

Workers' Power:

A Tale of Kitsch Trotskyism

Documents 1973-1993

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Education Department

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INTRODUCTION

THE WORKERS' POWER GROUP is a small tendency with little influence in the labour movement. Its politics are eclectic and not particularly distinctive. It is very much a part of the post-war kitsch-Trotskyist mainstream that we long ago distanced ourselves from. Why, then, spend time on them?

Firstly, they are to a considerable extent our creation. As we shall see, their politics were initially at least largely based on ours, and even today they remain a sort of grotesque sectarian shadow of our organisation.

Secondly, the very eclecticism of their politics is of a certain interest to us. Few organisations have embodied quite so many of the deviations that have afflicted post-war Trotskyism, and in such a short space of time. They are a microcosm of much (if not quite all) of what has been wrong with "Trotskyism" since the late 1940s.

The "Recapitulation Theory" in biology attaches great significance to the fact that the human embryo in the womb passes through just about every evolutionary stage from amoeba to fish to invertebrate, etc. etc., up to primitive human form. As a biological theory "recapitulation" may be discredited, but the fact remains that the process does occur: Workers' Power represents a kitsch-Trotskyist version of it, having passed through almost every stage of post-war Trotskyism from Cliffite economism to Pablo/Mandel Third-Worldism, taking in Healyite/Spartacist sectarianism along the way.

Finally, despite its many idiocies, Workers' Power does project a certain aura of "seriousness" which, though largely spurious, can be attractive to people repelled by the obvious opportunism of groups like the SWP and Militant Labour: thus we sometimes find ourselves in competition with them.

Workers' Power began as the "Left Faction" of the International Socialists (IS, now SWP) in 1973. At that time IS was at the height of its "turn to the class" and had won small but significant gains in industry.

Inevitably, many of the workers recruited to IS at this time were politically raw and sometimes backward on particular questions. The IS leadership round Tony Cliff, instead of educating and developing these workers, cynically manipulated them to create an atmosphere in IS in which crude economism was the order of the day and concern with issues like women's and gay rights, internationalism, or indeed politics as distinct from militant trade unionism, was the mark of the "petty bourgeois", "student types" and "people who ought to be in the IMG" (all commonly-used terms of abuse at that time).

The "Left Faction" opposed this economism in a limited, but nonetheless positive, way.

However, it is not quite true that Workers' Power began with the Left Faction. The core of the WP group, around Dave Hughes and Dave Stocking, existed as a distinct grouping in the Birmingham and Stoke branches of IS for some years before 1973.

They had been mildly oppositionist before 1973, too. IS between the late 1960s and the early 1970s was very different from the SWP today. It was a lively, loose, ramshackle organisation. Many small groupings criticised the leadership's economism. Hughes, Stocking, and their friends were one such group. And "friends" is the right word: they were tied together by a network of associations going back to college and even school days.

In 1971 they swung back to loyalism. We do not know why. Maybe they were rightly repelled by the conservative, cliquey, wiseacre attitudes common behind the "correct" politics of many of the critics of "economism". In any case, when the IS leadership expelled Workers' Fight (the "Trotskyist Tendency", a forerunner of the AWL) in late 1971, the Stoke branch, led by Dave Stocking, supported the expulsion so enthusiastically that the IS leadership had to pull them back into line for trying to carve opponents of the expulsion out of their branch delegation to the December 1971 IS special conference.

Here already, in WP's "pre-history", before even the formation of the "Left Faction", two enduring traits of the WP group had been defined: its cohesion was that of a clique or a cult around predefined leaders, rather than that of a group defined

by consistent politics; and those leaders were liable to sudden emotional lurches and splurges in their politics, followed by frantic "theorising" in defence of the new line.

From that "loyalist" lurch, however, they did sober up, and soon. In early 1972 they rebelled against the IS leadership's line on the official IRA's bombing of the Parachute Regiment officers' mess at Aldershot barracks — a line expressed by the then National Secretary of IS in the statement that it was no use killing British soldiers, since for each one slain a thousand would take his place. (It was the first bombing in Britain in the course of the "Troubles", and was specifically in retaliation for the Parachute Regiment's "Bloody Sunday" massacre in Derry in January 1972).

They started talking to the Workers' Fight people whom they had expelled only a few months before, and eventually produced a factional platform for the 1973 IS conference.

After the conference Hughes and Stocking "dissolved" their faction. Under rules adopted by IS when it expelled Workers' Fight in 1971, they had to dissolve or be expelled. But, they said at the time, this was no bad thing: the faction would be re-established on firmer ideological foundations after further discussions.

In fact the grouping never dissolved, and in 1974 the LF leadership waged a struggle against an impatient section of their members around Jo Quigley (who is now the GMB full-time official whose work for the Burnsall strike has aroused such controversy).

The Quigleyites eventually split, launched a barnstorming and incoherent kamikaze attack on the IS leadership, and soon scattered to the four winds. Quigley insists to this day that Hughes and Stocking did a deal with the IS leadership (in the form of Duncan Hallas) to save their own skins at the expense of sacrificing their former allies. We cannot vouch for the truth of this. What they certainly did was to retreat towards IS loyalism, going so far as to say that IS was "the healthiest political tendency to emerge from the disintegration of post-war Trotskyism. All other pretenders remain either impotent sectlets, abstract propagandists, or have capitulated to reformism". This was not only ridiculous hyperbole, it was consciously hypocritical: in private discussions the LF leaders had already expressed sympathy with WF and great disillusion with IS.

In 1975 IS hit a severe crisis. Many, probably, most of IS's industrial workers left the organisation; a large section of the old IS leadership, round Jim Higgins, John Palmer, and Richard Kuper, was pushed out. (They formed a short-lived organisation called the Workers' League, and some of them are still active around the Socialist Society). The LF was re-formed with a platform marking an definite improvement on 1973, and very close to Workers' Fight's politics. They were duly expelled. After discussions, the ex-LF, now called Workers' Power, fused with Workers' Fight to form the International-Communist League (I-CL) on 14 December 1975.

The political differences between WP and WF were small. WP still called the USSR "state-capitalist" (though the WP leaders had long agreed that Tony Cliff's theory was un-Marxist); WF still called it a "degenerated workers' state" (though we said openly that this description was unsatisfactory). The I-CL would be for the defence of the USSR against Western imperialism as its majority position. The ex-WF side wrote in to the fusion resolution a proviso (copied word-for-word from the WF platform of 1971) that "In any conflict, or apparent conflict, between defence against imperialism and the proletarian struggle against the bureaucracy, we believe in the primacy of the workers' struggles and the duty of revolutionaries to support them".

WP saw less need for work in the Labour Party than WF did: we agreed to leave flexibility for individuals on whether they would be involved in this work or not until the first I-CL conference. In practice this flexibility agreement worked very well, and almost everyone opted to be involved.

To ease the fusion further, WF proposed, and it was agreed, that the leading committees of the I-CL be constituted with equal numbers from each of WF and WP, thus "over-representing" the ex-WP element (about one-third of the fused membership). In fact the day-to-day leading committee, the Political Committee, was to acquire an "ex-WF" majority, not by any

bureaucratic measures, but by the voluntary withdrawal of two "ex-WP" people.

There were few disputes on the political line of the I-CL, and those there were, were mostly "ex-WF vs ex-WF" arguments, rather than ex-WF vs ex-WP. Along with the fusion, a new weekly paper was launched, *Workers' Action*, replacing the weekly *Workers' Fight*.

Yet nine months later, in September 1976, Hughes and Stocking walked out of the I-CL. The pre-fusion WP group — which, it became clear, had never really dissolved into the fusion — split, and Hughes/Stocking took about two-thirds of the ex-WP members with them.

What led up to this? In early 1976 there were some squabbles about such things as the internal affairs of the Troops Out Movement of that time, but those are now of no consequence, and were not fundamental then.

Serious political-seeming conflict began with a row over a draft "Action Programme/Manifesto". At fusion, Sean Matgamna had been commissioned to write the draft. He produced it in February 1976. Hughes and Stocking denounced the draft as timeless, doctrinaire, abstract.

Amendments to the draft, leaves of absence for Stocking (a full-timer) to write an alternative text, a Drafting Commission, discussions on general concepts of what a Marxist programme should be — they all failed to resolve the dispute. Part of the problem may have been different concepts of what a programme should be — as indicated in extracts included here.

Probably a bigger part was that Hughes and Stocking regarded programme-writing as their forte (they had criticised IS/SWP at length on the issue). "Perspectives" (the Hughes/Stocking catchword of the time) also played a role. They had come out of IS as part of a big blood-letting which took probably the majority of IS's industrial workers of that time. In the fusion discussions Stocking had declared:

"Workers' Fight is underestimating the possibilities of growth for a revolutionary group in the coming period. In the coming struggles, with political questions more sharply posed, transitional demands will become increasingly relevant, and a small but clear revolutionary tendency can recruit through industrial work".

They thought that they could grow rapidly, regrouping many of the workers who had left IS. This was one of the key reasons why they were sceptical about Labour Party work. And the "Action Programme" was to be their main means of regrouping those workers.

WF had argued in the fusion talks that this perspective was unrealistic. In the event, the possibilities of mass industrial work were smaller than even the most pessimistic of us thought. 1976 (and late 1975) was a period of lull in the generally high industrial militancy of the 1970s.

Hughes and Stocking were understandably frustrated — and expressed their frustration incoherently.

In early May preparations began for the I-CL conference. It was slated for July, though in June Matgamna and Hornung would propose, successfully, that it be postponed to September to give a better chance of it not being a heated vote-out on emotive but ill-defined differences.

Martin Thomas drafted a document on orientation. Again, uproar. Hughes and Stocking denounced the draft as biased towards Labour Party work and tending to liquidate the I-CL's industrial work (although Hughes, given the job of industrial organiser as yet another measure to ease the fusion, could not cite any initiative he wanted on which he had failed to get support from the ex-WF people, or any request for resources which had been refused).

Again, attempts to resolve the issue — amendments, discussions, hundreds of pages in discussion bulletins. Again, no progress. At an I-CL summer school in July, there were a series of knock-down and drag-out debates before a large part of the membership. Hughes and Stocking manifestly lost the arguments on the Labour Party. Manifestly, too, they felt that they had lost them: they retreated into sullen silence.

On 5 September the National Committee had its last discussion on "orientation" before the conference, then three weeks away. Hughes's objections had been reduced to nine amendments, mostly very small: the main one insisted that only one-third of the members of each branch, no more, should be heavily involved in Labour Party work. There was an argument

about the Walsall by-election then forthcoming: Hughes and Stocking wanted to back the IS candidate, the majority backed Labour. Neither Hughes nor Stocking nor any of their co-thinkers raised any objections about the arrangements for conference. At the end of the meeting, however, they distributed a document, "Factionalism or Perspectives", which set out to rally "ex-WP" opinion against the ex-WF leaders, who were allegedly turning the I-CL into a "splenetic impotent sectlet".

At the Political Committee of 10 September Stocking and King said they would not abide by the decisions of the forthcoming conference. At a Midlands regional meeting on 12 September Stocking repeated the declaration, and was backed up by Hughes, who had been absent on 10 September.

On 13 September the I-CL suspended Hughes, Stocking and King from membership, with provisos to readmit them immediately to membership and to all their offices and positions if they would accept the conference's authority. On 15 September, the supporters of Hughes and Stocking walked out of the East London and North London branch meetings. Michele Ryan, the leading ex-WP woman activist, memorably told the North London branch: "We, as rank and file members, cannot possibly argue the issues. We don't fully know the debate and our leaders' positions — we may not even accept them all". Unsure as she was about the political positions of Hughes and Stocking, she was quite sure that they were her "leaders", and she walked out to join them. She and the other Hughes/Stocking-ites refused even to try to talk to the bulk of the I-CL membership, branding us as zombies whose minds had been irreversibly poisoned. They refused even to talk to people who had supported them on some of the political disputes.

All attempts at conciliation failed. "As late as Tuesday night [14 September] Hughes talked to Hornung and Lever on the phone and proposed a deal. He wanted parity restored on the Political Committee and abolition of the Secretariat until conference. He wanted also a cancellation of conference, though that was negotiable if the other two points were conceded.

"On the Wednesday morning [15 September] Lever, speaking for herself and Matgamna, phoned Hughes to say they would agree with the first two points provided the conference was held on schedule, and try to persuade the rest of the Political Committee to agree. But by then Hughes had had a good night's sleep and decided 'no deals'. The only negotiations between the semi-mythical 'WP group' and the I-CL would occur after the I-CL, ex-WF and ex-neither, had kicked out the entire Political Committee" (from "Stop the Wreckers!", an I-CL circular of 17 September 1976).

On 19 September, Hughes and Stocking called a meeting of "comrades on the line of the ex-WP group". Arnie Prout and Pete Keenlyside, leading ex-WPers who agreed politically with the I-CL majority, were excluded; so was Alasdair Jamison, who largely agreed with Hughes and Stocking on the Labour Party and other arguments, but was not ex-WP and opposed a split.

Six people, including Jim Denham, voted against a split, and 19 for.

All participants in the split were freely invited to the last session of the I-CL conference on 26 September. Only Hughes and King came. Hughes told us that he did not, in fact, say that we were mindless zombies not worth arguing with, "gooks and monkeys". No, he said, "prove that you aren't — by throwing out the leadership of the Matgamna group". Failing to do so, we were "gooks and monkeys" after all, and that was that.

Two political threads from the "pre-history" of WP were in operation here: the cliquishness and the propensity to sudden emotional lurches.

The Hughes/Stocking group walked out of the I-CL as a clique, a circle of friends, hurt by a threat to the status of their leaders (i.e. they would be in a minority at the conference, albeit a minority with full rights — the ex-WF people had stated in advance that they wanted to keep Hughes and Stocking on the leading committees). They did not move as a political group motivated by politics. They were motivated neither by the interests of self-preservation nor by those of building the sort of organisation we had jointly set out to build nine months earlier.

And they did it in a sudden emotional lurch. On 5 September they were taking part in a more-or-less normal committee meeting, by 26 September they were denouncing those who stayed with the I-CL as "gooks and monkeys", and all this without any

new political issue arising!

The split also showed another lasting trait of WP: that its literary revolutionism is combined with feebleness in any real political struggle.

They had repeatedly been submissive, diplomatic, even hypocritical, in IS. Then they walked out of the I-CL without waging a struggle, without even daring to take the opportunity to argue their corner at the conference. The same trait can be seen today in, for example, WP's record as a "loyal opposition" to Red Action in Anti-Fascist Action.

The split was fatal to WP's political development. It left them demoralised, disoriented, and with no viable perspective. For some time afterwards, their polemics against our supposed "bureaucratism" led them to function only as a loosely-knit circle.

They had virtually no differences of public political line from the I-CL, so they could not be sustained by the consciousness that they defended some vital idea against the stream.

