of the USSR, the USA adhered to the Truman doctrine and its opposition to 'communist' expansionism. And it promoted the revival of the world economy, and Western Europe in particular, with the enactment of the Marshall plan. This latter development represented the beginning of globalisation. This meant the USA became the leading force for the expansion of world capitalism, and the possibility of rival opposition to this domination of the hegemonic economic power was ended by this situation. The USA assumed responsibility for establishing the international institutions that would promote economic boom. Other countries like West Germany, Japan and Britain benefitted from this development. This situation was not favourable for revolutionary developments in many of the advanced industrial nations, but upheaval occurred in the Third World with the process of national liberation of countries like India and China. The Cuban revolution was one of the most important expressions of national liberation, but the increasing dependency of this country on the USSR indicated that it had become an integral part of the Stalinist bloc. Rivalry between the USA and USSR led to the cold war, and the international working class was ideologically divided as a result, and this meant the class struggle became undermined by the situation of support for Stalinism or anti-communism. The development of the welfare state also seemed to express the material undermining of the possibilities of proletarian revolution because the working class could achieve gains by improvements to the system because of the role of state intervention. But the French revolution of 1968 indicated that an affluent working class could still be discontented and inspired by aspirations such as workers control of production. Between 1968 and 1974 there was a revolutionary period of class struggle, with important developments in Chile and Portugal. But serious defeats led to the political restabilisation of capitalism.

This period of unrest led the ruling class in the USA and the UK to consider the necessity of a vicious offensive in order to undermine the welfare state and enhance the economic power of capital over labour. This reactionary perspective led to opposition by the working class in many countries, but generally the working class was defeated, as in relation to the miners’ strike in the UK in 1984-85. But victories were possible, as in relation to the effective opposition by the anti-poll tax struggle in the UK. Overall the social power of the working class was weakened, and the trade unions became less able to defend the interests of their members. This situation was reflected by the bourgeois degeneration of parties like New Labour in the UK. The USA attempted to assert its hegemonic position in terms of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This situation expressed the aggressive interests of American imperialism against its growing rivalry from increasingly dynamic economic powers like Germany and China. In contrast, the Soviet Union was declining because of its increasing economic limitations, and it had to accept the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe. In this situation the USA was able to uphold its global domination by means of military supremacy and the assertion that globalisation would mean the world economy would be organised in terms of the imposition of its interests. It seemed that the forces of counterrevolution had become more powerful than an opposition which was not organised or conscious of the necessity to end the capitalist system. The forces of revolutionary Marxism were still weak despite being involved in the struggle against the offensive of capital against labour. But then this situation of the apparent stability and domination of capital, via the role of the USA, was ended by the economic crisis that began in 2008. We will analyse this event in terms of discussing the Manifesto of the League of the Fifth International.

THE MANIFESTO OF THE LEAGUE OF THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL

The serious character of the economic crisis of 2008 is outlined in the Manifesto. It rightly suggests that the ultimate cause of this crisis is the falling rates of profit which has led to the collapse of banks and the decline of industries. It outlines how debt in the major capitalist countries reached record levels, and this implied that the material interests of the people would be undermined in order to realise debt financing in terms of austerity policies. In contrast to the situation in the West, the growth of new capitalist economies like China and India has occurred in this situation. The Manifesto contends that this development will result in new rivals for the USA, but in opposition to this view it could also be suggested that a new economic dependency between China and the USA has been created. The prospects of the world economy, and the continuation of globalisation, are based on the close connections between China and the USA. The new Chinese bourgeoisie has interests in the revival and prosperity of the American economy. This is why the 'America First' policy of Trump is irrational because it denies the importance of the close interconnections of the American economy. In practice, Trump is unlikely to practice what he preaches. In other words, despite the economic crisis the inter-relations of the world economy have been maintained. The major capitalist countries have connected interests in trying to resolve this crisis situation at the expense of the working class. Hence the prediction of the League of the Fifth International that the crisis will result in the fragmentation of the world economy is premature. Instead the policy of the bourgeoisie of the major countries is to maintain globalisation, which means inter-connected trade and expansion. This possibility does not mean that the effects of the crisis have not been serious. The major policy result has been the imposition of austerity. This is the justification of new reasons to undermine the remains of the welfare state, such as imposing strict financial controls on the NHS in the UK. Such policies are unpopular, but are considered by the various right wing governments as necessary in order to tackle the financial aspects of the continuing economic crisis.

The League for the Fifth International make the following conclusion from the situation of crisis: “The credit crunch, recession and debt time bomb of 2008-2010 opened a new historic crisis for the capitalist system as a whole, a period in which intense struggles between the classes will give rise to revolutionary crisis, counterrevolutions, and conflicts between rival powers.”(1) What this prediction ignores is that economic crisis in and of itself will not generate the possibility of the intensification of class struggle to the point of revolutionary situations. In order for this prospect to occur implies the importance of the development of class consciousness, high levels of solidarity, the promotion of mass organisation, and possibly most importantly, the development of an influential revolutionary party. For example, the situation in Greece had all the ingredients of the potential to develop mass support for the overthrow of capitalism because of the acute economic situation created by the debt situation. But a temporary resolution of this situation has been realised by the left populist organisation, Syriza. There never was any recognition by a discontented people that what was necessary was the realisation of the aim of the formation of a workers government. Instead mass unrest was based on support for Syriza and its attempts to address the situation in terms of realising a new economic settlement with the EU. The trade unions did get involved in protests, but no specific anti-capitalist organisations emerged in this situation. This was an indication that the required class consciousness in order to challenge the economic power of capital did not occur. It was an example that acute economic crisis need not generate the possibility of a mass offensive in favour of socialism. In this context there never was a creation of a popular revolutionary party which could challenge the policy of compromise of Syriza. Thus the lesson of this situation is that the task of promoting the formation of Marxist organisations, and the related generation of high levels of class consciousness, will not simply be the result of a dire economic situation. Instead it requires a period of protracted preparation. However, the economic determinism of the League of the Fifth International seems to underestimate the difficulties involved in this task. For example, the recent election of Macron as President of France, and the election of Merkel in Germany, indicates that people within the EU still have confidence in bourgeois politicians. The point is that these developments are still the result of the offensive of capital against labour that has taken place within the last forty years. This situation has led to the overall defensive and marginalised condition of labour. The balance of class forces favoured the ruling class when the economic crisis began in 2008. If anything, the capitalist class of many countries has been able to utilise the crisis in order to impose austerity policies on their societies. This situation has only enhanced the political strength of capitalism. Hence it is simplistic to predict that the class struggle will intensify in this situation. In other words the basis of the prediction that class conflict will become greater is the result of an economic determinism that has no validity in study of the major capitalist countries. Overall the working class has lacked the level of political awareness to be able to oppose the austerity policies of the ruling class. For example, this is why a Conservative government could get constantly elected on an austerity approach in the UK. The revival of left wing politics in the UK has not been because of an upsurge in working class opposition to the government, but instead because of the increased popularity of the leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. Only in the very recent period have the trade unions started to oppose, and this is still at the level of complaints rather than action, the austerity policies of the government. Whilst in international terms there is no development of opposition to austerity. There is some discontent with the new labour laws being proposed in France, but action is still limited. Hence it can be said that in international terms, the capitalist class has maintained its hegemony. The major problem for the EU is the issue of the BREXIT of the UK. We can argue in cautious terms that economic crisis has not resulted in the intensification of the class struggle. Generally it has been possible for the various bourgeois regimes to impose policies at the expense of the interests of the working class such as austerity. This contention does not mean to imply that the working class has been defeated. Instead it can be suggested that the problem is the lack of mobilisation in order to oppose reactionary economic policies in the aftermath of the recession. This issue is connected to the mass confusion that has been caused by the imposition of austerity policies. The point is that the alternative perspective of opposing austerity was never outlined in a popular manner. Instead bourgeois economics remained hegemonic. This situation was even indicated in the apparently radicalised situation of Greece. The ruling class was able to provide convincing reasons as to why austerity should be the answer to crisis. The working class lacked a sense of an alternative political economy that could have rejected this standpoint. It is true that discontent has been developed in countries like France, Spain and Portugal, but this often has taken a populist and confused form. In France, the right wing has gained from the discontent of the people. In the USA, the result has been the election of a reactionary populist. Support for some form of socialism, as in the USA, has gained popularity, but this has been a minority trend. We cannot say that in any major country, the above prediction of the League for the Fifth International has been confirmed.

Nor can we agree that the result of recession has been the intensification of inter-imperialist rivalry. There are political tensions between say the USA with China and Russia over various contested situations, such as the Ukraine and military intervention in Syria. But these disputes do not express the differences of systematic economic competition. Instead all these countries have a vested interest in expanding their trade within an integrated world economy, of the continuation of globalisation. Indeed it could be suggested that the role of China is integral for the development of the American economy. So when the manifesto implies that 'increasing dangers between the great powers for the re-division of the world' could occur, this is an erroneous prediction. (2) This criticism does not imply that the problem of inter-imperialist rivalry has been ended by globalisation. There are obvious tensions which could be defined as an expression of a situation of intermittent antagonism between important great powers. But the crucial point is that this does not mean that the structural condition of inter-imperialist rivalry which occurred between 1914 and 1945 is being repeated. Instead the global economy established by the USA in 1945 is still present. It is also necessary to reject the view that war could occur between the great powers, because such a development would have catastrophic consequences. But primarily, the tensions between say Russia and the USA are not sufficient in order to create the potential for war. Hence this prediction of military conflict is a dogmatic view of the League for a Fifth International.

The problem with their views about relations between the major powers is that the League can only conceive of the seriousness of the crisis resulting in inter-imperialist tensions being resolved in the form of war: “As the major powers and their corporations are forced to struggle ever more aggressively with one another over the dwindling spoils, we can already see them manoeuvring to re-divide the world's markets, raw materials and labour supply, raising again the spectre of new wars between rival commercial powers.”(3) This comment implies that the ruling classes of the major capitalist countries have not learnt from history. Obviously one of the effects of the present economic crisis is to intensify competitive pressure, but the leaders of the various governments know that a generalised war would have a terrible effect for the world economy. Hence they instead act, at various conferences, to try and resolve the crisis at the expense of the international working class. The point is the leadership of the USA is still not seriously contested, whatever may be the pretensions of various other powers. It is still the leaders of the American government which propose measures in order to tackle the difficulties of the world economic situation. This is why the present isolationism of Trump is unrealistic, and not credible in practice.

The problem with the perspective of the League for the Fifth International is that the underlying assumption they are making is that inter-imperialist war will create the conditions for proletarian revolution. We can categorically maintain that this development cannot in any manner have a progressive outcome. Instead the international interests of the working class are with the promotion of peace. In this manner the most suitable political conditions can be created by which to facilitate the struggle for socialism. We already know from various wars occurring at the present moment how terrible it is, and that the people affected only desire peace. Therefore the aim of peace is what is most compatible with the aim of creating a better and more humane society. The point can also be made is that historically the working class has proved either not strong enough, or influenced by nationalism, to prevent the development of the two world wars. If a new world war was to occur this would mean that the working class consciously rejected internationalism and peace in favour of the development of military action. In contrast to this reactionary possibility the struggle for peace should be an integral aspect of the attempt to overthrow capitalism and to establish the basis of world revolution. In contrast, the League for the Fifth International does not seem to support this perspective because of its dogmatic assumption that progressive change can possibly result from war. They do not seem to recognise that the character of world war in the present situation would be different to that in the past, and would threaten the very demise of humanity. In this context, the working class would need to reject any regressive nationalist sentiments and instead agitate in favour of peace. However, a new inter-imperialist war is unlikely to occur for the reasons given. But in any eventuality, the policy of peace is integral to the struggle for socialism. This does not mean that we support pacifism, but rather we recognise that the development of inter-imperialist war cannot promote the realisation of socialism. The working class would be asserting its political independence if it supported the approach of peace.

