

CWI - Petty bourgeois deviations? The Committee for a Workers' International in crisis

Tuesday 23 July 2019, by [KELLNER Manuel](#) (Date first published: 1 July 2019).

This contribution has been published in the July-August issue of Sozialistische Zeitung (SoZ) which is published since 1986 in Cologne.*

The CWI is an international organization in the Trotskyist tradition. [1] Its strongest national organization is the “mother party” Socialist Party in England and Wales. In the 1980s, when its members were still working in the Labour Party, then as the “Militant Tendency”, it gained great prestige through its fight against Margret Thatcher’s poll tax, among other things.

According to reports, this organization could be threatened with division. By all accounts – and that is where the problem begins. We are dependent on “leaked” internal documents on the Internet, press articles based on them from other left-wing groups in the English-speaking world and a kind of Kreml-astrology. The CWI does not publicly discuss the differences of opinion that have arisen.

In particular, a 12-page text by Peter Taaffe (English member of the leadership of the CWI for almost 50 years) dated 15 January this year and entitled “In defence of a working-class orientation for the CWI” is available on the Internet. At the very beginning, heavy guns are fired at the CWI: “... the CWI is confronted with ...tendencies towards petty bourgeois Mandelism”. [2] Above all, Taaffe accuses the Irish organization of the CWI of “abandoning the necessity of an organization based on the working class movement” in favour of “identity politics”...

The examples Taaffe cites are not very eloquent and do not suffice to form a judgement. The Irish Socialist Party is currently probably the CWI’s most prominent organization, with some presence in the movements and some members of parliament. Did it give in to “bourgeois feminism” in participating in the movement against the criminalization of abortion because it did not appeal to the unions to support this struggle? [3] It is striking in Taaffe’s text that he often refers to alleged statements of “individual comrades” and does not quote texts of the Irish Socialist Party. And what do such accusations actually mean?

“According to reports”, Taaffe had fallen into the minority at a meeting of the broader international leadership body of the CWI towards the end of 2018. The leaders of the Greek and US organizations of the CWI, for example, supported the Irish. Taaffe, however, has a certain majority in the smaller leadership body, the International Secretariat, and with it he promptly founded a faction that answers to the following beautiful name: “In defence of a working class Trotskyist CWI”.

I know very well that the CWI organizations have got not a few things right and earned themselves some merit. That is why I would not be happy if this organization should break up. But I do not consider the organizational concept and the functioning of the CWI to be worth imitating. Of course, there is a lot of efficiency, and for a long time such organizations function like well-oiled machines.

The members are active and self-sacrificing. They don't know any "perhaps" and no "don't know". Formally everything is democratically regulated internally. But the leadership always remains in the saddle and in fact does not tolerate any first-class contradiction. If loss of control threatens, it is a split.

I know Peter Taaffe personally since the 2000s, when the CWI discussed with the "petty bourgeois Mandelites" whether and how a broader anti-capitalist force could be created at European level. Peter Taaffe speaks freely and commandingly and makes people laugh with anecdotes. In a personal conversation he gives the impression of a real person who can also listen and doubt. But – I'm sorry to say – already in the conversation with his immediate underlings I got to hear only stock phrases. This does not educate any independently judging revolutionaries.

In 2010, I asked a Pakistani comrade why his organization had turned away from the CWI and had an evolution towards the Fourth International, since it is also only [nothing more than] a small organized international movement. Laughing, he said it had been a relief not to have to deal with Europeans – in this case English people – who know better, and better what to do in Pakistan. Despite all the weaknesses that the Fourth International has its strength in comparison with the CWI and comparable organizations lies in bringing comrades together at the international level who develop positions at eye level with one another – without a handful of leaders who have leased Marxist wisdom for themselves.

Manuel Kellner

P.S.

• Translation IVP:

<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article6154>

Original version:

* <http://www.sozone.de/2019/07/kleinbuergerliche-abweichungen/>

Footnotes

[1] The CWI was founded in April 1974 in London and has sections in 36 countries. See Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee_for_a_Workers%27_International. Its own website: <http://www.socialistworld.net>; <http://marxist.net/> (note from the translator).

[2] Ernest Mandel (1923–1995) probably was the most known member of the FI. It is a bad habit of sectarian rivalry to give the name of such a person an "ism" and to use the term thus created as a political invective.

[3] The Irish section campaigned through its socialist feminist organization Rosa during the abortion campaign. One aspect of the broad campaign was a trade-union campaign for yes supported by more than 80 trade-union organizations. **IVP**