They claimed to stand for dynamic, agitational, industrial mass work — but almost all the few industrial workers who had backed them in the arguments inside the I-CL refused to join the split, and Hughes himself, before the split, admitted to a wavering comrade in Nottingham that "no serious industrial work" would be possible outside the I-CL. Just as there was something appropriate about the fact that the Healy organisation, in its last period, found its main base among actors and actresses, so also it was somewhat fitting that the new "WP" was dominated by college lecturers.

Mobilising for the split, they had claimed that the ex-WF leadership was so sectarian and propagandist that it was about to ditch the weekly *Workers' Action* and replace it with an abstruse ultra-polemical magazine. But now they were in no position over the next two years to produce anything more than seven issues of a magazine very much oriented to intra-left polemic.

And, despite all that can be said about the incipient tendencies towards "lecturers' socialism" in what they wrote about the revolutionary party and the programme, the WP members of 1976 were IS/SWP activists from a period when the IS/SWP had some working-class base and a vigorous (if economic) orientation to rank-and-file industrial struggles. They saw themselves as, and generally speaking were, people who wanted to build struggles, not people to stand on the sidelines priding themselves on having the most ultra-revolutionary criticism.

Analysing the bleak prospects before them, we concluded that they would either become a satellite group of the IS/SWP or join the IMG (forerunner of Socialist Outlook and Socialist Action — but then a relatively large and lively organisation). We were wrong about that (though they did negotiate with the IMG, and the IMG made itself the spokesperson for their claims about the split being due to us being "bureaucratic") — but we were not wrong about the unviability of other prospects.

They "sweated it out". A number of prominent people peeled away, but they kept going as a group and over the next few years mutated into an "orthodox Trotskyist" sect of the sort which you might expect to emerge as a splinter from the Healyite or the Spartacist tendencies.

We do not know the full inner history of this mutation, nor its precise connection with the fact that, over the 1980s, the active leadership of WP shifted from Hughes and Stocking to new people who had never been part of the pre-1976 WP. Dave Hughes died, aged 43, in August 1991; Stocking is still alive and in WP, but apparently not central; however, the decisive "emotional lurches" in WP's politics were made when Hughes and Stocking were still its main leaders.

Three factors, however, seem important. First: the group shrivelled in the late 1970s, not just in body but also in mind and spirit. Over the years they adapted to the situation of being a sect, defined politically by hair-splitting and often contrived criticisms of other groups, and began to make a virtue of it.

Secondly: they came under great pressure from the Spartacist League, which "colonised" a number of experienced people from America and elsewhere in Britain in the late 1970s and was for a while quite vigorous. The Spartacists "targeted" Workers' Power, attending all their meetings in force, constantly button-holing them, battering them with criticisms and polemics. (They recruited one core WP member, Charlie Shell). WP shifted politically to protect itself, to try to ensure that the Spartacists

could never accuse them of not criticising reformists enough or not being anti-imperialist or anti-"revisionist" enough.

Thirdly: their evolution was driven partly by sheer venom against the I-CL and Workers' Action, and then against its continuators, Socialist Organiser, the WSL, and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

The degree and recklessness of that venom was shown in 1982 when, at the height of the first phase of the Labour Party witch-hunt, they published WSL internal documents in the issue of their paper sold at Labour Party conference. John Golding, then Labour's arch-witchhunter, gleefully showed that copy of WP to our organiser John Bloxam as proof that he had "got" us. Hughes, when challenged about this, commented: "That's your problem".

Nevertheless, WP had split without any good reason to do so, and probably without thinking it through. And when it came to justifying the split with ringing full-blast denunciations of us they were stymied by the fact that they had no major political differences other than the one on characterising the Stalinist states. On that they were unsure anyway; and in early 1980, three years after the split, they would turn into the sort of "workers'-statists", backing Stalinist imperialism in Afghanistan, that we never were, and, given our commitment to the working class and the oppressed peoples caught in the maw of Stalinism, never could be.

When new issues emerged which offered scope for plausible differences — chiefly, our efforts to organise the Labour Left in 1978-81, the Russian troops in Afghanistan in 1979-80, and the Falklands war in 1982 (there were other issues before then, but they were small beer by comparison) — they seized on the issues and "improved" them by theoretical generalisation.

We were "capitulators" to Labourism, to imperialism, to revisionism; they were our opposites, the most ruthless (and sectarian) critics of any Labour Left movement, the most vehement anti-imperialists (even if that meant endorsing the presence of Russian troops in Afghanistan conducting a genocidal war like the Americans in Vietnam, or the Argentine military junta's mini-colonialism), and the most rigid orthodoxists (even if this meant mind-numbing contortions to explain why the systems spurned by the workers of Eastern Europe in favour of western-type capitalism were "workers' states" after all).

This evolution has produced WP as we described in at the beginning of this introduction — a sort of composite of different strands of modern kitsch-Trotskyism, mixed in with a few ideas taken from us and given a sectarian twist (on the general strike, on Europe, on the "mass working-class-based women's movement", on trade-union rank-and-file movements, and on the Fourth International, for example).

This collection of extracts aims to help WP members and sympathisers to find a path to genuine Marxism; AWL members and sympathisers to see better why and how we broke from kitsch-Trotskyism; and anyone interested in the Trotskyist spectrum to understand it better.

Jim Denham and Martin Thomas, 4 November 1993.

Dates

1973: Left Faction (forerunner of Workers' Power) formed in IS/SWP.

1975: Left Faction is expelled and fuses (in December) with Workers' Fight to create the International-Communist League and publish *Workers' Action*.

1976, September: About two-thirds of the old Left Faction people split from the I-CL and re-establish a "Workers' Power" group.

1978: Workers' Action joins with a range of Labour leftists to launch the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory and the paper *Socialist Organiser*. WP denounces it as an exercise in covering up for fake-lefts.

1979, December: The USSR invades Afghanistan. WP opposes USSR troop withdrawal and (February 1980) announces that it now considers the USSR to be a "degenerated workers' state". (*Workers' Action* calls for USSR troops out and publicly, though hesitantly, argues for the first time that the USSR has to be considered an imperialist power).

1982, April-July: Britain and Argentina go to war over the Falkland Islands. WP supports Argentina. (*Socialist Organiser* opposes both sides in the war).

NOTES TO EXTRACTS

1. "You do not mention anywhere the question of the party learning from the class"

- a. Platform of IS Left Faction, 1973: extracts.
- b. Letter from Martin Thomas to Dave Stocking, 6 March 1973: extracts.

We criticised the 1973 Left Faction platform not just for being very limited in its criticism of the IS/SWP, but for being "diplomatic", indeed hypocritical.

Three other points of lasting political importance are visible in this exchange.

First, the Left Faction's tendency to "lecturer's socialism", towards a view of the revolutionary party as "traversing the class struggle together with the working class, and explaining the scenery in passing... You do not mention anywhere the question of the party learning from the class... [or] giving a bold and decisive lead in time of revolutionary crisis".

Second, their tendency to use the calls for a General Strike and for Councils of Action as all-purpose fetishes. Probably, in early 1973, the Left Faction was just being "over-impressed" by Workers' Fight's arguments around the mass strike movement of July 1972 which freed five dockers jailed under the Tories' Industrial Relations Act. WF called for a "General Strike to smash the Act"; IS/SWP dithered and finally got round to demanding a General Strike only after the TUC had called for a one-day General Strike and after the dockers had been freed!

Third, the Labour Party. In 1973 the Left Faction had moved very little from IS/SWP economism: "you seem to reject the whole idea of demands on the Labour Party".

2. "It was because IS had no clear programme"

Workers' Power/Left Faction statement on expulsion from IS/SWP, around November 1975

By 1975 WP/LF had moved a lot closer to the politics of Workers' Fight, especially on transitional demands and the Labour Party (and also on Europe: the 1973 platform had had a variant of the "No to the European Community" position, but by 1975 the Left Faction had come to agree with WF that socialists must respond to the EC with Europe-wide workers' unity, not "Britain out").

One small phrase in this statement was, however, to prove significant: its call for a "workers' programme for the crisis" — note, "for the crisis".

For the subsequent debate in the I-CL, see the extract below entitled "A need to fight vulgar-Trotskyism".

3. "As a norm, revolutionaries would try to enter a mass party based on the trade unions"

Extract from minutes of Workers' Fight/Workers' Power fusion discussions on the Labour Party, 1 November 1975 and 4 November 1975.

These minutes show the seriousness and openness of the fusion talks.

They also show something which will seem strange to people who know today's Workers' Power, which relates to the

"Trotskyist tradition" — actually, the post-Trotsky tradition — very conservatively, "painting by numbers" from the palette of "Trotskyist orthodoxy" circa 1951.

In 1975-6, WP saw themselves as mass activists and innovative free-thinkers, and WF as tending to be "orthodox", "sectarian", doctrinaire, even "ulimatist". (In another part of the minutes, WF people are reassuring WP that were were not "ulimatist" towards trade-union rank-and-file movements and that we "accepted that a rank and file movement could not be built on a full transitional programme".)

4. The WP/WF fusion: the Fourth International and rank-and-file movements

Political resolution of the I-CL fusion, 14 December 1975: extracts.

Another issue on which WP had moved closer to WF was the Fourth International. The 1975 Left Faction criticised IS not only on British-Isles politics, but also, for example, on the revolutionary upheavals then taking place in Portugal and on its erratic and opportunist approach to building an international tendency.

Workers' Fight — which originated in 1966 as a small group of ex-members of Gerry Healy's "anti-Pabloite" SLL — had spent much time and energy on discussing the "Fourth International" question. We had just (in August 1975) completed a new round of that discussion, concluding that "the 'Fourth International' is an ideological and organisational chaos: we must rework the postwar efforts of the 'Fourth International' current in the spirit of Lenin's post-1914 work on the previous labour and Marxist movement... the ideological and programmatic work of the 'mainstream' is not an adequate basis for an international... even where, as on the analyses of the Stalinist states other than Russia, WF is in the post-1951 current, that current itself is massively inadequate..." We were to draw the full conclusions from this in 1988 (see below, item 11), rejecting outright the core idea of modern kitsch-Trotskyist as it was shaped in 1949-51, that Eastern Europe, China, and so on, were "deformed workers' states".

The first excerpt here from the I-CL fusion resolution is simply a short summary of the August 1975 WF document: WP had nothing special to say on this issue in the fusion discussions.

Workers' Power now makes a great show of its efforts to build a "revolutionary communist International". The excerpt here shows that all that is rational and positive in those efforts flows from what WP learned from WF — and that what WP has distinctively developed since 1975 is only a hollowing-out of the 1975 ideas, removing from them their open-endedness and their commitment to a thorough critical examination of the whole tradition of Trotskyism since Trotsky.

(It should also be noted that in 1975-6 the ex-WP people played no real part, and took little interest, in the fairly extensive contacts and discussions that the I-CL then had with other Trotskyist groups in Germany, Austria, Italy, France and Portugal).

WP had also learned from WF on rank-and-file movements in the trade unions. The section in the fusion resolution sums up our efforts to convince them that the IS model of rank-and-file groupings on the basis of just "more militancy" was inadequate, and our assurances to them that a more political approach did not mean sectarian programme-brandishing (of the type they themselves were to adopt later!)

The reason why WP asked for those assurances was WF's intervention at the Rank and File conference called by IS in March 1974. Workers' Fight backed an amendment from Stanton steelworkers on workers' control, nationalisation, anti-racism and women's rights (all mentioned only very cursorily, or not at all, in the official IS platform resolution). Clearly the WP people had thought at the time that such an amendment was too "advanced".

5. "A need to fight vulgar-Trotskyism"

- a. Extract from minutes of I-CL National Committee discussion on the draft Manifesto, 29 February 1976.
- b. "The nature of our Action Programme" and "What is an Action Programme", by Sean Matgamna, from *International Communist* magazine, no.2/3.
- c. "Document on the draft Manifesto" by Dave Hughes and I-CL Political Committee resolution on that document, February 1976.

The argument about the draft Manifesto took up much time and energy in 1976 — the whole discussion covered hundreds of pages — and acquired a venom and ferocity quite inappropriate to the issues.

Nevertheless, there were real issues. Initially, the WP notion of "a programme for the crisis" probably reflected residues of IS/SWP ideas. At the time IS/SWP had a simple economic perspective: crisis makes militancy, militancy makes revolutionary party. The Left Faction criticised this by insisting on the need for a programme of transitional demands rather than just calls for militancy. But they tended then to fall into a rather static, religious notion of transitional demands. Their picture was of "the crisis" — apparently a more-or-less fixed state of affairs — and "the party" with "answers" provided by its "programme for the crisis".

Ex-WF people argued instead that "The full socialist programme [should be] broken down into a linked chain, each link of which might successfully be grasped, and the movement hauled forward, dependent on the degree of mobilisation, intensity of struggles, and relationship of forces" (as the I-CL manifesto, eventually published in July 1977, put it.) Transitional demands could not be a predetermined "answer" to "the" crisis; they must be responses to particular crises and particular explosions of working-class action. "The Trotskyists do not raise 'the political slogan' according to some tempo worked out a priori in their own heads; it is their responsibility to swivel the programme around, to permute and structure the demands, so that they relate to the tempo of the development of the workers' movement" (WF pamphlet, *The Left and the July Crisis*, October 1972).

In other words, the issues of "the party learning from the class... [and] giving a bold and decisive lead in time of revolutionary crisis" — as in Extract 1 — were central.

WP's reaction to the IS/SWP, so we argued in February 1976, had taken them towards a "vulgar-Trotskyist" (neo-Healyite) idea of transitional demands. This element in their thinking was to harden and become dominant in later years.

It was, perhaps, the first brick in the "orthodox-Trotskyist" carapace which WP has since built around itself.

6. Debate on the Stalinist states

Minutes of debate on the Stalinist states at the I-CL summer school, Rugeley, Staffordshire, July 1976.

This extract — like those above — should help to show that the reason why Hughes and Stocking were unable to stay in the I-CL was not that the organisation was incapable of conducting serious and comradely debates.

The ex-WF people in the debate insist repeatedly that they see their "degenerated and deformed workers' state" line as provisional and problematic. There is less of the same frankness on the ex-WP side, but in fact — having rejected Cliff's specific version, and not found a new version of "state-capitalist" analysis for themselves — they were equally unsure.

In practice both sides in the fused organisation related to the Stalinist states as if they were class societies. Indeed, ex-WF did so more fiercely than ex-WP, as one tiny dispute showed. In a trade union branch where Matgamna, Thomas and Stocking were all members, a right-winger put down a resolution for democratic rights in the USSR. Matgamna and Thomas, the "workers'-statists", supported it; Stocking, the "state capital-

ist", opposed it.

7. The Labour Party dispute in 1976

- a. Dave Hughes, "Industrial Perspectives", circa June 1976 (extract)
- b. Sean Matgamna, "On Labour Party Perspectives", 12 September 1976.

Matgamna's document is a summing-up of the ideas on Labour Party argued over hundreds of pages by ex-WF (and some ex-WP) people in 1976.