Indeed the Manifesto contradicts this perspective of growing inter-imperialist rivalry when it comments that: “As the economy staggers out of recession, bankers and world leaders huddle together in a serious of conferences. They agree on one thing: that the first priority for each state is to repay its billionaire creditors. They all agree too, on must pay: the workers and peasants of the world. They demand working people boost profits by accepting cuts in jobs, pay and pensions, by working longer hours, retiring later, paying more tax, and higher prices for basic goods, by seeing services axed to the bone and benefits stripped away.”(4) This is a more accurate representation of the situation. The various national representatives of the interests of capital recognise the necessity of an international strategy in order to try and resolve the crisis at the expense of the workers and peasants. This development is made possible by the globalised character of the economy, and the fact that the present form of the capitalist system generates common interests. Most importantly, it is necessary to uphold the dynamics of capital accumulation and so lower the level of wages. This task has become crucial in the period of economic crisis. In other words, the very seriousness of the situation meant that it was not feasible to have a disparate collection of policies that had no connection. Instead because of its instructional connections the bourgeoisie of the major countries has promoted a common approach to the issue of how to tackle the crisis. This has resulted in the imposition of austerity policies. The perspective is that the working class will not be able to organise effectively in order to oppose this approach of the ruling class. In this assumption the standpoint of the ruling class has been successful, because of the general lack of opposition of the people. However, the effects of the crisis often continue because of its seriousness.

Nevertheless, the League for the Fifth International seems to be trying to defy the events of empirical reality when it contends, “On the other hand, we see tremendous working class resistance to the capitalist offensive". Around the world workers have fought back. General strikes in South Africa, Greece, France and Guadeloupe, mass workers action in Spain and Portugal, factory occupations in South Korea, the USA and Britain and a wave of strikes for higher pay in China. The resistance in each of these countries appears separate, but must be seen as a series of linked engagements in what is nothing less than a worldwide war of the employing class against the workers. The key to repelling the bosses’ offensive is a united front of the working class, spanning all the workers organisations, in each country and across borders.”(5) We cannot dispute that such actions have occurred, but the problem is that success has not been achieved which might have inspired the development of more sustained and effective action. It would have been more realistic to have accepted that in general the imposition of austerity policies has occurred despite some protests and actions of the workers. The point is to relate tactics and strategy to 'what is' rather than what we 'would like it to be'. It has to be admitted that at present the working class in general terms lacks the class consciousness to be able to realise successful and popular mass action against austerity. In this context, the balance of class forces favours the ruling class. This unfavourable situation is connected to the fact that genuine revolutionary parties are not being created. There are parties of protest in countries like Spain, but this uneven rejection of austerity has not necessarily promoted action. Instead the parties of protest, like Syriza, have been unable to reject austerity policies.

But the League for the Fifth International only create new errors when they also maintain that popular opposition to imperialism is occurring in the Third World. They do not recognise that such opposition is often led by reactionary forces that are not in favour of the establishment of democratic republics, and that repressive regimes are generally able to oppose the development of civil dissent. Instead the process of protest is given the gloss of being mass democratic movements, which often denies their elitist character. The point is that dissent in the Third World is often separatist and regional, and so not able to provide an expression of genuine national liberation. But the League does accept that in certain circumstances the reactionary leadership of struggles undermines its popular character. What is not being outlined in this context is that only leaderships with a socialist character can truly promote the realisation of progressive results in the Third World. Only in this context can genuine democratic struggle for liberation occur.

The Manifesto also makes another dogmatic conclusion: “In each sphere of battle, the workers and poor have all too often seen victories snatched from our grasp, not by the strength of our enemies, but by the weakness, and even treachery of our leaders.”(6) This point has truth to the extent that it is based on outlining the limitations of the trade union bureaucracy which prefers negotiation in contrast to the role of militant struggle, and indicates the reactionary role of Social Democratic and Communist parties. But what this view is also based upon is the myth that the working class in general has been receptive to the possibility of mass struggle, but that it has only been undermined from engaging in this activity by the role of its trade union and political leadership. This view ignores the uncomfortable fact that often the working class has accommodated to the ideological influence of the ruling class, and so accepted, even if reluctantly, the necessity of austerity. Thus, in the situation of Greece, which whilst characterised by mass unrest, nevertheless the people still ultimately accepted the EU imposed plan of austerity and public sector cuts. Hence we can say with more accuracy than the 'Manifesto of the League for the Fifth International' that the working class has not mobilised effectively to oppose austerity. For a variety of reasons, including the limitations of its leadership, it has generally submitted to the austerity policy. If the situation was characterised by mass struggle, the balance of class forces would be different, in that context it may be possible to achieve the defeat of the austerity policy in certain circumstances. Instead of that development the ability of the ruling class to impose austerity is because working people have not considered that there could be an alternative. This standpoint represents the fact that the understanding that an alternative system called socialism is possible lacks popular support. Instead the economic politics of the bourgeoisie seem to express common sense despite the undermining of the material interests of working people.

The Manifesto is being more realistic when it comments: “Nowhere can this crisis of working class leadership be seen more clearly than on the international terrain. The ruling class co-ordinates its offensive globally, while each of our resistance movements struggles in national isolation. They have their G8 and G20, their IMF and World Bank, their European Union and Central Bank. Bu the workers have no international organisation to bring our struggles together, to draw up a common strategy and lead a mass fight back.”(7) It is also mentioned that the reformist and bureaucratic character of the organisations of the working class mean that they accept the necessity and logic of austerity. This point is true, and it means the role of these organisations is to undermine any militant action by the workers. But the approach of the League also implies that the working class is receptive to the message of struggle against austerity. This point is becoming true in the present, but for many years we also have to admit that people have been demobilised by the ideological influence of the message of austerity. This is not to suggest that austerity has been popular, but rather workers could not recognise the possibility of an alternative. The point being made is that the low level of class consciousness has had an effect on the level of willingness of people to take action against the economic policies of bourgeois governments. Hence the reason that people supported this acceptance of austerity was because they could not conceive of an alternative. Such a standpoint was upheld by the right wing policies of many Social Democratic organisations. Opposition to austerity began to develop with left wing developments in Spain, and the election of a radical leader of the Labour party in the UK. But even this new situation has not yet led to effective mass actions by the trade unions.

Thus we can conclude that it is one-sided for the League for a Fifth International to entirely blame the reasons for a lack of successful struggle on the role of the trade union and political leadership of the working class. Instead we also have to acknowledge the ideological situation and the fact that the views of the ruling class have become a common popular sense. The reason for this development is because of a low level of class consciousness, which is expressed in the small influence of an alternative world view to that of the ruling class. Not many people understand what is meant by the conception of socialism. Hence mass struggle is not likely as long as the influence of an alternative to capitalism is obscure and without any form of popularity.

In this context the following comment of the League for the Fifth International indicates its evolutionary optimism in the possibility of international revolutionary struggle and the realisation of an alternative to capitalism: “Yet the force that can stop this capitalist offensive in its tracks, the worldwide working class, is bigger than ever. The new millennium sees the workers form a majority of humanity for the first time in history. Against the few hundred billionaires and their admirers, stand billions of workers who make and circulate their profits. Our labour process is more internationally integrated; our interaction and ability to communicate with one another greater, than ever before. When we act together the machinery of exploitation shudders to a halt. The working class produces everything, and can produce it without the exploiters, once we are conscious of our power and our interests.”(8) The problem with this comment is that it one-sidedly outlines the objectives possibilities generated for world socialism in terms of the international economic role of the working class. What is ignored is the issue of how to develop the class consciousness and political activity that will promote the possibilities for the realisation of this progressive potential within capitalism. For example, the workers are often divided by different national loyalties, and the ideological influence of bourgeois political economy is often hegemonic and so results in the acceptance of capitalism. But primarily, the working class has never acted as an international political actor despite previous attempts to develop its universal opposition to capital. Hence the task of promoting the effective formation of an international class that acts in unity and solidarity will be immense, even if it is not impossible.

What would advance this process of international unity would be the creation of a successful revolutionary regime which would promote the task of world revolution. The establishment of a genuine workers government, which is based on the highest levels of democracy, would inspire the working class of other countries to emulate this example. Indeed this point seems to be accepted by the League for the Fifth International when it considers the importance of establishing a workers state that would be on the basis of democratic administration, and which would create a planned economy. This development would be the result of socialist revolution. The implicit assumption is that the process of world revolution would have a national form, and so would have an aspect of uneven development. In this context, it would be vital to overcome any tendency for the justification of national exceptionalism, or the view that socialism in one country is sufficient. It could be argued that it is possible that an advanced capitalist country could have the material basis to generate the creation of a plausible socialist society in terms of its level of economic development and traditions of political democracy. But to accept this situation, and so effectively reject the tasks of supporting world revolution, would represent a nationalist betrayal of the interests of the world working class. Instead it would still be the internationalist obligation of the workers state to promote support and solidarity for the struggle against capitalism. If this task was not supported it would mean the workers state has put its national interests before the aims of world revolution. It could also be argued that the only alternative to the threat of counterrevolution is the success of the process of the international overthrow of capitalism.

The strategy of the League for the Fifth International is summed up in the following manner: “Today in the battles we are mounting against austerity, the working class is showing its potential power. These immediate struggles need to be co-ordinated to repel the bosses offensive, and to be directed against the system itself, in short, today's struggles need to become the starting point for revolution and the rule of the working class.”(9) This seems to be a principled understanding of the required strategy for the task of the overthrow of capitalism. The problem is that it is still based on wishful thinking rather than the accurate understanding of the balance of class forces. This means the difficult aspects of how to realise the mass mobilisation of the working class in a revolutionary manner are being generally avoided. However, in a crude manner it is reluctantly admitted that the role of ideology, which is defined as propaganda, is important for undermining the development of the class struggle: “The capitalists recognise our potential power if we unite as a class, so they spread every means of deception to divide us: control over official education, state and millionaire control of the media, religious, racial and national prejudices and petty controls over daily life. To set the workers of one nation against another ….. this is the capitalists’ strongest weapon.”(10) What is being described are the most crude reasons as to why working people may be disunited and will not act together in order to oppose the present economic system. But the most important reason as to why people may be reluctant to struggle to reject the offensive of capital against labour is because they have accepted the standpoint of capitalism and so adopt a passive view that suggests that nothing can be done in order to improve and change the situation. What is vital is to develop a level of consciousness which will mean that workers become receptive to the aims of revolution and socialism. The Manifesto accepts this view in terms of calling for the formation of a new International in order to unite the workers of the world against capitalism. This aim is vital but this means that the role of the International is not merely to organise the proletariat against capitalism, but also to promote the task of developing the level of class consciousness. Only in this context will mass struggles occur that are increasingly against capitalism and in favour of socialism. The present domination of bourgeois ideology means that struggles will either not occur, or else will be strictly limited and defensive. In contrast to this situation it is necessary that a Marxist party be developed which will have as its central task the aim of promoting the development of class consciousness.

This task, is connected as the Manifesto contends, to the necessity to form a world revolutionary party. Unfortunately this aim is presented in sectarian terms because it is argued that all of the present international formations are opportunist: “Each of these internationals represented a massive gain for the working class, yet each has in their turn disappeared, gone over to the enemy, or abandoned the path of social revolution. The task today is to build a Fifth International.”(11) This comment represents a simplified and rigid view of the history of the four international formations. The First International was led by Marx and Engels, and this carried out crucial work on behalf of the struggles of the working class, such as its defence of the Paris Commune. It was only undermined by the disruptive antics of Bakunin, the anarchist. Whilst the Second International was theoretically led by the gifted Karl Kautsky, it fragmented into national sections with the onset of the First World War. Its credibility never recovered, and it became a formal organisation devoted to opposing the Third International. The Third International was established by the Bolsheviks, but it underwent degeneration alongside the development of Stalinism in the USSR. It was organisationally dissolved by Stalin in 1943. Trotsky established the Fourth International, but it was prone to crisis caused by the complex necessity to explain Stalinism and the post-war boom. However, despite opportunist degeneration it never became consistently reformist and was generally centrist. There have also been many rival formations, some of which have had the potential to represent principled revolutionary politics. By proclaiming the necessity of the Fifth International, the League seems to have rejected the possibility of relations with these groupings. Hence they effectively and arrogantly suggest that they are the revolutionary party. However, this rigidity is balanced to some extent by the fact that the League accepts the necessity to realise the formation of a democratic congress in order to create a truly mass Fifth International. This aim would be more credible if they accepted the necessity to talk with various tendencies that still accepted the banner of the Fourth International.

Furthermore, we can suggest that the position of the League for a Fifth International is illogical in the sense that they still accept the importance of Trotsky's transitional programme. This provides their methodology by which they understand the role of the strategy for proletarian revolution. Hence in this sense they are still part of the Fourth International tradition. They have not adopted a different type of programme which would represent the logical necessity to claim to be the Fifth International. In contrast the Fourth International was formed because the Third International had betrayed the positions of its first four congresses, and the Second International had betrayed its commitment to proletarian internationalism as outlined by resolutions of its previous meetings. But in relation to the fragments of the Fourth International, and the League for the Fifth International, they would still claim that the Transitional Programme is a principled document to guide the development of strategy in the present period. It has not been proved to be opportunist, even if we can consider that some of its formulations have become dogmatic. In other words the primary basis by which we may contemplate the call for the formation of the Fifth International was applicable would be if we considered that the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International was in some sense problematical, and so should be replaced by a new programme on the basis of different principles and premises. Instead it seems more reasonable to call for the development of the process of programmatic elaboration in terms of the reconstruction of a renewed Fourth International. Indeed the League for the Fifth International provides no detailed reasons why they are against the possibility of rebuilding the Fourth International. They contend that the Fifth International should relate to the organisations and struggles of the working class and peasantry, and it needs to develop a programme with the strategy to oppose capitalism. But there is nothing in this standpoint that would justify the formation of the Fifth International. Instead the merely assume that we need a fifth International as the following comment outlines: “The only alternative to capitalism in crisis is socialism; the only path to socialism is revolution; the indispensable instrument of the world revolution is a world party of social revolution. The time to build a fifth international is now.”(12)

This above comment and analysis provides no genuine or theoretical reason for the formation of the Fifth International. Instead we would argue that it is their obligation to try to relate to as many organisations as possible in the task of trying to build a new mass international. This means the League accepting that they have genuine and valid reasons for still claiming the banner of the Fourth International. Hence any possibility of unification with other organisations would occur under the banner of the Fourth International. In contrast, the banner of the Fifth International implies that the aim is self-imposed isolation from other Trotskyist forces, and the perspective that only under the auspices of the League for the Fifth International can a principled organisation be developed. It is to be questioned whether such a situation of effective rejection of relations with other Trotskyist forces can build a mass international. In contrast to this effective rejection of relations with other organisations, the Democratic Socialist Alliance attempts to constantly promote alliances and relations with other forces claiming to be Trotskyist and based on the banner of the Fourth International. In this context our aim will be to defend our principles in relation to any possibility of compromise and the prospect of relations with other organisations. Hence we do not want to dilute our principles for the sake of a diplomatic unity, but nor do we reject the possibility of realising some form of political agreement and in this manner advancing the aim of a reconstructed Fourth International. In contrast, the League for the Fifth International seems to reject any possibility of unity, unless it is strictly on their terms and based on acceptance of their presumed superiority.

This clinging to the banner of the Fifth International seems to be mystifying given that their strategy or action programme is based entirely on Trotsky's transitional method. They reject the reformism of the Second Democracy and instead argue: “The programme of a new international needs to break with this failed model. It must advance a series of integrated transitional demands, connecting the slogans and forms of struggle needed to repeal the capitalist offensive with the methods we need to overthrow bourgeois rule, establish working class power and begin a socialist plan of production.”(13) The Manifesto rightly identifies the capitalist offensive in this period of crisis as the reactionary policy which needs to be challenged by the working class movement. In this context they relate the aims of this immediate struggle with the task of the overthrow of capitalism. Such a strategy is principled, and it would represent an advance in class consciousness if this approach becomes the practical guide for the actions of the working class. However, what is omitted from this perspective is the necessity of the influence of the theory and propaganda of the Marxist groups if the working class is to become receptive to the importance of connecting immediate struggles with the aim of revolution and socialism. The approach of the Transitional Programme is not influential because of the lack of mass support for socialism; instead discontent with capitalism is expressed by the influence of left populism and individuals like Jeremy Corbyn. The working class does not act in a militant manner because of the influence of bourgeois ideology. This means an ideological struggle has to be carried out if working people are to become receptive to the role of the transitional method. The activism of the various Trotskyist groups means that this understanding is often omitted in their perspectives. Instead the requirements of struggle replace the importance of theory and the related development of class consciousness. Consequently the Left groups are mystified when their views are not accepted by the working class. They do not recognise the necessity of ideological struggle is as important as actual activity. Primarily we need to elaborate what we mean by socialism, and why it is superior to capitalism. We need to indicate that this alternative type of society means that working people can decide how to administer society and the economy, and that it will be dedicated to ending the exploitation of capitalism. If this understanding becomes popular it will immensely improve the prospects of promoting the necessity of transitional demands that connect the priorities of the immediate situation with the ultimate aim of realising socialism. In other words, how can the working class effectively struggle against capitalism if it has only the vaguest notions of what is meant by socialism? For example, the weakness of the revolution in Venezuela was that only President Chavez defined what was meant by socialism. Hence after his untimely death the workers had no guidance as to how they could achieve socialism, because they no longer had any person able to define what it was! The result has been demoralisation and the increasing decay of the regime. Whilst in countries like the UK, the working class is deterred from struggle because it effectively accepts the political economy of the bourgeoisie. This is because it knows of no possible alternative to the present system. Hence it reluctantly accepts a low wage economy. In this situation the role of the Marxist Left should be to outline a popular conception of socialism, and to agitate in favour of its realisation. If this standpoint becomes influential it would then promote the possibility of militant action in both the defence of the interests of the workers, and increasingly in order to advance the realisation of the aim of socialism.

In contrast, the League for the Fifth International outline their programme of minimum and transitional demands based upon opposing capitalism, and in favour of socialism, without accepting that this perspective is unrealistic unless it is connected to the ideological struggle of the Marxists in favour of an alternative to capitalism. They seem to consider that the following formulation can be relatively easy to realise: “A Fifth International, therefore, will need to raise demands and propose forms of organisation that not only answer today's vital needs but organise the workers so that they can take and exercise power. Combining these elements is no artificial exercise; they are bound together by the real conditions of class struggle in this period of capitalist decline.”(14) This comment assumes that people know that they are an integral part of a class struggle. But the ideology of deference and tradition often inhibits the realisation of this understanding. This is why a revolutionary organisation is vital to promote socialist consciousness. If this task is successfully realised only then will class conflict start to acquire a transitional character in which the immediate situation becomes related to long term goals like socialism. The League for the Fifth International rightly contends that the realisation of workers control of production can be the prelude to the establishment of socialism. But the crucial issue is how do we establish this possibility? The point is that it will be crucial that Marxists elaborate the importance of workers control as the alternative to the domination of companies by capitalists. In other words, the culture of workers control requires that the deference of the working class towards the capitalists be ended. Instead it becomes considered to be acceptable and necessary that the economy be organised by the working class as a prelude to the ultimate overthrow of the domination of capital. The point being made is that it will not be the logic of the struggle itself that results in the development of workers control. Instead it is the role of the party to promote the realisation of a popular socialist culture, which will mean that the role of workers control of production becomes considered to be the logical outcome of class struggle. Without the development of socialist consciousness, the logic of struggles will remain defensive and limited. Only the popular influence of Marxism will mean that people act in correspondence with the logic of the transitional method.

In contrast, the League for the Fifth International seems to believe that struggle itself has an automatic and logical dynamic of raising the issue of socialism. This spontaneous approach is implied by the following comment: “Workers engaged in struggle against austerity can raise these demands individually and severally against specific attacks, but the programmes socialist goal will only be achieved when they are taken up and fought for as an interrelated system of demands for the transformation of society. The full transitional programme is a strategy for working class power. For this reason our demands are not passive appeals to governments or employers, but rallying slogans for the working class to overthrow and expropriate the capitalists.”(15) Hence it would seem that the spontaneous character of the class struggle logically and dynamically raises the importance of transitional demands and therefore connects immediate and defensive struggles with the aim of the overthrow of capitalism. But this perspective is an illusion unless it is connected to the role of the Marxist party. This acts to promote the importance of the transitional approach and so in this manner, acts to develop the class consciousness of the workers. Only if this task is successful will it be possible to generate mass struggle on the basis of transitional demands. However, the dialectic of the role of the transitional approach is that if the Marxist party is successful in obtaining mass and popular support for the significance of the transitional method, it will then be possible for the working class to act in an independent manner without the guidance of the party. The very task of the party is to encourage the initiative and self-activity of the working class. But this perspective does not mean that ideological struggle waged by the Marxist party is not important. Only the success of this activity will prepare the workers to strive to realise the revolutionary logic of the transitional approach. In contrast, the standpoint of the League for the Fifth International implies that the very inherent demands of class struggle imply that the dynamic of a transitional method will become apparent. If this is what is meant by their formulations it is being over-optimistic about the prospects of struggle. The point is that the Marxist party has an intense theoretical and political role in order to popularise and promote the role of transitional demands. Only if this task is successful will it become possible for the self-initiative of the workers to become a dominant aspect of the class struggle.

The demands that the League of the Fifth International make against workplace closures, in terms of occupying factories threatened with redundancies, and culminating in workers veto on management decisions, which is the prelude to workers control of production, are obviously supportable. Hence the problem is not with this action programme being advocated. Instead what is problematical is the question of how to connect theory to practice. This means that the development of increasingly militant action which challenges capitalism is an immense advance in the class struggle, and so the problem is that the League for the Fifth International underestimates what this means in terms of the transformation of class consciousness. Hence it is not adequate to outline the limitations of capitalism and its generation of poverty and inequality, as the Manifesto does. What is more crucial is to promote a perspective that is able to challenge the traditional deference of the workers to the domination of capital and the related acceptance of reactionary pro-bourgeois governments. In this context we have to provide arguments that outline how the working class can not only protest against capitalism and conduct struggles against its limitations, but also establish an alternative socialist society. Only the advance of a socialist consciousness within the vanguard of the class will create the situation to promote the development of a mass movement with the aim of creating a classless society. The point is that the struggle itself will not have a spontaneous logic that creates a dynamic in favour of revolutionary change. Instead struggles will only acquire a transforming dimension if sufficient workers, beginning with the militant minority, are convinced of the superiority of socialism over capitalism. If the Marxist party can convince the militant minority of the importance of revolutionary change, this development can be the beginning of the process of winning the rest of the working class to this perspective. Instead in a moralistic and rationalist or reasonable manner, the League of the Fifth International outlines the various limitations of capitalism. But this is not how we convince people of the urgency of socialism. People, to some extent know from their own experience of the various limitations of the present system, such as intensified exploitation at work, and declining public services. But they do not act to try and change this situation because they do not contemplate what could be the alternative. We can only motivate mass action if people become convinced of the superiority of the possibility of socialism. But the League for the Fifth International only presumes the advantages represented by socialism; they do not recognise the political necessity to make the systematic argument in favour of this alternative. The very possibility of class struggle against capitalism depends on outlining the superiority of socialism.