It is difficult to present an equally authoritative summary of what Hughes and Stocking argued, because so much of it was cries of alarm about what we allegedly implied or secretly wanted, rather than positive statements of what they wanted. As one critic pointed out: "Hughes's picture of the Labour Party is like nothing so much as the old patriarchal myth of the siren or the 'femme fatale'. No sooner is it mentioned than the pages are filled with fears of being seduced, corrupted, enervated, if not castrated. If the dramatists speak of anti-heroes, and the physicists of anti-matter, Hughes's and Stocking's document together constitute anti-perspectives on the Labour Party... most of the concrete points... are conceded. But they are surrounded with a deafening clamour of warning notices and straw-man-beating" (Martin Thomas, "The discussion on orientation", July 1976).

This extract from Hughes's "Industrial Perspectives" is the nearest thing to a clear statement. The final position of Hughes and Stocking (in August-September) was for one-third only of the members of each I-CL to be heavily involved in Labour Party work.

8. "We will not abide by conference decisions"

- a. Extract from minutes of I-CL Political Committee, 10 September 1976.
- b. Circular, "Defend the Unity of the I-CL!", by Sean Matgamna, 14 September 1976.
- c. First I-CL statement on the split
- d. WP statement on the split
- e. Second I-CL statement on the split.

The background to these documents is given in the Introduction.

The imbalance in the material presented here on the split — more I-CL material than WP — is not a result of biased selection. In the few feverish weeks of the split, the I-CL produced some 19 documents, and WP three.

9. "A warning for us: Workers' Power"

I-CL internal document, 22 February 1978, by Sean Matgamna and Martin Thomas (extract).

By late 1977, the I-CL saw itself facing "dangers of sectarianism", and tried to tackle them. At the time we could see no immediate practical way to "link up with left wing currents" in the Labour Party as this document suggested we would: the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, launched by Workers' Action and the "Chartist" group (forerunners of *Labour Briefing*) in the summer of 1978, was to provide the answer.

Workers' Power, meanwhile, was moving in the opposite political direction.

10. "No responsibility other than to spout its thin wisdom"

- a. WP article on the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, *WP* no.2, November 1978 (extract).
- b. Workers' Action "Notes to Organisers", 10 July 1978 (extract).

In November 1975 WP had sought reassurance from WF that we really did not want to push a full revolutionary programme on trade-union rank-and-file movements in an ultimatum way. (We didn't!) In July 1978 WP came along to push a full revolutionary programme in the SCLV, now visibly shaping up as a very promising "rank and file movement" of the Labour Left. Their approach was not so much ultimatism as irresponsible propagandism: they would rather try to "win over a few unclear people by making propaganda speeches at the conference, at the cost of destroying the SCLV's potential for reaching out..."

Sectarianism propagandism would become the basic political method of WP.

On the prompting of Workers' Action, the SCLV had come out in the first issue of its paper *Socialist Organiser* for the militant defence of the Asian community of Brick Lane (East London) against a fascist march — thus clashing with large sections of the left who instead backed a previously-scheduled Anti-Nazi League "carnival" on the same day in South London. Wasn't that proof that the SCLV was not, after all, a flabby, empty exercise in political adaptation?

Not for WP! No, what the SCLV had done was not enough! We had failed because we had not denounced Ted Knight by name for doing his job as Lambeth council leader and welcoming the ANL march at Brockwell Park, in his borough.

The SCLV did denounce Knight the next year, in 1979, when he proposed cuts in Lambeth council — and was able to do so more effectively because it had not marginalised itself by the sort of reckless literary "intransigence" which WP recommended.

11. "Wrong to demand the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan".

- a. WP articles on the USSR invasion of Afghanistan, *WP* no.12, February 1980 (extracts).
- b. Workers' Action statement on Afghanistan, *WA* no.166, 9 February 1980 (extracts).
- c. *Socialist Organiser* editorial, "Reassessing the Eastern Bloc", *SO* no.371, 15 September 1988.

A further stage in WP's congealing as an "orthodox Trotskyist" sect in the neo-Healyite, "anti-Pabloite", anti-"revisionist" mould — and also in their shift towards "anti-imperialism", rather than class politics, as their compass in international affairs — came with their adoption of the "degenerated workers' state" line on the USSR in February 1980. This was a very strange business!

It is right and proper that Marxists should revise theories discredited by events. Thus, for example, the idea that the USSR and Eastern Europe were "degenerated and deformed workers' states", post-capitalist and held back from moving towards socialism only by the desperate police-state rule of an unstable bureaucracy, was comprehensively discredited by the overturns of 1989-91. (We had dropped it before then).

But how could the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan discredit the idea that it was state-capitalist and imperialist? Surely if anything it gave more credit to that idea!

The instinctive response of any socialist or democrat was, surely, to condemn the invasion as imperialist and demand that the troops get out. The fact that the Afghan movements fighting the invasion were socially reactionary, and that they got aid from rival imperialist powers, would not change that conclusion

for anyone versed in the Marxist tradition.

You could not do other than condemn the Russians unless you thought their state and its system were positively progressive, and positively supported the extension of that Stalinist system. And how could a brutal imperialistic invasion drive you from thinking that Stalinism was not progressive to thinking that it was?

Theory might persuade us that the instinctive response missed out other important considerations and was wrong. But how could things work the other way — that WP felt obliged first to go against the obvious socialist and democratic response, and then to change their theory so as to license their acceptance of the USSR troops?

The only explanation is that the WP's basic socialist and democratic responses were outweighed by a desire to prove themselves in "anti-imperialism" — with "imperialism" defined only as the West, and an anxious look over their shoulders at groups like the Spartacist League, then relatively lively in Britain and devoting much of its polemical attention to WP (where it then had a small incipient faction). Then the theory was adapted to meet the desire. It was the emotional lurch to end all lurches!

12. "Our ally was the Argentine nation"

- a. WP "Open Letter to the Workers' Socialist League", in *WP* no.34, July/August 1982 (extracts)
- b. "Britain, Argentina: The enemy at home". Resolution on the Falklands war for WSL special conference, August 1982, by Sean Matgamna, Gerry Byrne, Stephen Corbishley, John Bloxam, Martin Thomas, and Mary Corbishley.

Socialist Organiser opposed British/Argentine war over the Falklands on both sides. The resolution reproduced here was written as a summing-up of the line for a special conference in September 1982 of the Workers' Socialist League, the organisation formed by the fusion of the I-CL and the old Workers' Socialist League, the group formed by Alan Thornett after he was ejected from Gerry Healy's WRP in 1975.

The Falklands war further shaped WP's new political identity. Driven by classless, abstract "anti-imperialism", they fervently allied themselves with "the Argentine nation" under General Galtieri in its drive to seize a territory 400 miles away from Argentina (2,000 from Argentina's main cities) which had been settled by a non-Argentine population for 150 years.

Here again, an emotional lurch of a perverse kind defined and shaped WP's theory. It was in order to justify their stance on the Falklands that they developed their one new and distinctive idea since 1976, that is, the notion of imperialist and "imperialised" nations, the idea that imperialism is just something some nations do to others.

Their attitudes on the two Gulf wars, on Ireland, on Palestine, and so on, can then all be read off from the principle of solidarity with the "imperialised".

Their 1982 "Open Letter" is also notable for the utter recklessness of the polemic, the incoherent railing against "revisionism". "Even if a formal reversal of position takes place on the war", it declares in a passage not included in this extract, "its originators, Matgamna/Thomas, would remain a constant source of revisionism. Look at their record on left reformism, war, Marxism and democracy, Ireland, imperialism, Permanent Revolution, the Transitional Programme, the Party, the Workers' Government. If they are now approaching the positions of a Kautsky, they do so with the velocity and appetite of a Bernstein..." Clearly WP wanted to prove themselves as nowise inferior to the Spartacists in the matter of blunderbuss denunciation. Their hoped-for audience here was a section of the old-WSL who were still close to the old-WSL's Healyite roots and who were reacting with sectarian and incoherent fury against the I-CL element of the new WSL.

13. Israel and Palestine

- a. Article from *WP* no.1, October 1978 (extract)
- b. *Socialist Organiser* editorial statement, *SO* no.243, 12 September 1985.

On Israel/Palestine, as on Ireland, WP continues the "headline" slogans of the I-CL, while the AWL has rejected them.

On both issues, the WP argument that the AWL has shifted politically in order to have a quiet life in the Labour Party makes no sense at all. Our rejection of the standard "far left" views on Israel/Palestine and on Ireland does not make the Labour right wing view us any more favourably, as they proved by banning *Socialist Organiser* in 1989. In the milieu where we mostly operate — the trade-union and Labour left — our views are more likely to bring us angry emotional denunciations (and even physical violence, from the SWP) than a quiet, comfortable life. (On the Falklands war, too, our position ran against the grain of a Labour Left much influenced by Third-Worldism and Stalinism).

WP calls for the Palestinians to "smash the racist Zionist state, replacing it with a secular workers' state of Palestine". The I-CL of 1975-6 had a similar attitude. That was not distinctive: it was the common attitude of almost all the British far-left. Marxists in some other countries — Israel, of course, but also, for example, France — had (so we would now say) a clearer view even then. After a very long discussion, the AWL shifted, in 1985, to that other view: we support the Palestinians' right to an independent state alongside Israel and advocate a socialist federation of the Middle East with self-determination for the Israeli Jews (and other minority nations). We explain why in the brief extract printed here and (in more detail) in our pamphlets *Arabs, Jews and Socialists* and *Two Nations, Two States*.

Although the WP line shares similar "headline slogans" to the attitude of the I-CL in 1975-6 and Workers' Fight before 1975, it differs in one crucial way. WF always argued for the "democratic, secular state" in all Palestine on the grounds that it was the best democratic solution to the Arab/Jewish conflict. We believed in equal rights for the Jews and would not have accepted any version of the "democratic, secular state" that denied them real equality.

In WP's version, as early as 1978, this criterion has been displaced by that of "anti-imperialism": Israel must be "smashed" in order to defeat "imperialism", and not so much because of any benefits for the relations between the Arab and Jewish peoples. Trotsky once said, in a discussion about the demand for the right for US blacks to set up their own state (in the 1930s): "We cannot tell them to set up a state because that will weaken imperialism and so be good for us, the white workers. That would be against internationalism itself... We can say: 'It is for you to decide'." WP, however, opted for the sort of "anti-imperialism" which was "against internationalism itself".

WF's criterion gave us the possibility of seeing that the "democratic, secular state" was not in fact a feasible democratic solution. WP's criterion locks them into a stereotype response to all such conflicts, one of always backing the supposedly "imperialised" nation against the supposedly "imperialist".

14. Ireland

- a. Extract from article in *WP* no.1, November 1978
- b. "Our record on Ireland", from AWL pamphlet, *Ireland: the socialist answer*, June 1989.

The issues on Ireland are in one sense the same as those on Israel/Palestine, and in another sense quite different.

With WP, again, an attitude sharing the same "headline slogan" as the I-CL and WF has been transmuted into stereotype Third-Worldism dressed up in "orthodox-Trotskyist" jargon by replacing democracy between peoples as the criterion by "anti-imperialism".

However, WF's line on Ireland, unlike its line on Israel/Palestine, did include distinctive thinking. In 1975-6 much of this was expressed only in cryptic comments, like the follow-

ing in the I-CL Manifesto:

"Britain is not playing a classic imperialist or colonial role in Northern Ireland — it is playing out only a grim parody of its imperial past...."

"The revolt in Northern Ireland... as a purely nationalist struggle... faces severe limits... [there is] small possibility of a revolutionary reunification of Ireland, other than as part of a communist revolution...."

"Those who need to pretend it is a classical imperialist situation... are not Marxist revolutionaries but unstable poseurs and demagogues...."

As we concluded later, "The basic principles, views and assessments were correct; but we tended to downplay our own assessments, criticisms and politics in deference to a petty-bourgeois nationalist formation because it was 'leading the struggle against imperialism'. We should not have been so self-effacing".

WP, however — to put it bluntly — have no independent assessment to downplay. When they decide not to be "self-effacing", they criticise the petty-bourgeois nationalists for insufficient energy and ferocity "against imperialism", rather than questioning the whole nationalist view of the issues.

15. "There is no better high than... wasting the fascists in open battle"

- a. WP article on drugs, *WP* no.168, June 1993 (extract)
- b. AWL "programme to beat racism", from *How to beat the racists*, October 1993.

WP coverage on racism and fascism does include argument for the social demands and the working-class orientation emphasised in the AWL programme. But their major focus is on "anti-fascism" by way of small-scale street-fighting (or talk about street-fighting!) This short extract shows just how far their desire to see themselves as revolutionary Dirty Harrys ("make my day, fascist!") has taken them away from a serious orientation to the labour movement.

Pen-names

Pen-names are used in some of the documents collected here. Key:

Jack Cleary = Sean Matgamna
Mike Evans = Dave Stocking
John Hunt = Dave Hughes
Johnson = Steve MacSweeney
Laing = Stuart King
Maxine Landis = Rachel Lever
Jack Price = Andrew Hornung
Chris Reynolds = Martin Thomas

1. "You do not mention anywhere the question of the party learning from the class"

a. Platform of IS Left Faction, 1973: extracts.

INTRODUCTION

Before we outline our criticism of the group's development, it is necessary briefly to state the common ground from which we start. We agree with the characterisation of Russia as "state capitalist", and with the position which flows from it: "neither Washington nor Moscow, but International Socialism". We consider that theories of "workers' states" and "transitional societies" divorced from the proletarian revolution and dictatorship lead to the displacement of the working class as the agent of its own emancipation. Consequent upon this abandonment of the centrality of the working class, "orthodox" Trotskyism has developed a whole series of errors in its theory and practice. These, we believe, the leading theoreticians of IS have outlined in a number of works vital to the further development of Marxism. We believe that from this work flows IS's practical orientation towards the working class and IS's potential in the struggle to build a revolutionary party.

Our basic disagreement derives from the incompleteness of this development. Our view is that IS's present conception of the building of the party renders it incapable of fulfilling this vital task which is a real possibility in the coming period - one of enormous opportunities for the revolutionary left.

REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

The revolutionary party is distinguished from all other working-class organisations by its commitment to bringing to the fore in and through every partial struggle the question of the emancipation of the working class, and by its internationalism. While this means that a revolutionary party represents the working class in the most complete fashion politically, it is simultaneously true that this is precisely what makes it a vanguard, a selected minority of the class. Because it has to be the most advanced and resolute in action; because it has to understand theoretically the line of march, the conditions and the methods of struggle, it requires the maximum of understanding and discipline in its members. The party has thus to be a vanguard, its members have to be cadres.

But this must be accompanied by the recognition of the importance of the spontaneous mass struggles of the working class and of other oppressed social groups, nationalities, etc. Active participation in these struggles is what distinguishes a real vanguard party from a sect. The party and its members participate in every struggle in order to help raise the "spontaneous" partial or sectional militancy into a total class view - into the outlook of the party. In this sense, socialist consciousness is developed by the party, and to this extent enters the class "from outside".

Such a party cannot be built in all circumstances - during a long period of capitalist boom, with a desultory economic struggle rather than class actions of any magnitude, a small group calling itself the vanguard party will become a sect, increasingly living in a world of illusions.