The Manifesto outlines a collection of demands including the call for strikes against closure of workplaces, nationalise under workers control enterprises due to make massive redundancies, nationalise the banks under democratic control, cut hours in order to tackle unemployment. Against low pay and insecure jobs, for a programme of public works, for a sliding scale of wages in order to tackle inflation. Open the books in order to scrutinise the activity of employers. Against the intensification of work, and for a workers veto on management decisions which culminates in the development of workers control of production. These measures should go alongside tax the rich, and for a massive expansion of public services. However whilst these aims can be supported, it is not apparent how they can be realised under the continuation of capitalism. It is necessary to be explicit. These measures will not be possible if bourgeois parties, or even left reformist organisations like that led by Jeremy Corbyn acquire parliamentary majorities. Only if the working class carries out a process of the revolutionary transformation of society and establishes a workers government will it be possible to establish extensive nationalisation under workers management, and to promote the realisation of a democratic plan of production. In contrast, the Manifesto ambiguously suggests: “Socialists must learn to distinguish capitalist nationalisation, which is used to prop up the system, from working class expropriation, used to dispossess the bosses for good.”(16) This latter development in which nationalisation benefits the workers and not the capitalists can only occur if the workers establish control of the enterprise as a prelude to the realisation of political power in the form of the establishment of a workers government. The point being made is that the generation of widespread workers control can only have strategic sense if it is an integral aspect of the process of the realisation of the economic and political power of a workers government. Instead of this explicit aim, the Manifesto outlines in a vague manner that: “Above all communists fight to link the fight for expropriation of this or that industry with the need to expropriate the capitalist class as a whole.”(17) This point is correct, but what does it mean in political terms? Such a situation cannot be realised under capitalism because the present system could not function coherently in terms of the dominant influence of workers control. Instead this situation would represent dual power in which the working class would be confronted with the task of establishing its completed political control. It could be argued that this perspective is the logical outcome of the approach of the Manifesto of the League for the Fifth International. This point is fair comment, so why do they not mention such an aim in the context of these demands, or that this is their goal? To outline an explicit strategic aim in this context would be an explanation of how they consider that their demands for changes within the economy could be realised.

The Manifesto also outlines valid arguments about the necessity to tackle ecological issues, and for tackling poverty and oppression in the Third World. They also outline measures for land reform and for improving the economic situation of the peasants. It is significant that they only call for the nationalisation of the land of the oligarchs, and in contrast are for the improvement of the situation of the peasants without forced collectivisation. This is making a perceptive point that is often ignored by Trotskyists. They also outline a principled policy against the exploitation and discrimination of women, and lesbians, gay and transsexual people. The situation of young people is also addressed in a perceptive manner. The Manifesto also calls for the extension of democratic rights within society and this includes not only the demand for the right to strike, but also freedom of speech and assembly, and the end to a repressive state apparatus. The Manifesto also calls for the formation of a Constituent Assembly: “When fundamental questions concerning the political order are posed, we call for a constituent assembly. The workers should fight to ensure that deputies to the assembly are elected in the most democratic manner, are kept under the control of their electors, and are recallable by them. The assembly must be forced to address all fundamental questions of democratic rights and social justice, agrarian revolution, nationalisation under workers control of large scale industry and the banks, the self determination of minorities, abolition of the political and economic privileges of the rich.”(18)

The emphasis of the Manifesto is on the policy of a socialist government, but the logical assumption that is quite rightly being made is that the Constituent Assembly will be based on the ability to freely elect competing parties. In this comment there is no suggestion that bourgeois parties will be banned. Instead there is the confidence that it will be possible to elect a revolutionary government with the support of workers and peasants. Obviously, the popularity of Chavez in Venezuela has influenced this implied standpoint. If the League for the Fifth International is against the ability of bourgeois parties to stand in elections in the situation of a revolutionary regime, they should articulate this view. In relation to the above comment we should assume that what is rightly being upheld is the perspective that elections to a Constituent Assembly should involve all types of parties which accept the importance of peaceful democratic competition, and accept the results of elections as the expression of the democratic will of the people. In other words, the role of the revolutionary party is also limited and restrained by the laws that are passed by the Constituent Assembly. It cannot assume unlimited power which would mean that it becomes the justification for the formation of a one party state that has absolute power. This development was part of the explanation for the formation of the privileged Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR. Instead the revolutionary party would expect to freely win the election to the Constituent Assembly after the completion of the process of the transformation of society because it expresses the interests of working people. In this context it would have the democratic credentials to promote the development of socialism. But such a process is already to some extent consolidated by the generation of the role of workers control of enterprises.

However, we also have to accept that because of the ultimate legitimacy of elections, the people have the right to vote for bourgeois parties who may promote the restoration of capitalism. In order to ensure that this situation does not occur, it will be necessary for the governing revolutionary party to tackle any tendencies for the development of bureaucracy and privilege. Only if the Marxist party is fully accountable to the people can it be possible for it to continue to gain majorities in the electoral process. Thus if socialism is being built in terms of the involvement and participation of working people in the economy, and on the basis of the exercise of democratic rights, we have every confidence that people will not vote for the bourgeois parties. Instead in a new situation that is without the influence of deference and tradition, or nationalism, it will be possible for a revolutionary government to continue to be re-elected. This situation has already been expressed in a limited and partial manner, by the continual popularity of Chavez in Venezuela. It has only been the bureaucratic and ineffective character of his successors which has meant the regime has become unpopular, and so posing the possibility of the return to power of the traditional powers. In contrast, a situation in which the working class was able to administer the economy should provide the most ideal conditions for a revolutionary party to freely win elections to a Constituent Assembly.

The Manifesto rightly calls for the formation of workers militia in order to defend workers from repression. However, we should also indicate that the most important aspect of the process of the transformation of society is not the role of coercive activity but instead the development of the class consciousness of the working class. The point is that only when popular support for the socialist transformation of society has developed will the process of revolutionary change occur. In tactical terms this make take the form of the realisation of the political power of the organs of workers control, or by the development of new mass organs of political power like the Soviets of 1917, or by an effective general strike. It is necessary to emphasise that this process of change should be as peaceful as possible in order to ensure that upheaval is kept to a minimum and instead an orderly type of change can occur. This development will ensure that the situation becomes most favourable to the development of the economy, and of the possibility to realise the creation of a Constituent Assembly in conditions that have avoided the possibility of civil war. In contrast, the political disruption of the new society can undermine the possibility to promote the formation of successful socialist development.

The programme rightly supports the right of national self-determination and the struggle of oppressed peoples. But we have to also emphasise that national issues have not necessarily been resolved by the limited realisation of national rights or autonomy under a situation of the domination of repressive bourgeois regimes. Hence it may be necessary to support the perspective of proletarian revolution as the approach which can most effectively resolve national issues. Only a democratic proletarian regime can promote the right of autonomy for oppressed groups, or even accept the separation of regional areas. Or, in contrast, the proletarian regime may be able to resolve outstanding national issues in a manner which overcome the urgency of actual separation of minority groups. For example, a socialist Spain may be able to overcome the national resentment of Catalonia, and a left wing government in the UK could encourage the people of Scotland not to separate. The point is whether we demand national self-determination unconditionally, and so form the basis of the policy of a revolutionary government, should depend on the circumstances. Thus it could be suggested that national self-determination is not an absolute demand, but instead the manner in which it is upheld should depend on the given circumstances. Thus we should promote the formation of revolutionary governments as the most progressive and principled manner in which the national question can be resolved in a democratic manner. In contrast, it has become an aspect of empirical reality that bourgeois nations granted self-determination have often still repressed new national minorities, and so creating contemporary new national issues. Hence in order to resolve these questions in the most principled and democratic manner, it is vital that the process of world proletarian revolution be as successful as possible. However, in the last analysis we should still support the right of national self-determination in an unconditional manner. The point is that this principle can be modified and transformed in terms of the possible advance of world revolution. In contrast the continuation of capitalism means that the problem of national questions still remain and are often difficult to resolve.

The Manifesto has a list of worthwhile demands in order to oppose racism. But this section does not make the most important point that the most effective manner to undermine the influence of racism is to promote the development of an international consciousness within the working class. The primary and contemporary impetus to racism is the view that a particular group does not belong to the nation and so should be excluded from the specific nation state. This approach is utilised in order to oppose migration, or to call for restrictions on immigration to a given country. This sentiment was evident in relation to the support for the LEAVE campaign in the recent EU referendum in the UK. This indicted the strength of a reactionary popular nationalism and the lack of influence of a genuine internationalism. The only alternative to this development is to promote the importance of internationalism and the solidarity of the working class of all nations. Such a development will be encouraged by the generation of increasingly effective class struggle against capitalism and the connected view that the existing nation state can be replaced by a global unit expressed by the role of world socialism.

The Manifesto rightly outlines the character of the reactionary role of fascism and its aim to undermine any development of effective struggle for revolutionary change. It calls for the formation of a principled united front in order to oppose this counterrevolutionary force. But what is omitted from this analysis is the question of the role of nationalist ideology which promotes the influence of fascism. Fascism is historically based on the ideological importance of a type of exclusionist nationalism which promotes the supposed superiority of a given nation as a hegemonic race. In this context it can oppose the role of ethnic groups which it excludes from being part of the 'supreme and special nation’. This exclusionist nationalism is used to promote the reactionary objectives of fascism which is ultimately about repressing the democratic organisations of the working class. It has an appeal to demoralised workers and to the conservative sections of the middle class. Hence if the working class is to be mobilised against fascism it is vital that the ideological importance of internationalism be promoted. This means that the universal objectives of the aims of class struggle be contrasted to the ultimately national standpoint of the capitalist class, and its possible reactionary allies like Fascist organisations. In the present situation we have also had the development of a new form of right wing politics in terms of the role of Trump and organisations like UKIP. These forces are also based on nationalism and chauvinism. Even if they are not explicit forms of fascism, and so still accept the importance of bourgeois democracy, they also have to be opposed in terms of the generation of an internationalist perspective.

The most dogmatic section of the Manifesto of the League of the Fifth International concerns the issue of imperialism and war. They consider that the deepening of economic crisis means that the situation is being prepared for inter-imperialist war. They comment: “At first, the contours of these new rivalries, tensions and standoffs between the USA and China, Russia and the EU, are only dimly discernible. Nonetheless they carry the threat of more deadly regional and proxy wars, and ultimately of a new world war, a desperate annhilatory clash between the declining world powers, and new, rising, empires.”(19) This perspective upholds the economically dogmatic view that crisis will ultimately result in world war. Even if we accept that there is a tendency for this possibility, it will not be realised. This is primarily because the people of the world, and especially of the developed capitalist countries, would not tolerate such a terrible international conflict. It would promote the possibility of revolution in order to end such a catastrophe. Furthermore, this type of war will not occur because of the risk of nuclear escalation. But primarily this war is not likely to occur because we still have a globalised world economy in which the role of international trade is crucial to the prosperity of the world economy. In this context war has no economic logic, when compared to the role of war in order to establish economic supremacy as in 1914-18 and 1939-45. Thus the USA and China may be rivals, but they still depend on each other in terms of an intricate division of labour and connected trading relation. The same point could be made about the EU and Russia, even if they have recently imposed sanctions on each other because of tensions over the Ukraine. This latter point indicates that diplomatic conflicts can arise over regional issues like the Ukraine, or involvement in Syria, but the result will not be inter-imperialist war. Instead the various international summits will be used in order to try and resolve various differences. The point is that compromise between the great powers is most likely to occur because of the globalised nature of the world economy. All the major imperialist countries are committed to promoting trade and investments on a global scale. This economy should not be undermined by major and catastrophic wars between the major powers. However, this is not to say that proxy wars do not occur, as in relation to Syria. However it is disorientating for the Fifth International to predict a situation of world war. Obviously nothing can be entirely ruled out, but we should base our politics in terms of it being unexpected. Instead we should oppose the militaristic rhetoric of Trump and the aggressive actions of North Korea. Whatever the changing circumstances the aims of Marxists should be connected to peace and the prevention of war.

The Manifesto is also being dogmatic when it suggests that the war in Iraq in 2003 could have been prevented were it not for the opportunist leadership of the anti-war movement: “The vast scale of the worldwide marches showed the potential for global action by the working class to stop war, or turn them into revolutions, the failure of the movement to stop the Iraq war revealed the need for a more disciplined organisation with more determined goals, a Fifth International.”(20) Certainly it was legitimate to criticise aspects of passivity in the leadership of the anti-war movement, but the views of the League are very harsh and one-sided. Primarily they underestimate the determination of Bush and Blair to go to war with Iraq, and they deny the fact that this action had an important level of popular support. Furthermore, the anti-war protestors considered their action as a single-issue campaign, and so the popularity of a more general revolutionary perspective was very small. Hence we were not even in a pre-revolutionary situation. Instead it was a time to make propaganda for socialism and this message could have received a decent level of popular support. The point is that we can only promote tactics in terms of the balance of class forces and the level of class consciousness. The point was it would have been a significant victory to have been able to bring an end to the war effort against Iraq. Despite heroic efforts this possibility did not occur. But many people were radicalised by the mass movement. This expressed some promise in terms of promoting the aims of socialism in the future. In contrast, the League for the Fifth International seems to have considered that there was an emerging revolutionary situation: “It is the duty of revolutionaries to use the war to bring about the downfall of the system, to turn the imperialist war into civil war.”(21) Quite frankly, this view is just rhetoric. If this perspective is an expression of the approach of opposing the wars of imperialist powers it could be said to have validity, but in concrete terms it was not applicable in relation to the role of the anti-war movements in 2003. Instead the aim, which was principled, was to undermine and oppose the imperialist invasion of Iraq. The transformation of this struggle into an issue of revolutionary opposition to capitalism was not possible at that moment in time. Effectively the actual invasion of Iraq meant a serious defeat for the aims and objectives of the anti-war movement. However, what is apparent from this mass struggle is that many people yearn for a peaceful and just world. Therefore the most appropriate slogan of the revolutionary organisations in the anti-war movement was to advocate peace and socialism. Only the establishment of popular support for that slogan would have meant that the possibility to connect opposition to the war in Iraq with more revolutionary objectives. Ultimately the defeat of the anti-war movement, contrary to the views of the League for the Fifth International, was not because of the opportunism of the leadership of this struggle, but instead because of the determination of the bourgeois governments of the USA and UK to embark on the war. Instead of putting blame on the leaders of the 'Stop the War' movements, it would have been more constructive to popularise the aims of peace and socialism. In this manner it may have been possible to create a revolutionary minority strand within the opposition to the imperialist war in Iraq. However, we also have to criticise the British Socialist Workers Party who were preoccupied with having influence within this mass movement, and therefore utilised an emphasis upon activism rather than attempt to promote propaganda for the aims of revolutionary socialism. In contrast, the League for the Fifth International seems to advocate the standpoint of Marxism in an ultimatistic manner in terms of mainly denouncing the limitations of the anti-war movement. Instead of the alternatives of opportunism or sectarianism it would be more preferable to agitate in order to promote socialism as the alternative to war. The limitations of the anti-war movement in 2003 was not because of a lack of dynamism but was instead because it inclined towards a non-political pacifism. This could have been opposed with the standpoint of peace and socialism.

The Manifesto rightly contends in instances of wars between different third world countries we should call for revolutionary aims and peace in both countries. It also outlines the necessity to oppose imperialist occupations of oppressed nations and to agitate in favour of dissolving military alliances like NATO. Also the Manifesto argues in favour of democratic rights for soldiers. Such demands are both principled and supportable. But we would suggest that the major demand for opposing imperialist aggression is peace and socialism. Indeed it is an urgent task for Marxists to elaborate the programme of peace. We should outline in historical detail how capitalism is a system that tends towards the promotion of war, even if world war is no presently a likely possibility. War is caused by the impulse towards economic domination by the major capitalist powers, and as a result war is a constant feature of the international situation. Only socialism is a truly international system, which by ending the reasons for economic and political expansion, also means that the impulses towards war can be resolved. Socialism can also end the causes of discontent within nations, and this development can also act to make possible the demise of war. In contrast to capitalism the promotion of socialism can bring about international solidarity between people of different nations, and in this manner lessen the possibilities of war. It can also reject the ideology of nationalism which has traditionally been a popular motivation for the mass support of war.

The Manifesto of the League rightly calls for the abolition of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, which have supervised the global capitalist economy and promoted the ability of the capitalist system to exploit the people of the world. The problem is that this analysis indicates what it is against, but does not outline what is the alternative. We should outline how it both possible and necessary to promote the formation of an international system of socialist states which would act together in a democratic manner to create an economic plan in order to tackle the issues of poverty, ecology, and the inequality, that presently are features of the economic system. We need to develop arguments that would outline how greed and the domination of an elite need not be the eternal features of society, and instead it is possible for working people to create an alternative. However, this aim means that we should reject any notion of socialism in one country which could imply justification of the domination of some nations by others. If we are to make this aim of world socialism credible, we also need to recognise that hierarchy and domination cannot be aspects of the future international society.

The Manifesto of the League for the Fifth International correctly outlines how the existing leaderships of most working class organisations are inadequate because they accept the limitations of the existing system. Most trade unions and reformist parties have accepted the imposition of austerity and do nothing to oppose this situation in terms of promoting militant action. However, the Manifesto concludes in a problematical manner: “In this way, the crisis of capitalism creates an ever deeper crisis of working class leadership. To overcome this crisis, to convert resistance into the fight for 21st century world revolution, we need to found a fifth international with sections in ever country. It must transform national labour movements, deliver cross border action and solidarity, and become a world party of socialist revolution.”(22) In other words, it is being suggested that only the Fifth International can become the principled leadership of the working class struggle to overcome capitalism. This perspective is a rigid and dogmatic view. There are plenty of political organisations, which often belong to the tradition of the Fourth International, which have a potential role in developing principled mass actions. They also can become an integral part of a world party of socialist revolution. The point is that it is sectarian to consider that only 'our' own political forces are the exclusive and principled basis of a revolutionary party. Instead those of us who consider ourselves to be Marxists should try to co-operate together in order to create a single and united party with revolutionary objectives. In this manner the label of four, or five, should be secondary when compared to the possibilities to create a united party. What matters is whether we can establish agreed objectives and strategies. In contrast, it would be arrogant to consider that only 'our' own organisation is capable of providing a principled programme for the class struggle. It would be much more constructive to be able to agree a programme for a united organisation as a result of democratic discussion. A process of fusions rather than splits should be the basis to create a genuine and credible revolutionary party.

The history of the fragmentation of the Fourth International has indicated that there is no single organisation that can presently claim to be the unique and exclusive revolutionary party of the working class. None of these groups are popular, or able to claim that they led a successful struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. This point can be applied to the League for the Fifth International, who in actuality are part of the history of the crisis of the Fourth International. Hence what is called for is not vain proclamations about being the genuine revolutionary party, but instead we should try and work together in order to establish whether a process of political unity is possible. This aim does not mean that diplomacy should replace the importance of principles, but instead on the basis of support for the transitional approach we should be able to promote the possibility of unity around an elaborated and effectively new programme. However it will be vital that any party that is formed is based on genuine freedom of expression in order to avoid the possibility of the creation of bureaucratic and rigidly centralised organisations. The leaderships of any organisation should be subject to democratic accountability. Our immediate aims should include opposition to austerity and war, and express the promotion of the ideas of socialism within the working class. It should be possible to establish a basic platform that would constitute ideas about how to generate the possibility of unity. With a measure of goodwill, and acceptance of compromise, the formation of a united International could be possible.

The argument above is not of secondary importance. One of the most important reasons why revolutionary groups are not taken seriously is because they seem to be divided on what seem to be the most trial of issues. For example, divisions concerning the character of the Soviet Union seem to be very abstract given the demise of the USSR and the restoration of capitalism. Instead of continuing to be disunited because of issues which have actually become resolved by political events, it would be more appropriate and relevant to consider whether it is possible to establish an agreed programme and strategy for world revolution. This would mean that the discussion of contemporary perspectives for the class struggle would be more appropriate than being concerned with issues that may have divided organisations in the past. Furthermore, it is also the fact that many groups are agreed that the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International is still an important document for guiding political work in the present, and so should also represent an important basis for establishing the possibility of agreement. Thus what needs to be primarily considered is whether we can be able to compare perspectives and so arrive at agreed positions on the major issues of today. It may be surprising to realise that greater unity could be possible than originally envisaged. However if this process of unity is to be advanced it will be vital that the often national leaderships of the various international organisations agree to accept that a genuinely new international leadership be formed. The era of nationally dominated international groupings should be ended. Indeed this organisational issue may be the most important question that undermines the realisation of a new form of unity. The problem of power and status has to be tackled if an authentic international based on democratic accountability is to be formed. In other words the leadership of the various organisations have to put the interests of the world working class before their own prestige and domination. If this change can be realised, it may not be difficult to realise the creation of a new and united Marxist grouping. What has to be grasped is that such a development would seriously advance the chances of the working class starting to take revolutionary politics seriously. It has been the disunity of what has been considered to be squabbling groups which has created a reluctance of many workers to join what seem to be minute sects. In a sense we are all sects at the moment. Only the formation of what could be united Marxist parties with the potential for growth would mean that the interests of the struggle for socialism had become primary over our own particular interests as small groups. Furthermore, the ability to intervene in the working class movement would be advanced. For example, a united Marxist party could organise both inside and outside the Corbyn led Labour Party. The present choice to be inside or outside the Labour Party would not have to be made. In terms of this organisational flexibility the political independence of the Marxist group would be upheld and advanced. In contrast, the League for the Fifth International can only adopt one tactic, which is being inside the Labour Party, and it cannot relate to those people who are still basically ambivalent about this organisation. Such a situation is an indication of the limitations imposed by its size. It cannot relate to the Left Unity party, or the other Marxist groups. Thus the small groups become defined by their organisational tactics, and the question of the validity of their programmes becomes obscured. Instead of this limited situation we need to develop the strength of a united Marxist party in which it has flexible tactics, and yet is based on adherence to an agreed common programme. In this context the increasingly influential Marxist party will be defined by its commitment to the class struggle and the aim of socialism. It will not be defined by its past, and the splits it has made with other organisations.