But in a situation where the battles of the class are increasing in magnitude, when the ruling class poses a sharp political challenge, an organisation which simply "interprets" workers' spontaneous responses to this attack in political terms is failing in its prime duty. It tends more and more to give a political, class gloss to the present level of consciousness. To describe the dockers' actions as "direct political anti-government action striking right at the sham of parliamentary rule" (Interim Political Report) is to pass from an objective description of the nature of the struggle to a wildly inaccurate description of the understanding of many of the most advanced militants. And optimism about this spontaneous political development leads to a failure to take up the very work that only revolutionaries can perform. It is up to us to explain "the sham of parliamentary rule". As a matter of fact, even the sham of the Jones-Aldington report was not exposed. Such statements as "the 1972 example of the miners will not be lost on the power workers" (IPR) show the danger of over-estimating the spontaneity with which workers draw lessons, and of under-estimating the task facing us.

Because militancy alone does not lead to the abandonment of reformist consciousness, particularly when this is as historically deep-rooted as that of the working class in Britain, we cannot talk of simply incorporating into the ranks of the party all active participants in these struggles.

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b. Letter from Martin Thomas to Dave Stocking, 6 March 1973: extracts.

(1) What are the tasks of a faction document? Surely (a) to map out the necessary tasks of the organisation, (b) to measure the organisation against those tasks, rigorously and unsparingly; (c) to draw all the necessary conclusions regarding the required changes in the organisation.

It doesn't seem to me that your document fulfills this schedule - but the failure is not due to incapacity, but, rather, to an apparent wish to be diplomatic. Thus you start off with an anxious bowing and scraping and forelock-tugging before IS theory; you refuse steadfastly to give any rounded assessment of the leadership and where it is going, confining yourselves to a list of criticisms, you locate your basic disagreement as the "incompleteness" of IS's theoretical development - which clearly cannot be right (it is not because of incompleteness that IS has failed to assimilate the Leninist conception of the party already quite clearly outlined fifty years ago - or has bowdlerised the concept of internationalism)...

(2) The centrepiece of your argument is the inadequacy of IS's "present conception of the building of the party". I agree with almost all you have to say on this point, but I find it inadequate...

Your formulations might not have sounded badly in fact, didn't sound bad - in the Communist Manifesto, 125 years ago. "But since then we have seen two revolutions" and more! The result of posing the question so abstractly is that criticism becomes purely quantitative too much "overestimating the spontaneity with which workers draw lessons", too much "underestimating the tasks facing us", not enough political education.

The function of the party is posed as diffusing a rounded socialist consciousness, within the framework of active participation in mass struggles. But to pose it thus leaves open the interpretation of the party as a sort of ideological "tourist's guide" - traversing the terrain of the class struggle together with the working class, and pointing out and explaining the notable features of the scenery in passing.

And some of your more detailed formulations seem to tend towards that interpretation - for example, your stress on the absence of explanation of the class nature of law as the prime fault of IS during Pentonville Five week [the week of mass strike action in July 1972 which freed five dockers jailed under the Tories' Industrial Relations Act]. Even the timid "Militant" was able to produce a quite lucid explanation of that point, while being utterly inadequate from a revolutionary point of view....

You seem to imply that spontaneous militancy is

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incorrigibly "partial or sectional", and the prerogative of the party is an overall class-wide view. This seems to me not merely to underestimate spontaneity, but also underestimate the party. What is specific to the party is not just a class-wide view, not just a revolutionary will, but a precise, scientific conception, the fruit of years of scientific work and also of years of systematic work in the class (you do not mention anywhere the question of the party learning from the class), and a level of political homogeneity and capability adequate to the task of giving a bold and decisive lead in time of revolutionary crisis (which is something different from the routine task of explaining "the sham of parliamentary rule", etc.)...

(5) Reformism. I find myself in sympathy with much of the general drift of your section on this question, but not all satisfied with it... You seem to reject the whole idea of demands on the Labour Party - seeing the purpose of such demands simply as "exposure". But I would argue that there is more to it than that....

(D) I don't think it would be correct to stress 'Build Councils of Action' week in, week out... We have dropped the names 'councils of action' on the grounds that (a) the name is beginning to have bad connotations; (b) to use it for relatively limited committees is to miseducate people in what councils of action really are...

(E) To pose the general strike weapon immediately in relation to the [Tory pay] freeze is not, I think, correct. The point is (a) the freeze actually can be broken by sectional action; (b) action against the freeze is necessarily at least initially sectoral - the freeze's immediate impact is on particular sectors, whereas the fact against the [Tory Industrial Relations] Act poses itself in terms of particular outrageous acts by the government which have had a clear, immediate class-wide focus.

Thus presenting the general strike as the way to smash the freeze could have a paralysing effect, a la Gormley... [Joe Gormley, right-wing leader of the miners' union, who was then trying to head off a miners' strike by claiming that only a general strike was worthwhile].

2. "It was because IS had no clear programme"

Workers' Power/Left Faction statement on expulsion from IS/SWP, around November 1975

What did the Left Faction stand for in IS?

It commenced in 1972 as a response to the leadership's position on Ireland. One bomb in Aldershot immediately exploded any pretence on their part to argue for support for those fighting the British Army in Ireland. Since then IS's Irish work has diminished to virtually zero.

We objected to this failure to argue for clear Internationalist politics in the British working class. We have consistently opposed IS's opportunistic and unpolitical approach to international work and the building of the International.

This failure to argue clear politics was not, we argued, because of an absence of abstract propaganda for socialism or a planned economy. IS has a surfeit of this. It was because IS had no clear programme and strategy for the class.

We opposed the draft programme offered by the Cliff leadership. We said it was a useless mish-mash of history lessons, rosy portrayals of the future and endless lists of elementary and immediate demands. As such it could never be offered to the class as IS's alternative. We were right. That programme never saw light of day, let alone the test of shop floor battle! It was quietly buried by those who commanded us to obey the conference they so brazenly held in contempt.

We have argued for a consistent fight to build a genuine rank and file movement independent of the swings of the IS leadership. We have always argued for a serious, alternative, workers' programme for the crisis as an answer to the illusions and blind alleys of reformism. We have argued for women's politics not to be an optional extra but central to the battle for our ideas in the working class movement. We are proud of the consistency and correctness of our ideas.

When the £6 limit was imposed, the IS leadership turned in frenzy on the Labour Party. Previously IS had contented itself with making fun of the Labour Party for its falling votes and diminishing ward membership. It was incapable of addressing the confusion sown by reformism in the working class, of providing more relevant answers than 'more militancy', 'hate Labour' and 'build the Socialist Workers' Party'. Ignoring the firm hold of reformist ideas *via* the Trade Union bureaucrats and the sobering effects of unemployment and inflation on industrial militancy, IS has neither the political nor organisational means to tackle these key problems.

IS will neither put demands on Labour so as to mobilise against them nor outline clear alternatives to the old, inadequate, sectional methods of trade union struggle.

We think that such an alternative can only be posed in terms of a clear transitional programme.

3. "As a norm, revolutionaries would try to enter a mass party based on the trade unions"

Extract from minutes of Workers' Fight/Workers' Power fusion discussions on the Labour Party, 1 November 1975 and 4 November 1975.

(SM is Steve MacSweeney, DS is Dave Stocking). "PC" means "Phoenix Club", another name for Workers' Fight

5. LABOUR PARTY.

Hornung: We have certainly not abandoned the fundamental characterisation of the LP as a bourgeois party. Also, we see entry as a tactic. We don't see it as strategic as the 'Chartists', for example, do, i.e. seeing the LP as an instrument of proletarian revolution. Our entry tactic arises from our specific situation - e.g. if we were much larger, say the size of the CP, we would probably not be in the LP.

But we are small, very small indeed. Since 1972 we have seen a certain recession in the industrial struggle and a turn to greater concern with parliamentary politics. The LPYS can be a framework for our work and allow us more possibilities for mass work than we could possibly get independently. There is a certain limited ferment in the LP, and the LP/LPYS allows to increase the carry of our voice.

And we haven't adapted ideologically, as the IMG, RCG, WRP etc have adapted to Labourism without even entering the LP!

It is wrong to counterpose an industrial orientation to a LP orientation. We see our LP orientation as a useful aide to a primary industrial orientation. The Militant probably has the best sociological composition of all the left groups, and our own LPYS recruitment has been more proletarian than our recruitment generally. Moreover, work in the LPYS is good experience and training, especially for comrades from non-proletarian backgrounds.

On the question of mandatory entry into the LP - JP felt that once a general rule had been laid down, there could be individual exemptions.

AGREED to continue 9am, 4-11-75.

2. THE LABOUR PARTY (continued)

Stocking said there were no differences in the general characterisation of the LP. The LF rejects IS's syndicalist approach. However there are differences on entry work. LF does not support total entry. What does it actually mean when PC says industrial work is 1st priority, Labour Party 2nd? How 'deep' is PC's entry perspective? To what political perspective on the development of the LP is it linked? What does PC mean by the 'open valve' connection between LP and TUs? Is the PC tactic based on the idea of a strong left current emerging in the LP? How do we see the role of Benn etc. in this? How do we assess the possibilities of a split in the LP? Is the new-name paper based on a perspective of pushing the LP to the left? The LF approach is to base activity on certain crucial demands, including transitional demands, but to say clearly that the left leaders will betray.

Does entry blur an independent presence? What are the implication of talking about 'supporters' instead of 'members'?

SM asked, what does PC's statement that our main orientation is industrial mean in terms of the balance of the paper? How would the paper be used by those not particularly active in the Labour Party, e.g. those in an area where no LPYS exists? LF would not consider it worthwhile doing LPYS work in an area where no LPYS exists.

Thomas : on the contrary, areas where no LPYS exists are the best areas for LPYS work. We can then build an active, outward-directed LPYS instead of being bogged down in trench warfare with the Militant. The key to our Labour Party work is the idea that the direct struggle of the working class is the fundamental criterion. That determines both the political content of our work and the way we do our work. As regard political content, we proceed as DS outlined; we put forward demands based on the needs & logic of the class struggle & judge all LP institutions and leaders by that. As regards the way we work, we try to turn the LPYS outwards towards the class struggle.

The point is that our LP tactic is an activist tactic, not a scheme based on speculations of finding the right 'platform' to wait for the 'train' of the mass left wing to arrive.

The idea of a contradiction between LP work and industrial work is false. That has never been our problem in balancing our work. Our problem has been balancing LP and industrial work, on one side, and the necessary degree of left united front etc. work on the other. Equally, though the industrial coverage of the paper should be better, the reason why it's not as good as it should be is certainly not our LP orientation. Actually our LP coverage should be better too.

Because of the point above about our LP tactic being an activist tactic, many of DS's questions miss the point. We consider it possible that serious ruptures and serious left wing currents will develop in the LP in the next period. Such a development would be very important. But our tactic has never been based on such speculations. And in any case we relate to any such development with absolute programmatic independence. We explicitly deny that the Tribune left is politically better than the Labour right in fundamental terms. In fact, during the EEC debate we greatly shocked the IMG by pointing out that on the EEC issue Benn and Foot were to the right of Jenkins or even of E.Heath.

Matgama summarised the sections from Pc conference minutes dealing with the discussion on changing the name of the paper. The new-name paper would have the same basic content as the old paper. The key question was: inflexibility of political principles, flexibility of tactics & presentation.

The opposition, industrial vs. LP work, was absurd when considered concretely. It is a question of gaining an implantation in the working class by whatever channels are most open and most fruitful.

We must look at the fundamental question of, what is reformism? The Labour Party is an organic part of the British working class as it has so far developed. Even big direct action upsurges have not outgrown LP politics. What we mean by the 'open valve' is that the LP is based on the TUs. As a norm, revolutionaries would try to enter a mass party based on the TUs; sometimes of course they wouldn't be able to without sacrificing the ability to express their politics.

The problem is that the history of the British labour movement shows a negative experience of zig-zags from sectarianism (SDF, early CP) to adaptationism (Healy, the 'Week', etc).

Thomas : Trotsky, urging the English Trotskyists to enter the ILP in the early '30s, complained that they looked at the ILP through the eyes of the Stalinist party. It appears also that the LF cds. look at the LP through the eyes of IS.

DS: In some areas LF have taken out IS branches whole or almost whole. In such areas we see no reason for not continuing the work we previously did in IS. With an independent presence the LF, even though being a small group, can build big campaigns in the labour movement, e.g. on unemployment. But we need an independent presence, we need to be honest about who we are; otherwise there is a problem of blurring our intervention. E.g. we can't clearly argue the need for a revolutionary party.

Lever: given that we are a small group, and given that we're not the SLL, who end every article with the call to build the revolutionary party, discussion on the the need for a revolutionary party is necessarily propagandist, not something we need to proclaim stridently in our paper. In addition, of course, with the

change in name of the paper, we can be absolutely forthright about such issues in the magazine. DS's idea that groups of half a dozen people can build big campaigns reflects the experience of a small town, Stoke; it is different in major centres. Also DS's conceptions are very parochial.

Hornung said the EEC issue could be taken as a fair test of whether our attitude to the LP was actually accommodationist; but on that issue where the pressure was strongest in the LP we took a principled position.

Of course there are dangers in working in the LP - but then there are dangers in all but the most abstentionist tactics. We are not fetishists about the LP; we do not deny the possibility of individual exceptions to LP work; we always seek to link LP work to class action (c.f the 'Red Letter' resolution on the £6 limit).

DS objects to the minor dishonesties necessary to thwart LP legality. But what is involved? Dave Douglass was expelled from the LP; he went back and said (untruthfully) that he had left the RWP(T), without saying he had changed his politics at all, and he was readmitted. SLL members in the late '50s/ early '60s operated without denying their politics just by saying they weren't members of the SLL. To rule out this sort of deviousness (just a matter of avoiding the most provocative statements) is actually to rule out entry work any time!

Agreed with CR that the best place for LPYS work is where there is no LPYS established. The LPYS work is vital for proletarian contact and for cadre building.

Lever: the 'umbrella' of the LPYS helps a lot e.g. in starting the unemployment campaign.

Stocking: That may be true. But if we present ourselves under the name of the Labour Party that may be a block to working with adult industrial militants who resent Labour Government policies. We can mobilise if we appear under the banner of a tendency opposed to Labour policies. LF would not rule out LF work altogether, but such work should be accompanied by an external organ. LF find it strange that PC should have our paper as our LP organ, our magazine as our external organ. This seems to imply that our main agitation should be through the structure of the LP. Better the other way round.

Matgama: DS's distinction between agitation and propaganda is false. Why is the paper the non-identifiable publication? Because the paper is aimed more at a mass audience & therefore must be usable in LP.

The basic question is, what are we: a name and a badge, or a propaganda group. In relation to ML's reference to Stoke and the LF; we had had an experience with comrades in Bolton who found themselves at a head of a mass movement in that town and became completely disoriented, forgetting necessary tasks of a propaganda group.