If a united Marxist group is formed it will over a period of time have an increasing attraction for the centrist groups like the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party. Their members will question why their leaders are opposed to the growing and democratically based Marxist party. In this context, one of the tasks for the Marxist party will be to provide articles explaining why these organisations need to join the united group. The point is that we should not reject the possibility that organisations we have defined as opportunist being attracted to our ideas because of the success of uniting principles with flexible tactics. We should be open to them but without diluting our aims and perspectives. The point being made is that the creation of a genuine and united Marxist organisation generates a new situation in which it can be a pole of attraction for both working people and existing left wing forces. However, even this development will not mean that success is assured for the new Marxist party. It will have to carry out effective propaganda in favour of socialism in order to overcome the influence of bourgeois ideology within even the most militant of sections of the working class. Furthermore, this party will be defined by its willingness to work with others in order to advance the aims of the class struggle, such as united action in opposition to wars, or co-operation in the tasks of promoting the success of various industrial struggles. In this manner the very combination of opposition to sectarianism, and the adherence to principles, will be the basis to create a mass organisation. This development will mean that any other Marxist groups outside of the ranks of the new party will aspire to join and become part of what has represented a successful development. But none of this is possible if the present fragmentation of the Marxist forces continues. Unfortunately, the League of the Fifth International seems to be oblivious to the problems caused by the present situation of fragmentation, and is indifferent to the necessity to overcome this situation by promoting unity. It prefers a condition of splendid isolation in order to uphold its sense of organisational and political integrity. This approach is not helpful in relation to the task of unifying the forces of the Marxist Left.

The Manifesto rightly outlines how over the recent period the forces of reformism have become more right-wing and supported the neo-liberal approach of the bourgeoisie which has included the undermining of the welfare state. But what is not mentioned is that this right wing trajectory of reformism should present genuine Marxists with a basis for their development in the sense that they have become the most committed political force for defending the welfare state. Marxists should have a role in encouraging the trade unions to take militant action in defence of the public sector. The Manifesto also outlines the decline of the Communist parties of Europe, and outlines the limitations of Maoism in the Third World. The bureaucratic limitations of Cuba are articulated, but it does not elaborate upon the major reason for this situation. The isolation of Cuba since it has been without the support of the Soviet Union means that there is an objective basis for the restoration of capitalism. This regime can only continue in terms of establishing closer economic and political relations with the USA. In this situation the only possibility to undermine the trend towards the restoration of capitalism would be proletarian revolution and the attempt to establish a more democratic and truly socialist inspired regime. However the ultimate success of this development would be the international expansion of this prospect in terms of the realisation of a revolutionary Latin America.

The Manifesto outlines how the regimes in Venezuela and Bolivia have been genuinely reformist and carried out important measures in favour of the interests of the workers and peasants. But it makes the vital point that: “Social reforms and nationalisations only become “socialist” when a workers state co-ordinates them and defends them. Only with workers control in the workplace, and workers power in the state, can it become possible to eliminate the waste and chaos of the market and replace it with democratic planning.”(23) This conclusion is important because the regime in countries like Venezuela was a type of left populism in which Chavez established a progressive Bonapartist autonomy within the state, but ultimately the society was still capitalist. The crucial reason why this situation did not become an expression of socialism was because the working class was never mobilised in order to overthrow the existing state and establish its own economic and political power. Instead the workers were encouraged to support the various reforms introduced by Chavez, which were progressive and should have been critically supported. But it was also necessary to utilise this situation in order to promote the more ambitious aims of socialism. Unfortunately the aftermath of regime of Chavez, has meant the political state has become more reactionary and alienated its mass working class support. In this context a crisis has developed, which has still not been resolved. To some extent the problems were caused by the fact that whilst Chavez was subjectively critical of capitalism he did not systematically have a coherent conception of socialism. This political limitation meant that he ultimately accepted the continuation of capitalism. But he did promote the realisation of a democratic constitution which could have provided the basis for the participatory transformation of society. In this context it is necessary to also recognise that the militancy of the workers in this situation was concerned with defending the Chavez regime and so they did not become conscious of the necessity of socialism. Hence the problem was the inability to create a credible revolutionary party which could have promoted a strategy for revolutionary change.

The section on the trade unions in the manifesto is the most impressive. It outlines eloquently how the limitations of the present political character of the unions is expressed in relation to their inability to promote effective opposition to the present offensive of capital against labor. This situation is because of the domination of the bureaucratic officials who are willing to accommodate to the capitalist system in order to maintain their privileged position. The Manifesto contends that the alternative to this situation is to promote the formation of rank and file movements which can oppose the limitations of the trade union officials, and ultimately aspire to create the formation of a new principled leadership of the unions. It is also outlined how the present syndicalist type of view that unions should not engage in politics has to be replaced by the influence of a new revolutionary approach, which means upholding the perspective that the unions should be part of the struggle to overthrow capitalism. In this context the unions should reject their present sectionalist approach and instead encourage action by all the unions against capitalism.

But the following formulation is possibly problematical: “A new international must commit itself to renewing the existing unions where possible, but not flinch from a formal break and the formation of new unions where the reformist bureaucracy makes unity impossible. We need organisations in the workplaces which do not accommodate to the dictates of the bosses but which defend the workers with militant methods of struggle such as mass strikes, occupations and where necessary general strikes.”(24) This view underestimates the difficulty involved in creating new unions, which are often considered to be unrepresentative by the workers. Instead of this futile approach, there is generally no alternative to the process of trying to transform the existing unions. In this context the Manifesto is more credible when it calls for the formation of rank and file movements in order to strive for the realisation of a militant leadership within the unions. It is crucial to develop the initiative of the rank and file so that the workers are increasingly able to act without the restrictions and limitations imposed by their bureaucratic leadership. This is the most effective manner in which the unions can be transformed and so become agencies of the genuine interests of the workers. We also have to suggest that the ultimate aim of the role of the trade unions should be the establishment of workers control of production. If this aim is achieved it will enable the unions to challenge the very ability of the management to dominate within the enterprise. Furthermore, this process of development will indicate what could be possible under capitalism. But most crucially, the realisation of workers control will represent the development of class consciousness in terms of militant actions. This situation will indicate that the workers are increasingly receptive to the possibility to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism. But most importantly it will express the fact that the working class is acting to promote the prospect of a new society.

The Manifesto outlines what could be a problematical conception of centrism: “Between the mass reformist parties and revolutionary communism stand a myriad of unstable intermediate organisations, groupings and sects. Although these centrists claim to represent continuity with the revolutionary programmes of the Third International in the days of Lenin, or Trotsky's Fourth International, in their political practice they zig-zag between craven opportunism and helpless sectarianism.”(25) This description may be accurate for understanding some of these centrist groups, but it still a generalised and dogmatic view. What would be more constructive would be to try and establish what organisations had the potential to become part of a renewed Fourth International. It is surely dogmatic and pessimistic to deny that there are any possibilities for a process of unification with compatible groups. Indeed this comment indicates the problem with the perspective of building the Fifth International it means that any organisations within the Fourth International tradition are immediately considered to be opportunist and irredeemably centrist. This could be a premature conclusion, and logically means that the potential for relating to these organisations is denied. The point being made is that this rigid definition of centrism could be the pretext to adopt the most pessimistic assessment of organisations outside of the League for the Fifth International. Instead we should adopt the most optimistic and constructive view of other organisations, and in this manner we should be able to evaluate their potential. The point is that centrism should not be considered to be an insulting term, and therefore we should be able to differentiate between right and left wing forms of centrism. The latter definition should promote the ability of genuine revolutionary forces to orientate towards them.

However, despite this potential sectarianism in the approach of the League for the Fifth International, they do also describe centrism in an adequate manner. They contend that it represents an adaptation to reformism and Stalinism, or can become sectarian. It often establishes bureaucratic regimes with little genuine contact with the working class. Furthermore, centrists can vacillate between adapting to the spontaneous illusions of workers and having a sectarian attitude towards struggle. The conclusion is flawed: “The common element of centrism, in both its opportunist and sectarian forms, is failure to fight in the mass movement to win the reformist masses away from the programme of reformism and to a programme of revolutionary transition.”(26) This comment is one-sided. Centrist forces often strive to gain influence within mass movements, but their immediate objective is often to increase their own prestige rather than promote the aim of socialism. For example, the SWP within the anti-war movement of 2003 attempted to provide leadership to the mass movement, but its approach was based on the promotion of activism rather than connecting opposition to the war with struggle against capitalism. Indeed such a perspective was considered to be irrelevant. In this manner it effectively argued that the attempt to enhance the consciousness of the movement in terms of promoting revolutionary ideas was a distraction. Its aim was purely to generate the influence of the role of activism. This has resulted in the limited view that struggle is inherently crucial, but its relation to ultimate ends is considered to be superfluous. The result of this acceptance of a limited form of politics is obviously centrism. However, not all groups can be considered in this manner. Surely it is important to seriously evaluate all the groups that promote the role of the transitional programme as the manner in which class struggle can be advanced as potential revolutionary forces? But the League for the Fifth International does not accept this point. Instead it projects the most obvious examples of centrism as being the most definitive expression of this trend. To them right centrism is the representation of the character of this political phenomena.

However, in one instance the League for the Fifth International are wrong to define Syriza in Greece as centrist. Instead this organisation indicates the difference between centrism and reformism. Syriza became a government in Greece with the aim of negotiating with the EU a financial settlement that would attempt to resolve its difficulties. This government never seriously entertained the idea that the mobilisation of the working class could be crucial for promoting a progressive resolution of this situation. Instead the intransigent position of the EU meant that Syriza entered into crisis, its reformist standpoint had failed. But it could still be argued that it could have been of crucial importance to try and develop an oppositional revolutionary tendency within Syriza in order to argue for an alternative approach. The point is that we should recognise the necessity of tactical flexibility, and be prepared to be able to adapt to the most diverse political circumstances. Hence in order to undermine illusions in the role of Syriza it may be necessary to work within that party. If this approach is possible, then surely it is also vital to attempt to develop unity with organisations that claim to be part of the tradition of the Fourth International? For example, the groups around the past leadership of Moreno and Lambert may be promising to try and relate to. Instead of this openness the League for the Fifth Intentional seemed to adopt an approach that is content to proclaim themselves as the exclusive revolutionary party. This is surely a rigid and dogmatic approach.

There is a welcome exception to the dogmatism of the Fifth International because they consider it possible to work in the centrist New Anti-Capitalist party of France, and have recently become a part of the Corbyn led Labour party in the UK. But in general they prefer to outline the various limitations of centrism, and so imply that it is not possible to work with most of these organisations. Thus it is concluded that: “In general, centrism remains unwilling and unable to break in practice with left reformism and thus ultimately with capitalism, and to build an open and bold revolutionary alternative. They often turn left under the pressure of the masses but then turn right under the pressure of the bureaucratic apparatus in the name of 'realism'.”(27) The following conclusion is reached: “A new revolutionary international will need to attract thousands of the militants of these parties and groups...It cannot do so by making concessions to centrism....It is no accident that the centrist organisations display the greatest instability on the very question of developing a new revolutionary programme, of building revolutionary parties and a new world party. Building a Fifth International therefore requires a relentless struggle against centrism.”(28)

The problem with this perspective is that it is based on the contradictory notion that it is possible to win adherents from the centrist groups without generally establishing political relations with them. What is being suggested is that the superiority of adherence to a revolutionary perspective will mean that the necessity of possible compromise will not be possible. Instead it will be feasible to win from the centrist forces supporters for the exclusive banner of the Fifth International. This view is wishful thinking. Instead it will be necessary to try and establish political relations with other groups, including centrist forces, in order to advance the aims of building a world party of socialist revolution. It is possible to engage in political relations that may involve some form of organisational compromise without diluting or undermining the programme of Marxism. The point being made is that the tiny forces of the League of the Fifth International will not in and of themselves create a mass international party. For example, in order to build in Latin America it will be necessary to talk to supporters of the forces that originate from the leadership of Moreno. In other countries it may be vital to relate to the groups that have been associated with the Mandel led Fourth International. Whilst in America it may be vital to become involved in the campaign that was started by the Bernie Sanders election campaign. The point is that tactical flexibility, and a willingness to talk to other groups, need not result in accommodation to opportunism. We can promote platforms that are both a basis for discussion with others and yet represent unyielding revolutionary principles. In contrast, the League for the Fifth International considers that centrism is unchangeable, and inherently opportunist. This is a pessimistic view that is not an ideal basis for attempting to relate to other groups and influence their politics. Instead we must combine tactical flexibility with firm adherence to revolutionary principles in our relations with other groups.

Possibly the theoretical basis for the sectarianism of the League for the Fifth International is their over optimistic view that we are effectively in a pre-revolutionary situation: “Our goal is political power, power to change the world forever so that inequality, crisis and war, exploitation and classes become a distant memory. But revolutionaries alone do not make the revolution. Objective preconditions are needed; a deep economic, political and social crisis that the ruling class is unable to solve so that it becomes divided itself. Subjective conditions too are needed: the working class and lower middle class must be unwilling to continue to support the old order because of the suffering and chaos it has bought about. In these conditions, a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation comes about and in such conditions a substantial number of revolutionary vanguard fighters can win the majority of the working class to the perspective of revolution.”(29) This approach effectively considers that social discontent is the expression of a developing pre-revolutionary situation. Such a standpoint implies that the objective situation of crisis generates the level of unrest that will promote the possibility to automatically facilitate the significant growth and increased influence of the revolutionary party. The problem with this view is that it is an example of vulgar evolutionism which in a catastrophic manner equates crisis with the prospect of revolutionary possibilities. The problem is that there is no determined or favourable outcome to a situation of crisis. Instead the activity of the party has no historical guarantee of success. It is entirely possible that an economic recession will have demoralising effects on working people, and so make the activity of a revolutionary party extremely difficult. Whether it will be possible to develop class consciousness in such a situation depends on a number of often uncertain variables, such as the issue of realising success in the class struggle. It will be the balance of class forces that will be the most important indicator relating to whether a pre-revolutionary situation is maturing. In order for this possibility to be realised the revolutionary party can take nothing for granted. It must make constant propaganda for socialism and advocate a strategy of transitional demands. Ultimately the progress of the realisation of workers control of production will define the extent to which society is becoming receptive to the aim of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

In other words, the difficulties of the task of developing support for the Marxist perspective must be fully appreciated. But the objectivism of the League for the Fifth International seems to suggest that they have underestimated the complexity of the task of realising victory in the class struggle. We should remember that the contemporary working class generally only have a history of defeat and the intensification of exploitation by the employers. Even militant action is often unknown. Thus the task of developing a socialist culture within the working class will be a long and patient task. What we have to recognise is that the overthrow of capitalism is not an inevitable result of maturing objective conditions. Instead it is a contingent event related to the difficult task of promoting class consciousness within the working class. The outcome of history is open-ended. This is the uncomfortable lesson of two hundred years of class struggle. There is no logic that means the imperatives of economic progress will be inevitably realised by socialism. Instead Marxists in a sense act against the results of history which has led to the continual domination of powerful elites. It is also necessary to recognise that we have a difficult task in opposing the reactionary influence of bourgeois ideology such as the role of nationalism. However the complexity of our tasks should not make us pessimists. Instead we should believe that adherence to a Marxist approach can obtain mass support. With sufficient sophistication and determination it is possible to build a revolutionary party.

The manifesto also advocates that: “The transfer of power from one class to another can only be accomplished by the insurrection of the exploited masses led by a revolutionary party of their vanguard fighters.”(30) This standpoint is based on an interpretation of the October revolution which underestimates the vital importance of the actual role of the working class. The possibility of revolutionary transformation can only occur if the working class becomes committed to this aim. Hence the party can only act to promote the influence of revolutionary ideas within the working class. Ultimately it will be working people who decide whether they support the aims of socialism and are prepared to act to overthrow capitalism. The October revolution of 1917 could not have occurred if it were not form the formation of Soviets by the workers. Thus even the most perceptive programme is no substitute for the self-activity of the working class. The most that Marxism can do is to inspire workers to act against capitalism. The party cannot carry out the act of revolution. Hence our role is to promote the development of class consciousness and in this manner persuade people to oppose capitalism. To achieve this task will be difficult because it will mean undermining the influence of bourgeois ideology, reformism, and the very inertia generated by production. Thus the ultimate problem in the approach of the League for the Fifth International is that they do not acknowledge the difficulty of the tasks of developing conscious class struggle. The result of this standpoint is an evolutionism and objectivism which equates crisis with revolution. Such apparent complacency has to be rejected. Instead we have to recognise that the crisis has led to austerity and the imposition of a situation of low wages and demoralisation. This development was reflected in the reactionary vote in the BREXIT referendum in the UK. The popular vote for Jeremy Corbyn does not tackle the continued low level of consciousness in the UK and other countries. The forces of revolutionary Marxism are at their lowest level of influence. To make these points is not to be pessimistic, but instead to recognise the difficulties of our tasks. Our greatest theoretical problem is expressed by the temptation to construct a conception of an illusory and favourable reality that does not exist. Instead we should attempt to understand reality as it is, and not how we should like it to be. Only in this context can we develop a credible programme and perspectives. The present starting point for our endeavours is an unfavourable situation, but we should not be discouraged and instead attempt to relate to the discontent within society. We need to introduce to people the ideas of socialism, and inspire them with a conception of a better society than capitalism.

The Manifesto outlines what is means by a workers state that would replace the elitist character of the bourgeois state and its institutions. It is argued that the new type of political apparatus would be based on the democratic role of workers councils, such as developed in the past in terms of the Paris Commune and the Russian soviets. But it suggests that these organs of state power would have definite revolutionary leadership. The problem with this formulation is that it could become the basis of the justification of a party state, or the domination of a single party over society. It is argued that this possibility would be avoided because: “However, a workers state must not allow a caste of bureaucrats to exercise dictatorship over the workers, nor can it be a state in which only one party is allowed to exist. The working masses must be able to express their different views in different parties, ones that have to compete democratically to win a majority in the workers councils. Nor must socialism be one in which a president...concentrates all initiative in their hands and surrounds himself with a cult of the personality, like Stalin, a Mao, or Castro.”(31) The problem with this formulation is that if all of these parties are socialist in character, this situation would mean that there is ideological homogeneity and so a condition of an effective realisation of a type of party state. Only when contrasting bourgeois parties are allowed to compete in the electoral process can it be said that there is a genuine type of democracy. In this context the electoral victory of the socialist party will be an authentic expression of the views of the people. Only the open contest between parties with very different views will ensure that diverse opinions are expressed in what is an effective expression of democracy. This situation must be confirmed by the right of the people to vote in favour of the restoration of capitalism. However, this prospect would only occur if working people are not able to create a successful socialist society. But if they are involved in the process of administering the state, and developing the economy in terms of the principles of industrial democracy, it would be irrational if people then voted to restore the exploitative and alienating character of capitalism.

There is also another problematical view of the character of the workers state in the manifesto. It is argued that: “As long as there remains an old ruling class capable of taking back power, the working class must do everything necessary to prevent it. Whilst a workers state will be the fullest and freest democracy for the formally exploited classes, it will, at the same time, be a dictatorship against those who seek to restore capitalism. This, no more, and no less, is what the dictatorship of the proletariat really means. It cannot be dispensed with until the most powerful ruling classes of our planet have been disarmed and dispossessed.”(32) It is vital that any workers state defends itself against an actual attempt to restore capitalism by means of counterrevolutionary force, but it should not repress anyone for aspiring to re-establish the old order. It should be perfectly acceptable within a socialist society that people should be able to peacefully, and by utilising the democratic process, to agitate in favour of capitalism. This aspiration would be tested in terms of the votes of the democratic process. Hence it should be legitimate to try and realise the restoration of capitalism by means of the role of the popular vote. If this right is not allowed, it does not mean that the interests of the workers state are being upheld, but instead a repressive state is being justified in terms of a situation of ideological conformity. The point being made is that it is not in the democratic interests of the working class to have situation in which the open discussion of political views is not allowed. Instead the process of democracy is being restricted, and such a development could result in the formation of a single party dictatorship. Only a genuine ability to discuss different views can enable the formation of a socialist democracy to occur. The political interests of the workers state are not upheld by the repression of the political views of the former bourgeoisie. Only the suppression of an actual counterrevolutionary uprising is an expression of the legitimate coercive function of the state. But it would not be in the interests of democracy to ban the right of freedom of speech.

In other words the interests of the workers state are not upheld by the banning of bourgeois parties, or the repression of particular reactionary forms of media expression. It is to be expected that there will still be television stations that promote the views of the former ruling class under socialism. The developments are not a recipe for the promotion of counterrevolution but instead necessary in order to ensure that all different opinions are able to be expressed in a worker state. If particular views were repressed because they expressed the interests of the former ruling class this situation would not be in the interests of the workers who require the promotion of genuine democracy, which means that all different types of parties would not be repressed within a developing socialist society. The point is that historical experience itself has indicated that the banning of parties has a logic that results in only allowing the views of the single party. Even this limited expression of opinion promotes a situation in which the rule of the dictator is realised. In contrast the open contest of parties means that the process of democracy facilitates a situation in which the primary revolutionary party will genuinely attempt to uphold the interests of its working class voters. Such a situation will mean that the tendency towards the rule of a bureaucratic state presided over by an omnipotent party will be avoided.

The Manifesto does not seem to tackle the issue of the character of the economy under a workers state and socialism. The necessity of nationalisation under workers control is mentioned, but the importance of this development is not elaborated. We have to suggest that without industrial democracy the process of planning will be carried out by a state bureaucracy. This situation will mean that planning is not meaningful because the bureaucrats will impose their priorities onto the economy without consulting the workers in a meaningful manner. In contrast the establishment of workers co-operatives will mean that the given enterprises will be able to produce goods in a situation of realising their ability to organise and develop production. However, historical experience has indicated that it is not efficient or rational to try and produce without the role of a market. We would suggest that a market is able to indicate the level of demand for particular goods, and so it is a guide to the level of production that should be generated by each particular enterprise. This process would occur under the general guidelines established by a democratic plan. In this manner, the issue of the quality of consumer goods would be ensured, because it they are of a defective or inferior nature they will not sell on the market. However, we also have to remember that the market does not operate efficiently within capitalism; many goods are not sold because of their high price level. Hence under socialism goods will, if at all possible, be of a low price in order to ensure that output is sold. Indeed production will have the aim of being able to realise the interests of the consumer. In that manner one of the major issues of the quality of goods generated by the Stalinist type economies should be resolved because of the pragmatic acceptance of the role of the market. If the market is based on the importance of price, workers will still be remunerated in terms of wages. But if there is any waste in terms of some goods being unsold, the process of distribution should also be based on the free disposal of what were superfluous goods. In other words the market will be humanised and modified in terms of the interests of the consumer. This situation does not mean that exploitation will still be generated because the importance of industrial democracy should enable the process of production to occur without exploitation and alienation. Instead work will be rewarding and increasingly skilled and based on the return to the crafts principle of previous times.