Part of the problem is that LF eds. seem unable to envisage our functioning in concrete terms. But take a look at the SLL in the period '59 to '64. Though politically right-wing in many ways, they did combine work in the LP with serious industrial work and an open presence.

SM said he could see how PC could initially use the LPYS to help gain a hearing in the labour movement. But how do we proceed from that towards recruitment? How does our open work outside the LPYS relate to our work inside?

Thomas said it was necessary to understand the relation between mass work and propaganda. Through the LPYS, or otherwise, we can gain a mass hearing for some of our slogans and promote mass actions. We should do this, and PC has done this. But as a small ideological minority, we cannot gain a mass hearing for our complete programme, however we try. The road to that mass influence lies through cadre building, rather than the road to cadre building through mass influence. We cannot recruitly direct from mass work; we must couple that work with intensive propaganda work. This we do in the LPYS. We build an audience in the LPYS through campaigns on selected issues, e.g. unemployment, and at the same time conduct education & debate in the LPYS. There is no duality between our LP work and our open work; in both our presence is defined through our politics, presented mainly in our paper.

Stocking: Now the issues are clearer. PC is underestimating the possibilities of growth for a revolutionary group in the coming period. In the coming struggles, with political questions more sharply posed, transitional demands will become increasingly relevant, and a small but clear revolutionary tendency can recruit through industrial work.

And, even given the centrality of cadre-building, a mass orientation is necessary to win the healthy elements thrown out by the fragmentation of the major revolutionary groups. These elements can be won in large numbers.

Matgama: The LF comrades need to readjust their vision massively from looking at things with IS eyes. E.g. DS's comment on weekly & monthly paper makes sense from an IS viewpoint, but none from the point of view of a small group like PC.

Look at the experience of PC. After our expulsion from IS we didn't refocus our sights clearly. We hoped to win great numbers from IS. When we didn't, we had to refocus, and since then we have learned serious lessons from a whole range of experiences. Cf. Manchester VSC 1967-8; National Port Shop Stewards Cttee; national docks strike 1967; Bolton tenants' movement; various strikes and sit-ins: all big movements in which PC has played a leading role, with good policies, but no immediate results in recruitment.

Even if DS is right on the future prospects, a LP tactic is indicated, because the strains and ferment will be intense in the LP.

Our open presence is and will be absolutely clear vis-a-vis the other revolutionary left groups. A base in the LFYS enhances that presence, rather than blurring it.

Thomas: The issue is not whether we do open mass work. PC certainly does that.

The question is, given that mass work, which is more important: the formal prominence of our 'banner', or opportunities for political propaganda, gained if necessary at the expense of formal prominence of the 'banner'.

Another very clear example of the fact that good mass work does not necessarily generate revolutionary cadre recruitment is the Shrewsbury 24 campaign. PC started that campaign on our own and carried it on our own for the first few months. Yet did we recruit directly from that? No.

LF comrades, basing themselves on IS experience, are not sufficiently aware of the problems of integrating worker-militants into tiny revolutionary cadre organisations. The concept of slow, hard struggle against the odds as an ideological minority is not one that comes easily to comrades trained in the mass struggle. They tend to lapse into trade union parochialism or to become frustrated at the slow progress.

An example to illustrate. We organised a meeting of steelworkers round a redundancy struggle. 30 to 40 steelworkers were addressed by one of our comrades. We were very pleased. The contact who had set up the meeting for us was dismayed. Our criteria were those of winning a minority to a clear position, his were those of immediate mass influence.

Hornung: In that same struggle a contact took up a programme which we had drafted; but then wanted to give up because he only gained 400 votes! And it's not just our experience. Look at the French Trotskyists in the '30s. They campaigned for the united front and gained some sizable hearing for that slogan. Then the slogan was 'confirmed' by the CP-SP united front. The Trotskyists whose ideas had been vindicated did not recruit - on the contrary, they declined sharply. How did they build cadres? Later, with the entry into the SP. It is good that the LF are optimistic on coming out of IS, but they should learn from experience.

On DS's point about militants resenting the Labour Party; you may get that attitude among militant tenants, who are not really linked with the organised labour movement - but you won't get it among seasoned militants - they know very well that there is a left wing in the LP which opposes Government policy.

Lever: DS went off into flights of fancy at the point where he went from saying that transitional demands can be very important and gain a big influence (which is true) to saying that consequently a revolutionary group with clear politics could recruit very fast (which doesn't follow at all). It's much more difficult than that. Also: masses of people may flood out of IS, but we can't recruit from them.

Robin

Camacho : said there was a big drop-out from IS already.

Stocking : A definite independent presence is necessary in view of the situation in IS, even though LF are not basing their whole perspective on the break-up of IS. Without that presence dissident ISers will not consider us.

Industrial work is vital from the point of view of cadre-building. Need for discussion of industrial bulletins.

Matgama asked: is it that the LF wouldn't want a merged organisation to be bound by a common tactic? Or are the LF against contact with the LP altogether? If a paper had all the necessary politics, are the LF comrades saying that it also have a more affirmative organisational identification? If there are sufficient joint forces for a monthly magazine, would that not be sufficient 'banner'?

Stocking : The LF are not against some LP work, but would not want to be bound by a common uniform tactic. Though it is not necessary that the paper carry the legend

"Organ of the Central Committee of ...", we must be able to identify the paper positively with the organisation. A monthly magazine would not be sufficient.

Need for discussion on industrial work, and the question of conducting it in the name of the independent organisation.

4. The WP/WF fusion: the Fourth International and rank-and-file movements

Political resolution of the I-CL fusion, 14 December 1975: extracts.

II: INTERNATIONALISM

The proletarian revolution in Britain is only one subordinate link in the chain of the world workers' revolution. The proletariat, the class which will create communism, is a world class; and capitalism is a world system which, especially in its imperialist phase, has drawn the world together, intermeshing it so that no single part is understandable without reference to the whole.

The communist programme is an INTERNATIONAL programme, or it is utopian. The national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation, and not vice versa.

Our fight to build a revolutionary party in Britain is historically, therefore, only a subordinate part of the fight to build a proletarian-revolutionary International. The primary precondition for such an International is a developed international PROGRAMME. A

PROPAGANDA International — that is, one which as yet lacks mass national sections — can be valid and meaningful as the defender and advocate of such an international programme. We reject the centrist view promoted by IS, according to which an International can only be formed AFTER national mass parties are built.

Trotsky's Fourth International, declared in 1938 as just such a propaganda International, represented the healthy revolutionary-communist tendency which had survived — and which had fought against — the political liquidation by the Stalinist bureaucracy of the Communist International.

In the post-war period, the Fourth International movement suffered ideological erosion and disintegration. This arose essentially from a failure to come to terms adequately with the post-war revolutionary developments in Eastern Europe, China, etc. For Trotsky's dialectical materialism, there has been substituted a vulgar evolutionism, seeing the 'world revolution' as a mystical and pervasive 'process', acting behind or even in spite of the material class struggle. The disorientation is expressed in adaptationist politics, most seriously in evasion, or even treachery, on the anti-bureaucratic revolution in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam, etc.

To this general ideological disorientation, the 'anti-Pabloite' currents have added an extra element of poisonous confusion. They arbitrarily assign all the failings of the post-war Trotskyism movement to their factional opponents, the so-called 'Pabloites'. In actuality, the term 'Pabloism' has and can have no precise historical meaning, because there is hardly a single mistake, however grievous, that the 'anti-Pabloite' forces themselves, collectively or separately, have not committed, usually with that crassness which is peculiar to them.

To their incoherent and often lying denunciations, the 'anti-Pabloites' add loud proclamations of "the party" and "the programme" — as entirely NON-POLITICAL fetishes. By thus reducing their politics to RELIGION, they LIQUIDATE scientific Marxism in the most thorough way possible.

In this sense (and in this sense only) we consider the current represented today by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International to be the mainstream of post-war Trotskyism. It represents the most serious and sustained attempt to relate to the post-war problems. The 'anti-Pabloites' can offer only ideological left-overs from the USFI current's work, together with an obscurantism which is properly their own.

As for the 'state-capitalist' alternative to the mainstream 'Fourth Internationalist' position, the most substantial state-capitalist tendency, the Cliff group in Britain, abandoned basic Leninist conceptions of the Party and the International; moreover its 'state-capitalist' theory is certainly neither Marxist nor state-capitalist! (The internal logic of Cliff's description and analysis of the USSR, as opposed to the labels adhered to for reasons of dogmatism, is bureaucratic-collectivist).

Nevertheless, we do not consider the USFI to be a Marxist International — rather, a centrist obstacle to the building of such an International; and all the greater an obstacle for its pretence, bluff and self-glorification. We WELCOME the forthcoming split in the USFI,

believing that this disintegration of a rotten bloc will increase the possibilities for healthy dialogue and regroupment.

Immediately, we see our tasks as:

- a) building a communist-internationalist organisation in the British working class;
- b) contributing to dialogue, discussion and debate on an international scale, and, out of that, seeking to build international links with co-thinkers.

VII: INDUSTRIAL WORK

The central focus of the League's work is the workplaces and the trade unions. We orientate towards the rank and file, recognising the fundamental role of the labour bureaucracy as 'labour lieutenants of capital'.

As a major instrument of its work, the League will produce factory bulletins, carrying both information and agitation on factory issues and revolutionary political propaganda.

We work for a genuine mass national rank and file movement aiming to unite workers for militant policies, transform the unions, establish rank and file democratic control, and thus oust the bureaucracy. As part of this work we will promote rank and file caucuses in industries and workplaces. Within any such rank and file grouping we fight for communist politics and for communist leadership on the basis of our politics, raising the key elements of a transitional programme as they become tactically relevant, while avoiding any ultimatism or sectarianism.

5. "A need to fight vulgar-Trotskyism"

a. Extract from minutes of I-CL National Committee discussion on the draft Manifesto, 29 February 1976.

Hughes: What is our audience? Advanced workers, facing 3 problems: changing nature of capitalist attacks and leadership, absence of revolutionary tradition, chaos of left groups. Programme should be based, not on '73-'76 cyclical turn but on changed period dating from the late '60s. We should not deal with false ideas abstractly, but as false programmes in the class, e.g. Stalinism. An Action Programme tries to deal with the nature of the offensive, the current crisis of leadership, and the need for a response. It includes a series of demands which go together and build up, leading to the question of power. Present document is an attempt to reconstruct the Marxist tradition, abstract and lifeless, removed from living experience, material for timeless propaganda. In the section of the draft called 'Action Programme', the demands and methods of action are abstract. We have two different concepts of what a programme can be.

Matgamna (summing up) People like Hunt and Evans are still fighting the IS beast; Cleary and Reynolds fighting the vulgar-Trotskyist beast. The latter has much more real existence. A vulgar evolutionist conception of the programme underlies much of the criticism. Tuckwell is correct in part (on the level of political culture in the USA in the '30s) but we are not in a similar economic crisis to the '30s. This is at the root of the debate. Our situation is different from that Trotsky faced in the USA in the '30s. The comrades' talk of "the crisis" is too vague and abstract. We must face the lack of a clear or coherent conception of capitalist development. Trotsky in the '30s had to use a theory of imperialism which was out of date, but still had much more immediate application than it has today.

The document should aim to last longer than a year, but the charge of timelessness is false. Some criticisms based on not having read the draft through.

A vulgar-Trotskyist idea of the programme leads to a false idea of the party. What you get out of the document depends on what you put into it, i.e. the intelligence of the person reading it and more importantly of the party. There is no need to fight the ghost of IS in the I-CL, but there is a real need to fight vulgar-Trotskyism.

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b. "The nature of our Action Programme" and "What is an Action Programme", by Sean Matgamna, from "International Communist" magazine, no.2/3.

THE NATURE OF OUR ACTION PROGRAMME

A socialist programme of action is neither an optional nor an arbitrarily chosen weapon for a party with the politics and the goals of the I-CL. Its nature sums up the essential content of our politics - proletarian self-liberation.

It expresses the most advanced lessons of the attempts by the proletariat between 1848 and 1919 to hammer out a political practice which linked the goal of socialist revolution with the day to day organic struggle imposed on the working class by capitalism.

Social Democracy: Minimum and Maximum Programmes

In the epoch of social democracy, before the great international labour movement collapsed into national fragments at the feet of the warring bourgeoisies in 1914, socialists operated with a minimum programme and a maximum programme.

The maximum programme was the millennium, the unseen goal in the far distance, the subject of abstract propaganda, holiday speeches and moral uplift; the theoretical property of an elite within the loose parties of social democracy. The minimum programme consisted of limited practical goals and the immediate aims of the everyday struggle of the working class.

What was the link between the two? The party and the Trade Unions, being built in the struggles and through propaganda. (A sect like IS today provides a miniscule historical fossil for students of the tragedy of the Second International and its methods).

Capitalism was advancing organically; so was the labour movement. The 'right' Social Democrats saw the process continuing indefinitely until capitalism became transformed by its own evolution, of which the evolution of the labour movement was part - "The movement is everything, the goal nothing", said their theoretician Eduard Bernstein. The mainstream Left believed evolution involved qualitative breaks and leaps, and that the evolutionary process would have to culminate in a revolutionary proletarian seizure of power.

Both failed to link the daily class struggle with the goal of socialism. For the right, accommodating to capitalism and moulding what it could of the labour movement accordingly, this separation made sense, and their rigorous thinkers attempted to make theoretical sense of it. For the Left, the separation led to sterile 'maximalism' and hollow 'orthodoxy' (Kautsky).

In practice, control and hegemony was left in the hands of those whose practice corresponded accurately to the minimum/maximum model; in turn, this overweening reality of the labour movement led the 'orthodox' Left to accommodate to the Right. Ultimately, having won one hollow verbal victory after another in debate, they capitulated to the Right in practice.

Central to both wings of mainstream Social-Democracy, for differing reasons but with the same consequences, was the same failure. They failed to see in the creative self-controlling activity of the working class -

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including workers who were initially, at the beginning of struggle in which they could learn, formally backward politically - the central force for socialism.

Left and Right had in common a bureaucratic, elitist conception of socialism. Their operational image of the relationship of the revolutionary party to the revolutionary class was one of pedagogic teacher to passive pupil, or self-substituting bureaucratic instrument to inert mass.

The Revolutionary Marxists in the Second International

Rosa Luxemburg, first, in company with the orthodox 'left', exposed the relapse to utopian socialism implicit in Bernsteinian 'revisionism' and also the relapse to the substance of utopia-building within capitalism involved in reformist practice.

She then, by 1910, came to understand the empty futility of the political victories of the 'orthodox' and the practical impotence of those, like Kautsky, who accommodated to the dominant forces in the Second International. She learned from the tremendous self-mobilisations of, especially, the working class in the Tsarist Empire during the 1905-7 Revolution, and came to see the reality of European Social-Democracy clearly.

The Russian Bolsheviks did not see the nature of the European 'Left' until it capitulated to chauvinism in 1914 - but they did, right through, relate to the central truth of Marxist socialism which the tremendous combativity and creativity of ^{the} Russian working class kept before their eyes.