The Manifesto makes the important point that the strategic aim of Marxism should be to agitate for a workers government. It recognises that the Marxist groups are not yet in a position to be able to promote this aim under their existing isolated leadership, and so we should call upon the reformist mass organisations to support this standpoint: “In such circumstances, we call upon the existing workers leaders, unions as well as parties, to break with the capitalists and form a government to solve the crisis in the interests of the working class, holding itself accountable to the mass organisations of the working class.”(33) This tactic would be relevant in relation to the activity of the Corbyn led Labour Party. We should demand that it intensify its opposition to the Tories and aim for the formation of a government that was based on the organisations of the working class, and with the intention of opposing the interests and domination of capitalism. This development would be considered to be the prelude to the realisation of socialism. We would demand that this government nationalise the major sectors of the economy and promote their organisation on the basis of workers control and the establishment of a plan of production. However, we have to be aware that the influence of revolutionary Marxism has to be enhanced in this situation in order to maintain the momentum of the left wing government. But it is necessary to emphasise that the preferred situation as the Manifesto outlines is the formation of a situation in which the working class develops its own form of political power in terms of the establishment of councils of action which represent the ability of working people to determine the possibility to transform the situation in terms of the aims of socialism. In this sense this is our strategic goal. But in tactical terms it may be appropriate to call upon reformist forces to establish a workers government. But we should not be surprised if they reject this perspective and instead attempt to try and modify capitalism.

The Manifesto suggests that the perspective of permanent revolution is still appropriate in the third world countries. This means the national bourgeoisie is too connected with the forces of imperialism in order to carry out a genuine bourgeois democratic revolution, and instead it is necessary to combine these tasks with that of proletarian revolution. The aim should be to establish a workers and peasants’ government which would carry out land reform and overcome the domination of capital by promoting the realisation of workers control of production and the influence of the soviet based mass organisations. We can support this perspective and emphasise that it is vital if the aim of socialism is to become popular within the third world. However, it is vital to recognise that it is not possible to realise socialism within the national limitations of an underdeveloped country. Instead historical experience has indicated that this situation promotes the formation of bureaucratic elite that organises the economy and politics. Hence in order to oppose this possibility the revolutionary government should encourage the advance of the formation of similar administrations in other countries.

It is also argued in the manifesto that socialism, on the basis of a democratic plan of production which is related to the combination of nationalisation of workers control of production, is feasible. It is argued that the development of technology has made the rational co-ordination of the economy possible: “Modern technologies make it possible to discover and communicate needs and necessities around the globe in seconds and then co-ordinate production and transport to meet them.”(34) But this aspect mainly refers to the possibilities of developing an organised process of generating production. It does not relate to the character of consumption. The problem is that the character of consumption is based on subjective preference, which can be spontaneous and immediate. It cannot be planned in the manner of production. Thus if the requirements of consumption is not to be neglected, it will mean that production has to be based on the role of a market. The demand of the consumer must in some sense guide the process of production. Therefore useful goods that are able to realise the satisfaction of the consumer have to be created if the imperatives of consumption are to be realised. Hence this means that the plan of production has to allow for flexibility if it is to express the importance of consumption. The role of the supply of goods has to be connected to the level of demand. This situation should not undermine the efficiency of the plan of production but instead the plan should be responsive to the needs of the consumer. This situation does not mean that trivial goods will be produced in vast quantities, but the plan can also influence consumer taste in terms of an emphasis on the creation of items that most genuinely realise human need. But the ultimate arbiter of the requirements of the consumer will be the role of the market. The only alternative to the market is the imposition of the requirements of the plan at the expense of the needs of the consumer, or rationing. Thus the concept that goods can be free, or in abundance, is a myth. The very scarcity of resources means that the most efficient allocation of goods is by the role of the market.

The Manifesto also makes the following problematical comment: “Artisans, shopkeepers and small scale peasant farmers will be able to retain their private property, if they so wish. At the same time they will be encouraged to free themselves from the insecurity of the market and cutthroat competition by gearing their production to the society wide plan for economic development. The idea that socialism can be based on small scale private ownership or co-operatives is a backward looking utopia that can only, over time, recreate the conditions of a market economy and encourage the accumulation of capital once again. Nonetheless, the socialisation of small peasant economy, small shops and so on must happen gradually and voluntarily and not by force as under Stalin.”(35) This approach indicates that the aim of the conception of socialism outlined in the Manifesto is the demise of the role of the market. But what is not explained is how this perspective will be realised. The interests of the consumers in relation to the importance of market demand are ignored. Instead the emphasis is on the primacy of production and the ultimate nationalisation of the whole of the economy. Eventually even the remaining sectors of small scale private production are to be encouraged to become nationalised. The economic reasons for this development are not explained, but instead the ideological assumption is that any aspect of private production, however insignificant, has to be overcome because it may provide the impetus for the restoration of capitalism. This viewpoint is absurd. Small scale private production could provide specialist goods that amount to a welcome part of the variety of items that could be supplied under a socialist economy. Thus small scale private production would in no sense represent a threat to the integrity of the socialist economy. Instead it is all part of its variety and dynamism.

But most importantly, the manifesto is against the role of co-operatives. This means what is being effectively argued is that the importance of workers control has to be subordinated to the interests of the centralised plan. It is necessary to emphasise that the vital form that workers control will express is that of co-operatives. Only in this sense can it be possible to promote workers control. Only in terms of the role of a given enterprise is it possible to establish meaningful workers control and the autonomy that the workers require in order to take decisions and to participate in a democratic manner in the organisation of their production. This situation does not mean that the interests of the centralised plan are being undermined, because with the role of computers it will be possible to integrate the specific level of co-operative production within the aims of the plan. Furthermore, the character of the co-operatives, as small scale enterprises, means that they can be responsive to changing fluctuations in consumer demand. They can also if necessary produce specialist goods. In contrast, the Manifesto does not outline how workers control will work. Instead in a deterministic manner it is assumed that the plan will be successful because of the role of technology. Thus what is not explained is the importance of consumption and how the role of workers' control can relate to this issue.

In other words, the Manifesto has no systematic outline of what a successful and modern socialist economy would be like. Instead in a dogmatic manner it emphasises the importance of nationalisation, the plan and workers control as principles. But this standpoint does not provide us with even an understanding of the rudimentary details of the working of a socialist economy. Hence they do not go beyond the limited approach of Marx. As a result what is meant by workers control is not outlined, and nor is the role of consumption. It is assumed that there will be no market economy, but this standpoint is not elaborated. In an era when people do not know what is meant by socialism, this limited understanding is not adequate. Instead we have to outline with some detail how we consider that a socialist economy can be efficient and realise the needs of society. Thus we cannot simply assume the principles of workers control, but we have to outline why it will be credible and possible. We believe that the workers of a given enterprise can be able to have the motivation to replace the domination of the capitalist. They can elect their own managers and organise together in order to establish the ability to produce a given good. The accountability of the process of production can be realised by the role of assemblies, and by constant self-supervision of the quality of work. The co-operative will also relate its activities to the trends of the market, and by being aware of the latest tastes in the process of consumption. They will also submit targets for the national planners to approve. Ultimately without an effective form of workers control, the trajectory of the economy will be towards the creation of a rigid centralised economy. This was the lesson of the history of the Russian revolution. Hence it is an urgent theoretical task to continue to elaborate what is mean by the industrial democracy of a socialist economy.

The Manifesto of the League for the Fifth International concludes with the following conclusion: “Whether revolution breaks out and triumphs first in a backward, semi-colonial country, or an advanced imperialist country, it is vital that it spreads internationally. This is necessary both to defend what has been gained and to achieve the full potential of socialist society.”(36) Such a perspective has validity. If a revolutionary regime remains isolated, it will be threatened with the possibility of an international form of counterrevolution, and also will not be able to realise the full potential for socialism which is based on the international development of the productive forces. But there is also a more important reason. The morale and militancy of the international working class will be encouraged to oppose capitalism, if the revolutionary regime makes an appeal for their support. Stalin betrayed the promise of the October revolution when he considered the role of the international working class to be nothing more than as passive support for the regime in the USSR. Only a genuine global perspective of world revolution can ensure that a particular revolutionary regime is not accommodating to the interests of capitalism, and therefore betraying the interests of the world working class. Only internationalism can express the fact that a revolutionary regime is truly attempting to construct a socialist society. But in this context only the success of world revolution can ensure that an aspiring socialist country is able to promote the aims of a new society without the threat of counterrevolution, and without the possibility of bureaucratic degeneration of a its regime. In this context, the internationalist approach of Trotsky is still historically valid and the basis of the strategy of world revolution.

In general we can conclude that the Manifesto of the League for the Fifth International is essentially principled. But we can criticise lapses into dogmatic reasoning, and some omissions that mean there are limitations in this document. But primarily, we have to question the political wisdom of calling for the formation of a new Fifth International. The Manifesto is written in terms of being a contemporary elaboration of Trotsky's transitional programme. In this manner it expresses its connection historically with the standpoint of the original Fourth International. Consequently, it would seem to be problematical to call for the formation of a new Fifth International. This would imply that the old transitional programme had become inadequate and so should be replaced by a completely new programme. But this is not the conclusion that is reached. Instead what is being suggested is that the approach of Trotsky is still the standpoint of contemporary revolutionary Marxism. Hence it would seem to be more logical to call for the renewal of the Fourth International. If this call was made it would mean that the League would become more approachable for like-minded members of other groups in this political tradition. In this manner the process of the development of a genuine international party could be advanced. Instead in some mythical sense, the League seems to imply that the continued crisis of capitalism will mean that people will recognise them as the exclusive revolutionary party. This is a delusion that underestimates the complexities involved in the class struggle. It will require a protracted process of renewal of Marxism if a credible revolutionary party is to be formed. However, we also have to emphasise that the outcome of history is contingent and not pre-determined. Thus the success of socialism is by no means assured. Instead we have to convince people that socialism is a credible alternative. Such a task is complicated, and does not mean that it will be victorious. Instead, with modesty, we have to accept that our efforts may be in vain. But at the very least we can contend that we did our best to overcome the power of capital.

FOOTNOTES:

(1) League for the Fifth International: Manifesto – From Resistance to Revolution p2

(2) ibid p2

(3) ibid p2

(4) ibid p3

(5) ibid p3

(6) ibid p3

(7) ibid p3

(8) ibid p3-4

(9) ibid p4

(10) ibid p4

(11) ibid p4

(12) ibid p4

(13) ibid p5

(14) ibid p5

(15) ibid p5

(16) ibid p7

(17) ibid p7

(18) ibid p10

(19) ibid p12

(20) ibid p13

(21) ibid p13

(22) ibid p14

(23) ibid p15

(24) ibid p15-16

(25) ibid p16

(26) ibid p16

(27) ibid p17

(28) ibid p17

(29) ibid p17-18

(30) ibid p18

(31) ibid p18

(32) ibid p18

(33) ibid p18

(34) ibid p19

(35) ibid p19-20

(36) ibid p20