They had the advantage over Luxemburg and her small circle in Germany of not over-reacting to a bureaucratised, routinised, essentially elitist party, which they could only see a future for by looking to the explosive latent creative power of the working class to correct it 'when the time came'. The Bolsheviks built a revolutionary party which was uniquely sensitive to the creativity of the working class, in tune with the central and irreplaceable chord of Marxist socialism; which learned from the working class, absorbed the lessons of its struggles, synthesised ^{them} with the experience of the international struggle, and codified them scientifically - thus educating a stable cadre.

Transitional Demands and the Comintern

The communist movement, reorganising itself during and immediately after world war 1, resolved to have done with the minimum/maximum division, with its inescapable consignment of the masses to passivity vis-a-vis the struggle for socialism, which the leaders would talk of and History would take care of.

The central thread of their revolutionary conceptions was summed up in the idea of Soviets (workers' councils) - at the same time the broadest ~~most~~ responsive, most democratic and most effective means for the immediate struggle against capitalism, and the essential organs of the revolutionary proletarian regime. (Significantly, the first notion of a trans-

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itional programme is expressed in Trotsky's analysis of the 1905 Russian Revolution - the revolution that first produced Soviets).

Resolved to mobilise the working class to fight immediately for socialism, the communist movement elaborated the conception of a transitional programme - to link the everyday struggles of the working class with the goal of socialist revolution; to focus every struggle so as to rouse working class masses and direct those masses against the pillars of capitalist society.

Luxemburg, at the foundation of the Communist Party of Germany in 1919 (shortly before her assassination) and the Communist International at the 3rd and 4th Congresses began to elaborate such a concept.

The Communist Parties attempted to root themselves in the immediate working class struggles and relate those struggles to an overall struggle for socialism. They began to bring 'socialist' propaganda down from the cloudy skies and harness it to the hard daily grind of working class struggle.

The full socialist programme was broken down into a linked chain, each link of which might successively be grasped, and the movement hauled forward, dependent on the degree of mobilisation, intensity of struggles, and the relationship of forces.

Everyday demands, as on wages, were expressed not within the framework of acceptance of a capitalism that the socialists believed to be maturing towards some optimum time for ripeness, when it would fall. They were expressed against capitalism, so as to challenge capitalist prerogatives and the assumptions of capitalist society on a day-to-day basis.

This transitional programme, in the hands of a party organised for immediate war on capitalism and neglecting at the same time neither general propaganda nor the most 'minimalist' concerns; that was the weapon that the communists armed themselves with (though the Comintern never actually formalised a transitional programme).

It summed up the pillars of the bitter post-1914 knowledge on which Marxist socialism reconstructed itself - War on capitalism, not coexistence with capitalism, waiting to inherit its legacy either peacefully or with a little bit of last-minute force. Mobilisation and involvement of the broadest layers of the working class in immediate conflict with capitalism, a break with elitism, propagandism, and evolutionism. The integration of the various fronts of the class struggle, ideological, political, economic into one strategic drive.

The Transitional Programme for the Comintern and for us

The conception of a transitional programme and transitional demands was the product of the great Marxist renaissance and lessons drawn from the terrible collapse in 1914.

Certainly it was part of a world view that saw the struggle for socialism as immediate. But the conception itself, the criticism of the theory and practice of the Second International out of which it came, was a major

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conquest in understanding the relationship of the daily struggles of the working class to the struggle for socialism, even if the possibility of struggle for socialism were not quite immediate. The Communist International seriously began to discuss transitional demands at about the same time as it accepted that capitalism had survived the post-world war 1 earthquake and reached temporary stabilisation.

Above all the conception of a transitional programme represented a break with the elitist, bureaucratic, evolutionary socialism to which its central core, mass mobilisation in class struggle, is the very antithesis.

Nominal adherence to the method of transitional demands of the Communist International or of the 'Transitional Programme' written by Trotsky in 1938 is no guarantee against Second-Internationalist conceptions. There are no such guarantees. Within nominal adherence, there has been a general reversion in the Trotskyist movement to the level of the Second International. One can even find 'Trotskyists' for whom transitional demands are clever devices to manipulate the working class, to con them into socialism; others for whom they are only lists of measures to demand of this or that government; others, again, for whom they are merely propaganda formulas for the literary 'exposure' of the reformists; some, indeed, for whom they are semi-religious talismans.

But in history the idea of transitional demands summed up the break with the evolutionary, bureaucratic, elitist conception of socialism. That is what it means for the International-Communist League.

INTERNAL INTRODUCTION TO THE DRAFT MANIFESTO OF THE I-CL

(It would help if comrades read first the section of the draft on 'The Nature of Our Programme')

The character of this draft needs some explanation. Though the major section is an Action Programme, the document as a whole is an attempt to state the general politics of the I-CL in the form of a general manifesto. And even the Action Programme section itself contains a great deal of exposition and explanatory material.

What started as an attempt to produce a short Action Programme has developed into a document of this character because if you attempt to work up a document of answers, slogans, action projects you either are guided by 'inspiration', pet ideas, etc, or some other arbitrary and subjective approach, or else attempt rigorously to draw practical conclusions from a Marxist analysis of reality and general codifications summing up the experience of the working class so far, focused on the situation facing the British working class.

Your Action Programme will be preceded, ^{and} accompanied by general propaganda and in depth expositions of the various parts of the Action Programme - otherwise the cadres of the organisation themselves will not understand, or not adequately understand, the Action Programme or some of its sections.

When the 1938 Transitional Programme was produced, a whole background of socialist culture, inside the FI ranks and even to a degree on its periphery, could be assumed. The massive debate and the hammering out of such slogans as on the workers' government by the early Communist International was still living and recent memory (at most 15-17 years back) for many of the cadre. Many of the early documents were in their possession or easily available. For example, in the 'Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International', Trotsky's exposition of the workers' government slogan feels no more need of additional warnings of the dangers discussed by the CI than to add a summary of the misuse of the slogan by the Stalinists).

Today:

A) Massive lacunae exist in Marxist analysis of society, amounting to a major crisis of Marxism. The weakness of the draft Manifesto on explanation of the condition of capitalism is one illustration of this.

B) The general cultural level of the revolutionary movement has been thrown backward massively to such an extent that perhaps the majority of the 'Trotskyist' groups in existence could learn valuable positive lessons from the Left in the Second International!

C) Many of the basic concepts used in drafting the Action Programmes of the '30s have lost most of their meaning, or never had any, for the present-day Left. Some of them ("Workers' Control", "Nationalisation", "Workers' Government") have been given a reformist/utopian character in their current usage. The very conception of socialism itself needs to be restated - for it has simply been perverted into a repulsive elitist 'statism' by the dominant sections of the British left.

D) Many, or most, of the demands essential to an Action Programme have been made into fetish-objects, outside of and above rational judgment and critical and concrete assessment by the 'orthodox' Trotskyist sects, because of being part of the 'Transitional Programme'. And even the more flexible USFI 'Trotskyists' who don't parade the Transitional Programme in ritual procession as Catholics parade statues of Jesus or the feast of Corpus Christi, keep it as an ancestral heirloom in a place of reverence, not quite sure what to do with it but given to taking chunks of its verbiage to buttress some political monstrosity, whether it be the IMG's recent misuse of the idea of the

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Socialist United States of Europe to gain their entry into the ranks of working class chauvinism on the Common Market, or their earlier misuse of the slogan of workers' control. (The politics of the IWC today are a still recognisable version of the central slogan of the European FI sections' work in the Social-Democracy in the early to mid '60s). They are like barbarians who appropriate stones from a once imposing building whose structure has been shattered, to construct hovels for themselves.

And, after the fetishists and their political first cousins, the vandals who believe their hovels are holy because stones from the 'Transitional Programme' cathedral are visibly part of them, come - naturally! - the negative fetishists, IS. For them too the Transitional Programme and the method of the Transitional Programme are outside of rational consideration. Irrational rejection is their attitude, with fear as superstitious as the reverence of the WRP. They reject in all conditions slogans like the Sliding Scale of Wages, and are entirely confined to the minimum/maximum conception of a programme (See the section of the draft on the 'Nature of our Programme' for more on this).

The proof of the negative-fetish character of IS's attitude to the Transitional Programme is that in all their writings and comments, despite all their pretence of cool rationality, they have never rationally assessed the origins, significance, elements, remaining validity etc of the 1938 draft. All we have is the true assertion that the demands and slogans in the Transitional Programme were presented in the 1938 document in a setting of a brief analysis and all-pervading recognition of chronic capitalist crisis - and, taking off from that, Tony Cliff allowed himself (at the Skegness rally, 1971) to regale an audience, half of which had never heard of the Transitional Programme, with the idea that if you take it seriously you wind up like Posadas, believing in flying saucers.

For all these reasons the explanations, restatements (as on state capitalism vs socialism) and detailed expositions with reference to the history of the slogan (as on the workers' government) are essential.

"The significance of the programme is the significance of the party", said Trotsky, discussing the Transitional Programme of 1938. For the I-CL this type of manifesto signifies an attempt to start a process of educating and developing the organisation's cadres in the politics of the Transitional Programme. The Action Programme element, the slogans and responses, are tools in the hands of the cadres- it is vital that the cadres understand the use, the limits, and the relation to the other tools, of each demand. For we do not present or serve up even a much more simple 'Action Programme' in toto: the organisation uses its judgment to decide how to swivel the various elements in the programme so as to be best used in any concrete situation.

Given that framework, there is no reason why we cannot valuably produce (as cd. Smith has suggested) a simplified short pamphlet for wider circulation, called 'Action Programme', summarising some elements from the Manifesto and backed up by the Manifesto and other material.

Is there too much explanatory material? It must be a matter of opinion. Too little would keep us on the level of savages playing with tools and finely designed instruments we have found in the ruined city of revolutionary communism - which we haven't developed and only dimly understand - that is, the general level of the so-called Trotskyists. To write too much, many of the sub-sections would be thick articles if not books!

Too little explanation would be a bare collection of slogans drawn together mainly from the Transitional Programme. It would be a literary exercise in collation, of not much value, and would only be a codification and extended performance of what the Political Committee and the Editorial Board of the paper normally do, and what the editors of Workers Fight and the old WF Steering Committee normally did, in response to separate events. In fact, it would be less: such articles for the paper or policy documents would deal with reality and provide a concrete analysis. A skeletal Action Programme of the 'collection of slogans' type would not.

Attempting to draft the document, I felt that when even the distinction between state capitalism and socialism can't be taken for granted, we needed more in a manifesto. Too much explanation - apart from the question of the character of the Manifesto, that's the sort of problem we should have! Actually the theoretical work of the group over the next period will partly centre round the discussion and critical assessment and elaboration of many of the slogans and ideas here presented - the production of serious studies in the magazine, pamphlets, translations and reprints.

The central danger, though, is too little. Alfred Rosmer in "Lenin's Moscow" reports the comment a communist militant made when Lenin's pamphlet 'Left Wing Communism' appeared around the time of the 2nd World Congress of the CI in 1920. He said: "It is a dangerous book", meaning that people would take from it only recipes and licence for artful dodges and 'flexibility' of a type altogether different from that which Lenin was trying to teach the ultra-lefts. He was right, of course.

The Transitional Programme of Leon Trotsky is also a 'dangerous book' in the epoch when almost the whole political culture of which it was a sort of distillation or 'abstract', designed for a specific purpose, has disappeared. The specific character of the Transitional Programme and even more of the Action Programme for France - lean, honed down, unintentionally creating an illusion of literary-scientific self-sufficiency, though Trotsky disclaimed anything like that - bears witness to the fact that Trotsky was preparing levers to insert into the labour movement, where a lot could be taken as common ground and the task of the Trotskyist cadres was one of reorientating the existing movement for action. It also relates to an immediate situation where the labour movement 'switches points' and fights back - or is crushed in the relatively short term. We can operate with no such assumptions. The cadres of so-called 'Trotskyism' have largely forgotten or are ignorant of much that the 1938 Trotskyists could take for granted in the mass labour movement they related to in the 1930s (or, at least, did take largely for granted, on pain of otherwise renouncing all hope of reorienting the movement in time for the coming showdown). Moreover, we operate in a situation of simmering, rather than crushing, crisis.

The Transitional Programme's slogans have too often been abused, misunderstood, applied in opposition to the spirit of the method of the Transitional Programme - by the French OCI (Lambert sect) for example, with their 'workers government' without reference to the state, class mobilisation, or programme in any sense of the word. The same in Ireland where former associates of Workers Fight apply what they understand as the Transitional Programme approach to the 26-County Labour Party - and effectively if unintentionally support the coalition government!

In the Middle Ages physicians worked from anatomical textbooks by Galen which they inherited from the ancient world. In a period when it was deemed degrading for such people to do manual work, the doctor would sit in the operating room on a high stool, with Galen's book open, giving directions to minions and apprentices who actually carried out the

operations. Eventually the textbook was discovered to deal not with the anatomy of men and women, but of monkeys! If our former comrades in the 'League for a Workers' Republic' were to go and study the discussion and documents that produced the slogan and demands in the slim pamphlet they fetishise, they would have to understand that they bear the same sort of relation to Trotsky and the early Comintern and Fourth International as the medieval physicians did to Galen.

No - definitely, the danger is of 'too little'. That 's the lesson of the history of the Transitional Programme since the death of Trotsky.

Finally, on the use of the Manifesto/Action Programme. One of the central theoretical insights of the old Workers Fight group from its study of the history and problems of the Fourth International was on what a programme is and is not. It is not a blueprint, a fixed document, nor even codifications from experience distilled into directives for action. It is all of these things, but more - a living, fluid interrelation of these with conjunctural analyses and, above all, concrete assessments and responses on the part of the revolutionary organisation. It is a living thing, not a document. It can only live and develop in and through the practice of the revolutionary party - "The significance of the programme is the significance of the party".

Its revolutionary validity or otherwise is determined not by whether its basic theoretical bedrock and basic analysis is sound, but by the other more immediate, more conjunctural factors - that is all that is specific to the reactions, concrete analysis and practice of the party. This is where revolutionary Marxism divides from even the best and most useful academic blueprint-making. Not to understand this is to be open to serious errors - the error of seeing 'a document' as 'the programme' in itself (the beginning of the process of fetishisation); the error of believing a programme can have revolutionary life apart from the revolutionary party and the working class. (It can have a sort of life, the basic codifications that is, but more like suspended animation, with the risk of 'Galenisation' if too long divorced from the practice of a revolutionary organisation or if allowed to flake off from the revivifying struggle for its development as the party develops). It can lead to the sort of errors Workers Fight made on the USFI (though our relationship to the USFI consists of a great deal more positive than errors), of appearing to agree with most of the basic codifications, which we saw as the programme, and being perplexed by the vast range of political, practical, and tactical differences that somehow existed and separated us from the USFI. We didn't understand that these too are 'the programme' - the living part, and, for immediate politics, the most decisive part.

If the NC decides to adapt a manifesto of this character, its purpose will be as:

- A) A propaganda document, but one related very much to immediate problems.
- B) To serve as an arsenal (the Action Programme section) of responses over a whole period to the events in the class struggle. (It is important to see it as covering a whole period and not rooted too directly in "The Crisis"). It will be of use here to the degree that the Political Committee is of use in reacting to and anticipating events - and also of responding creatively to new situations and gaps in the document, of which there are bound to be some that the NC will not detect. Central here is a Marxist detachment and critical spirit. Even if every member of the NC agrees with every phrase in the final draft - then especially there can be no fetishisation, no Bordigist complacency about our own products. In 1930 Trotsky acidly replied to the Bordigists who claimed they had 'not departed from' their programme of 1925, which in 1925 Trotsky had approved, by pointing out that the purpose of a programme is not 'not to be departed from', but to be used and developed and supplemented as new situations

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arise. The same comment would do for the present-day 'Trotskyists' who claim 'not to depart from' the Transitional Programme.

C) To present to the chaotic ranks of the 'revolutionary militants' outside the I-CL as a basis for why they should build the I-CL with us.

D) To serve as a seed-bed for popularisation (and discussion) articles in the paper.

E) To stimulate production of Action Programmes for industries where we are involved and for other fields of work.

F) As the basis of a simple summarised 'Action Programme' pamphlet.

S.Matgamna 23-2-76

P.S. There are some short sections missing from the end of the present draft. These are unlikely to be controversial and will be handed out at the NC.

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c. "Document on the draft Manifesto" by Dave Hughes and I-CL Political Committee resolution on that document, February 1976.

2. Document from Hunt on the draft Manifesto

An Action Programme for the present period would:

One - proceed from an analysis of the developing instability of world capitalism, the roots of its crisis and the prospects for capitalism. Most importantly it would develop the social and political intentions open to capitalism.

Two. Faced with attacks, unemployment, the erosion of shop floor bargaining, etc, the existing leaderships and methods of struggle become increasingly inadequate. Our Action Programme must clearly nail the false perspectives, the false programmes and strategies existing in the working class movement. This cannot be done as liturgy, but (with a background of concrete historical accounting) against the test of what is needed now to stop the attacks and push the class struggle forward. In this context we can clearly and relevantly differentiate ourselves not only from 'State Capitalism' but Labourism of the right and left, Stalinism, and the perspectives and myths of the so-called revolutionary left. (The existing document has no mention of Bennism, the trade union right and left, Scanlon, etc.)

The present draft does not proceed from such a concrete analysis. The present draft does not politically and immediately equip us and our audience with a critique of existing strategies and programmes.

Three. A programme of action (proceeding from such a background) does not seek to be merely a list of demands. Against each of the major attacks on the working class it earmarks:

- 1) The effects and methods of the bosses' attack. On the basis of the experience of the organisation this is done with reference to the most important and generalisable events, i.e. on participation we must start with both the car industry and the steel industry.
- 2) The central alternative policies and demands that we pose as our alternative to the attacks.
- 3) The methods of struggle to be deployed - recognising both the peculiar and the generalised characteristics of the struggle to date.

The existing draft is patchy and un-concrete in its description of the attacks. Participation, Bannery, productivity dealing, voluntary redundancy, redundancy payments, compulsory arbitration, speed-up are all barely mentioned. They are not the problems of one year, they are the central area of an attack which has lasted for over six years and which will continue. The methods of struggle, the concerns of struggle, are likewise unworked out and underdeveloped. A desire by Cleary to write a programme that will last has left us with:

- 1) demands that differentiate us little from other 'Trotskyists';
- 2) an absence of analysis and guidelines of struggle. Note on unemployment, participation, and welfare cuts we have not even recommendations for campaigns, battles - and our attitude to the Labour and TU leaders is not made relevant in this context.
- 3) An overemphasis on government - on demands on Labour as a methodology - an underestimation of the immediate objects and tasks of struggle.

We need:

- 1) A comprehensive statement of the politics of our organisation in relation to the history and experience of the workers' and Marxist movement. This draft does not do that. The explanation of our politics is abstract and removed from the experience of that section of workers which we seek to address.
- 2) An Action Programme for the class - our strategy and road forward. The draft does not give us this.
- 3) We will also need a clear and concrete commentary to the Action Programme we produce.

Therefore:

1) A drafting commission should be established by the NC to structure an Action Programme on these lines. Reference should be made to the 'Workers' Answer' material too. Drafts and amendments should be submitted to this commission.

2) The commission should ensure day schools, branch meetings etc with informed discussion.

3. Sketch outline by Hunt of an alternative structure

- A. crisis of capitalism - its particulars and its logic
- B. response; crisis of leadership - false programmes.
- C. nature of attacks: itemisation, description, particular problems of groups of workers.
- D. our policies - our battleground.
- E. methods of struggle; how we must fight; direct action; united fronts.
- F. attitudes to leaderships; demands; rank and file.
- G. the party and the International.

4. Resolution on Hunt's criticisms and the general nature of the document

(1) We note Hunt's criticisms and agree with the general drift of most of them.

(2) We refer the draft, alternative drafts, amendments, those criticisms, etc. to a drafting commission, recognising, however, that:

a) This document must include, and operate within the framework of, a fundamental reassertion of the basic conceptions of communism and Bolshevism. This is vital since the forms and verbiage of communism and Bolshevism have been incorporated by most present-day 'Trotskyist' sects into semi-Second-Internationalist politics. This reassertion should be coupled with a systematic comparison of our politics and those of our opponents in the labour movement.

- b) The document must relate to the general increase in social, political and economic instability of the world capitalist system. It must also recognise, however, that:
- (i) the document includes our fundamental aims (otherwise it is simply not a revolutionary programme) - i.e. it covers, at least in outline, the whole period from now to the seizure of power.
 - (ii) the document must have validity for more than a few months, therefore it cannot be rooted too closely in the present particular cyclical crisis (the generalised recession which began in late '73 and seems to be drawing to an end at present).
- c) The document cannot possibly deal with purely ephemeral tactical questions as, for example, NAC, or particular individual trade union leaders. It can, however, lay down certain general ideas on methods of struggle and tactical rules.

6. Debate on the Stalinist states

DEBATE ON THE CLASS NATURE OF THE USSR at the I-CL summer school, Rugeley, Staffordshire, 8 July 1976.

Dave Hughes: Capitalism, classically, means isolated independent producers competing on an anarchic, anonymous market. But capitalism has changed: monopoly, imperialism.

Marxists have always considered state capitalism a theoretical possibility. E.g. Bukharin — who argued that capitalist anarchy would remain on the scale of the world market. Since Bukharin Marxists have made a poor analysis of the role of the state in capitalism — e.g. Nazi Germany, where the commodity nature of labour power was heavily limited.

What is a workers' state? A transition period is necessary between capitalism and socialism, but the transition is not an automatic economic process. It needs conscious political intervention. The bourgeoisie grows in the womb of feudalism with its own economy, and there the transition from the old society is a matter of freeing economic forces from the fetters of feudalism. But the working class relies on its state as the pillar of the process of transition.

In Russia, by 1921 the soviets were no longer genuine workers' organs. Lenin argued it was a workers' state with bureaucratic deformations. The soviets, trade unions and party remained able to be transformed/reformed by the working class. By 1926 many oppositionists were arguing that Russia was state capitalist. In 1925 Zinoviev argued that the NEP meant state capitalism in a workers' state. The "Democratic Centralist" faction argued that the power of the NEPmen and the market was expressed in the new policies of the Russian bureaucracy, who were its agents.

Trotsky argued that the state apparatus was playing a bonapartist role, balancing between the world economy, the peasantry and the working class. As long as the regime could be subordinated to the working class by reforming methods, the state was a workers' state.

Between 1926-27 and 1933-34 there were major changes in Russian society. The Trotskyists were in disarray. Preobrazhensky and Piatakov argued that Stalin's left turn expressed the essence of the Left Opposition platform, and that Stalin needed the help of the Left Opposition to carry it through. Trotsky argued that the Stalinists could not carry it through.

In 1933-34 Trotsky redefined his criteria for Stalinist Russia. It was a workers' state because of nationalisation, the state monopoly of foreign trade, and planning, even though the apparatus was no longer reformable, and revolution was necessary. Features of this position were that the bureaucracy was a parasitic formation with no constructive economic role, and counter-revolutionary.

The outcome of World War 2 posed problems for this analysis, with the survival and expansion of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The idea emerged of deformed workers' states in Eastern Europe without proletarian revolution. Up to 1948 the Fourth International argued that the East European states were still state capitalist.

Mandel's political economy of the USSR is that the plan, allegedly established by the workers' state (although the planning mechanisms date from at earliest 1928-29), create a compulsion to grow, which is held back by the bureaucrats' desires for consumption. The major contradiction is the bureaucracy versus the plan. The plan is reified. The workers are ignored.

What alternative ideas? Bureaucratic collectivism? Bruno R developed the idea of a "bureaucratisation of the world" with a tendency towards socialism. Shachtman argued that bureaucratic collectivism was based on slave labour. It was barbarism. It had no laws of motion. It was a static society. Shachtman was inconsistent on whether bureaucratic collectivism was progres-

sive or reactionary.

Cliff developed a deterministic, mechanistic theory. He argues from the East European case. He argues that the USSR and Eastern Europe are clearly not socialist. The bureaucracy in the USSR has played the classic role of capitalism. He is near to the Menshevik theory that there was no alternative to capitalism in Russia — e.g. Cliff describes Preobrazhensky's work as a manual for state capitalism. The argument is based on abstract historical parallels and historical analogies.

Ticktin characterises the USSR as a system of waste on an enormous scale, plus the social relations of a police state.

Different versions of state capitalism: according to Harman and Cliff, in 1928-29 the Soviet bureaucracy found itself in a situation of either perishing (under external and internal forces) or ending its balancing role. Bukharin argued an open restorationist position. Stalin adopted the policy of the bureaucracy establishing itself as a class, with collectivisation, the drive to suppress any vestiges of workers' control, etc — developing its own self-consciousness and culture.

Other state-capitalist positions have existed — e.g. placing the date of counter-revolution earlier (around 1921) or later (around 1936-7).

There are problems in establishing that the counter-revolution led to a *capitalist* regime. What is capitalism? Harman and Cliff argued that the key features of capitalism are (a) alienated labour — leading to capital formation, (b) determination by the world economy and world market, especially through arms competition, although that is competition of use values, (c) expansionism, e.g. Eastern Europe.

IS/SWP argues that the USSR is imperialist. This is a very loose concept of imperialism.

My position: the question of whether the bureaucracy is a class or a caste, and the question of capitalism, are not separate; but the position that the bureaucracy is only a caste is clearly wrong. The bureaucracy is a class because of its specific relation to the means of production, and its ability to exploit.

The plan is not counterposed to the bureaucracy — the planning mechanisms were established by the bureaucracy in a struggle against the working class. The bureaucracy does not own property? It is a collective class owning state property. The October Revolution destroyed the normal barriers to complete state capitalism.

What are the role and function of the ruling class? The question of the world economy *is* paramount, is central in explaining the way the bureaucracy disposes of the product of labour. The USSR's bureaucratic class has had a subordinate, defensive place in the world economy. It has had increasing involvement recently with the world economy.

There has been a historical tendency on the part of the Trotskyist tradition to fail to recognise the falsification of their analyses by history. A failure to develop an adequate political economy of the USSR.

Many alternative theories, such as Shachtman's, are reactionary and un-Marxist.

The things to be rejected in the state-capitalist tradition are the confusion on imperialism, the confusion on the role of arms, the Menshevik tendencies. But the bureaucracy has to be recognised as a decisive and controlling class, dominated by competitive survival in the world market, with trade playing an increasing role.

CD: What do you say the bureaucracy *is*, especially in relation to the party?

Dave Hughes: The bureaucracy is the state and military apparatus, which is the kernel of the party.

Martin Thomas: Do you say that the USSR is imperialist?

Dave Hughes: Its relation to Eastern Europe is not imperialist. It is expansionist and colonising. It is an integral part of the imperialist world economy, but the classic mechanisms defined by export of capital do not hold in relation to Eastern Europe, though they do in relation to India, etc.

Phil Semp: Firstly, that assumes that it is *capital* that is exported. Secondly, capital was exported before imperialism. The question is the forces driving for it.

Mick O'Sullivan: The USSR's plan can't be seen as a real plan. There is also the question of destalinisation, and the problems it gives rise to in partly ending the complete atomisation of the working class.

Sean Matgamna: I take very seriously the section of our 1975 resolution which says that the "deformed and degenerated workers' state" theory is a working hypothesis only. It is very much that for me. However, in this debate we are focusing on the USSR. Even on the USSR I would dissociate from the USFI, e.g. from Mandel's idea of the chief contradiction being between the bureaucracy and the plan.

What is the argument about? It is clear that the bureaucracy is a distinct social stratum, parasitic on the working class, ruling through a police state, unable to plan the economy rationally, and needs to be smashed by a political revolution with wide-ranging social effects. That is agreed. But the argument relates to the possibility of socialism.

State capitalism is theoretically possible. It has happened episodically, e.g. in Egypt, now returning to a private capitalist economy, but only episodically, without a smashing of the old ruling class. The Stalinist states are products of revolutions of one sort or another, and are not episodic. If they are state capitalist, then all these revolutions leading to state capitalism imply substantial new possibilities for capitalism.

Dave Hughes argues against the IS/SWP analysis of the USSR as imperialist, though if the USSR is state capitalist then logically it must be imperialist. But if state capitalism is a way for China, the USSR, etc. to break out of imperialism, then state capitalism is progressive, and Marxists, not being moralists, should recognise that, and be defencists. Also, that view would imply a revision of the Marxist idea of this being the epoch of proletarian revolution. It would imply a perspective of proletarian revolution only in isolated Paris-Commune-type cases.

There is *no* theory of state capitalism, as Dave Hughes's exposition made clear. Cliff's theory is not state capitalist, nor Marxist. Neither Cliff, nor Dave Hughes, establishes capitalist economic laws of motion. E.g. Dave Hughes rests his argument that the USSR has been state capitalist since 1928 on its involvement in world trade now. Cliff rests his on competition of use values in arms production, and thus stands Marxist economics on its head.

Cliff tries to cram his model into Marxist categories, but unsuccessfully. In fact he describes a new ruling class, of a new type, controlling one third of the world, with a new form of society. It destroys the whole Marxist perspective. It wouldn't necessarily follow today as it did for Trotsky in 1939 that bureaucratic collectivism will expand world-wide, because capitalism has expanded since World War 2.

The "deformed and degenerated workers' state" theory is not very satisfying. But bureaucratic collectivism and state capitalism have added nothing to the "deformed and degenerated workers' state" programme of anti-bureaucratic revolution; thus we can afford to be cautious and conservative about the unclarity of "deformed and degenerated workers' state" theory. The process of developing a new theory of society, if we need that, will be long. We do not need to make a break now to state capitalism or bureaucratic collectivism. We can use the "deformed and degenerated workers' state" theory as an "algebraic formula" on the model of Lenin's formula of "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry", provided that we keep our political cutting edge on a clear definition of political revolution.

A revolutionary tendency cannot live on speculations. It can live with uncertainties if it keeps clear its definition of the political tasks.

Bureaucratic collectivism is no more than "society X". Shachtman's working theory is a "deformed and degenerated workers' state" analysis with different labels.

On Dave Hughes's points. Trotsky's change of definition of a workers' state? Trotsky himself explains the change. He was trying to analyse a real process of degeneration of a revolution. "The methods of the Stalinist bureaucracy are the same in all fields. The results differ according to the resistivity in the Communist International and in the USSR" — *Writings 1933-34*.

Planning was not a direct result of the 1917 revolution. But the role of the state was begun by the revolution, was a product of

the revolution.

Dave Hughes protests against the IS/SWP theory that the Left Opposition's programme represented state capitalism. But that theory follows logically from the state capitalist thesis. The same economic world pressures would have existed if the Left Opposition had won in 1928-29.

Why 1921? One can argue that in 1921 the party restored capitalism. I would deny it on the grounds of the political character of the party. One can argue that the counter-revolution came with the change in the party with the Lenin levy in 1924. One can argue that the counter-revolution came in the mid-'30s with the final annihilation of the Bolshevik party. 1928 was just a continuation, although a massive expansion, of the previous role of the state.

Capitalism is not defined by accumulation and exploitation. Cliff defines capital as hardware, machines — a non-Marxist definition.

Bonapartism? Trotsky's analysis in the '20s was that the state balanced between the peasantry and the workers, in the '30s that it balanced between the gains of the revolution and imperialism. The latter explanation falls down since World War 2. The bureaucracy has shown greater solidity than Trotsky allowed for.

The bureaucracy's role in the economy? It obviously has one. But a necessary one? In the deformed workers' states, obviously it has, since it led the revolutions. In the USSR, no. We don't assert that the plan is "the" plan, merely that it operates within a framework which is the product of the revolution. There is an antagonism between the economic system and the bureaucracy, represented for example by the waste which Ticktin points to.

Eastern Europe? Dave Hughes is contradictory to hold that the USSR is capitalist and expands, but not imperialist. Yet it is certainly not classic imperialism between the USSR and Eastern Europe. Obviously there is a rapacious nationalist policy by the bureaucracy, but it's a policy option, which imperialism isn't — it is a necessary drive.

Dave Hughes spoke of the Communist Parties as conscious state capitalist forces in the West — probably a slip. The CPs are state capitalist in the same sense as the Tribunites, but they are not clearly working for a USSR-type economy as the Shachtmanites alleged.

Alienated labour? It has its full development under capitalism — but elements common to all class societies.

Phil Semp: [no notes of this contribution]

Martin Thomas: [no notes of this contribution]

Pete Keenlyside: In Dave Hughes's introduction he destroyed his own conclusion. Dave Hughes rejects Cliff's conclusions but fails to reject his premises. However, he didn't say what *his* model of state capitalism is.

Dave Hughes tells us no more about the system, he just changes its name. There is no proof that the bureaucracy is a class. It owns nothing beyond personal property. The logic of state capitalism is towards bureaucratic collectivism. There are also implications from the idea of peaceful counter-revolution — the film of reformism in reverse. Dave Hughes is at the same stage as Shachtman in 1939-40 but going in the reverse direction.

Mick O'Sullivan: West European CPs? They are state capitalist in their programmes, therefore utopian in advanced countries. Stalinism *has* helped the existence of some new state capitalist societies.

Sean Matgamna: Another contradiction in Dave Hughes's presentation: he argues that the USSR is state capitalist, but not imperialist. What does that imply in relation to the US-USSR rivalry? Defencism. On Mick's question — Dave Hughes seemed to suggest the old Shachtmanite theory. CPs are not embryo new ruling classes, but they have state capitalist programmes in the sense of Fabianism.

Sue Thomas: It is useful to exchange the criticisms that state capitalist comrades have of established state capitalist theories, and "deformed and degenerated workers' state" comrades of established "deformed and degenerated workers' state" theories.

The problems of state capitalist theory — imperialism, exchange value, etc. — are real. But false arguments have been raised.

For example, Pete Keenlyside raises the old argument about ownership and inheritance. It is minor if we can prove the general capitalist nature of the economy. Sean's comment on the Left Opposition misses out two planks of the Left Opposition platform in addition to industrialisation — proletarian democracy and international extension of the revolution. In 1928-29 the defeat of the Left Opposition meant that the hopes of world revolution were shattered, and therefore the bureaucracy turned to class self-preservation.

Historical roots? There are supposed to be a variety of state capitalist regimes. These problems equally apply to "deformed and degenerated workers' state" theory. Implications that state capitalism is progressive? Jamaica is likely to go on a state capitalist course at present. Progressive? Only very relatively. It upsets imperialism a bit, but not critically.

Dave Hughes: Sean's points? State capitalist theory implies socialism is off the agenda? The USSR is the only case of proletarian revolution leading to state capitalism.

Elsewhere it was non-proletarian revolutions or Red Army intervention in Eastern Europe. Is state capitalism inevitable? Not so in the USSR — because the victory of Stalinism was not inevitable. Nor, e.g. in Vietnam — again, it is a matter of the conscious reactionary role of Stalinism in the process there.

In Vietnam, Cuba, and China, state capitalist regimes have been progressive insofar as they free economies from imperialism. But Stalinism is reactionary as compared to the ripeness of the world for socialism.

From the 1930s there was a coherent effort by the Stalinist bureaucracy, dominated by the world market, to establish an imperialist and state capitalist economy. The features of imperialism and competitiveness within Stalinist economies are increasingly reviving. Now there is the emergence from the autarkic shell of conscious state capitalist strategy. It is linked to the French and Italian CP programmes for nationalist state capitalism.

Sean says the bureaucracy is not necessary irreplaceable, there is no real economic drive to imperialism, the bureaucracy is antagonistic to the economy, and there is a continuity of the 1930s expansion with the forms established by the revolution. But the collectivisation decision was a *reversal* of previous policy. The 1928-29 counter-revolution period was one of massive upheaval. The plan was a conscious creation of the bureaucracy. The Left Opposition's programme, by contrast, was for workers' democracy in planning — the fundamental productive force for socialism.

Sean asks us to accept an algebraic formula to describe the regime, and to see the dangerous logic of abandoning that formula. There is also a dangerous logic of the algebraic formula! See Mandel on the fundamental contradiction being between the bureaucracy and the plan, and the Fourth International positions on workers' states being formed without revolutionary working class action. The "working hypothesis" has caused tremendous confusion.

Sean Matgamna: Most of what Dave Hughes says is true. But it misses the point. Recognising the reactionary role of Stalinism does not lead to state capitalist theory.

The bureaucracy developed Russian industry to avoid being flooded by foreign goods? No, there was a state monopoly of foreign trade.

On Sue Thomas's points: I recognise the possibility of state capitalism. But the bourgeoisie still exists, there is no revolution, the state isn't smashed — it is not like even Third World deformed workers' states. Where is the bourgeoisie in the Stalinist states? There is none. If a ruling class exists it is the bureaucracy. But there is no capitalist economy. Hence the bureaucratic collectivist logic of the argument.

Dave Hughes's point on the "algebraic formula": I also said that the "algebraic formula" enabled us to preserve theoretical concepts. Yes, the "algebraic formula" has been misused — but the presumably more precise IS/SWP theory has led IS/SWP to just as bad conclusions. Or look at the politics of the bureaucratic collectivists — the IS of the USA refused to take sides in the Vietnam war.

State capitalism progressive? Sue Thomas said: perhaps in a

very limited way. But if it applies to one third of the world it is a major phenomenon. And it is absolutely sectarian to argue that it is not progressive because the world is ripe for socialism. How do we know the world is ripe for socialism? How do we say it is an epoch of transition when there is no transition?

Also: the idea that the USSR's transformations in Eastern Europe were to thwart the working class. No. To thwart the working class they did what they did in Greece.

Dave Hughes says the USSR is not imperialist but helps imperialism. That makes sense on "deformed and degenerated workers' state" theory. But on state capitalist theory it implies a strange Kautskyst theory of a benevolent non-imperialist state capitalism.

Dave Hughes says that the USSR has been building up for 20 years at home to enter the world market. That supposes the bureaucrats are infinitely more far-sighted than they actually are.

There was continuity with the forms established by the revolution? Yes. The policy changes in 1928-29 were possible only within the framework established by the revolution — at the same time as the collapse of real capitalism!

Inevitability? The past, in hindsight, was inevitable.

Dick Pratt: What *sort* of workers'-statist aren't you? What kind of deformed workers' states are in existence? Where and how?

Martin Thomas: [no notes of this contribution]

Phil Semp: Sue Thomas on Jamaica and state capitalism: state capitalism there would be progressive as against imperialism. Sean's argument on inevitability is wrong

It would seem to imply that the defeat of the Left Opposition was predetermined. But the real question of the progressive character of state capitalism: it is true that progress is not the same as economic growth, but the Stalinist states are different from the economic growth of imperialism.

"Allegorical" arguments are being used. E.g. USSR as "prop of world imperialism" must be distinguished from the USSR being imperialist. E.g. the USSR's "export of capital" to India and Afghanistan must be seen as more political than economic.

Restoration of the price mechanism etc. would exist to some extent in a healthy workers' state. It does not mean that the economy is capitalist. Does bureaucratic investment in heavy industry derive from their own interests? No: though the way they invest derives from their own interests.

The world economy determines production priorities in the USSR? Not except very vaguely.

Martin Thomas: Dick Pratt asks "what sort of workers' statist"? I consider "deformed workers' states" very much a working hypothesis.

Phil Semp on inevitability: I don't think the developments were inevitable. But if you say that all these states are state capitalist, then you can't avoid the conclusion that the development was more or less inevitable.

Dave Hughes: Inevitability? The victory of bureaucratic counter-revolution in the USSR did lead to a fundamental change in the CPs' programme.

The "deformed and degenerated workers' state" comrades underestimate the degree of consciousness of the bureaucracy. They have an idea of the bureaucrats thrashing around in the dark economically for the last 40-odd years. But the plans represent specific plans and aspirations of the bureaucracy. There was a drive to set up temporary autarky.

Arguments that "XYZ would happen in a healthy workers' state too" are not useful because we agree that capitalist features can exist within a workers' state.

Why does the USSR have a police state? In its period of ascent the bourgeoisie poses as the leader of the whole society — promotes democracy. But the Soviet bureaucracy, because of its counter-revolutionary role, can't pose as the leader of the whole society, can't afford open debate.

State capitalism is not progressive. Since the world economy has established an international division of labour, the establishment of new national state capitalisms is utopian and reactionary in comparison to the possibilities of the labour movement.

7. The Labour Party dispute in 1976

a. Dave Hughes, "Industrial Perspectives", circa June 1976 (extract)

Industrial work and the Labour Party:

Comrades have argued that the contacts and ~~periphery~~ necessary to do industrial work can be located through Labour Party work. The argument runs that there is no division between Labour Party work and Industrial work.

1. We must not overestimate the flow of industrial militants into the Labour Party the most significant sections of shop-floor leadership exist organisationally outside the individual membership of the Labour Party in most areas. This does not mean to say that no significant contacts for industrial work can be made in the Labour Party.

2. We should not forget the historic split (not that we seek to glorify that split) between the TUs and the MP in the class struggle. Militants look to trade union struggle first and foremost on ~~sbattles~~ ~~after~~ over wages, conditions, jobs, the MP is seen as monopolising the question of government - of what should the Government do about it. We do not recognise the split between 'economics' and 'politics' in our agitation and propaganda. But we must not budge from our position of seeing the central arena of struggle as direct industrial action for a clear workers alternative - ie. political struggle on the shop floor. Only in the TUs only in the workplaces do militants expect to mobilise the force and sanctions to push forward their demands. Only in exceptional circumstances (including the question of local expenditure) do militants expect Labour Party bodies to lead a struggle.

3. In this situation to invite militants into the LP with us is fraught with problems unless we have won them to support for WA's politics: it runs the risk of defocusing away from central battles, of positively steering them away from what must be the principle preoccupation. On its own it cannot be a strategy for industrial work - our branches must be capable of relating to and concentrating on the industrial perspective of such contacts not seeing joing work in the Labour Party as a holdall for our work.

Work in the LP and TUs is only the 'same thing' in that our political programme is the same although, in propaganda terms it is 'swivelled' in a different direction. TU bodies - shop steards cttees, district cttees, union executives have the power to direct their members in mass struggles - the Labour Parties rarely have this ability because they rarely have a mass activist-base. The difference is quantitatively so great to assume the status of an imperative to revolutionaries to direct their main attention to the trade unions.

An organisation that ignores this stands to miss the boat in the coming period. Our Labour Party work must stand as an auxiliary, as a complement to our Trade union orientation. The history of our industrial work, its neglect even in comparison with our haphazard Labour Party work, the propensity of our comrades to gravitate to the broad campaigns, the propensity to routinism, necessitates a clear campaign in the organisation to rectify this backlog, to refocus on the industrial struggle.

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b. Sean Matgamna, "On Labour Party Perspectives", 12 September 1976.

1. THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS AND THE TRADE UNIONS

Communist revolution demands the prior liberation of the working class from bourgeois ideology. In Britain, where the privileged conditions of the Empire allowed a great degree of freedom of working class activity to be tolerable to the bourgeoisie, the role of the labour bureaucracy has been crucial. The education system and the media, of course, reinforce the ties of bourgeois ideology over the working class; most important, however, in a situation where the working class has created an organisationally-independent political force and has periodically engaged in major struggles with the bourgeoisie, is the role of the trade unions in sustaining the false consciousness created by the basic social relations of bourgeois society and restricting the struggles of the working class from breaking through that consciousness. The Trade Unions 'socialise' the class to acceptance of bargaining within the system and therefore taking responsibility for it in time of crises.

The last 2½ years have shown that Trotsky was not at all exaggerating when he wrote that: "In England, more than anywhere else, the state rests upon the back of the working class which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population of the country. The mechanism is such that the bureaucracy is based directly on the workers, and the state indirectly, through the intermediary of the trade union bureaucracy".

The MP was an extension into the bourgeois parliament of a force to carry out direct political bargaining in parallel to the economic bargaining of the unions - political reform and amelioration of the working class lot as complement to the economic reformism of the unions.

2. THE LABOUR PARTY

The Trade Union bureaucracy created the Labour Party under pressure of blows from the ruling class (Taff Vale, Osborne Judgment), itself responding to intensifying international pressure.

The great revolutionary upsurges of the British working class (early 19th century, Chartism) had already been defeated before they could have had the chance to link themselves with scientific communist theory (Marxism). After the defeat of Chartism and the rise of the Empire, a definite labour aristocracy consolidated itself in the workers' movement in the late 19th century. The mass party of the British working class therefore was created, not as a party influenced by Marxism (like the French, German, or Italian social democracies), but as a conservative party of social reform. At its founding conference the trade unionists insisted that the Party constitution should not include even the formal statement of a socialist aim. The sectarian attitude of British Marxists to the Labour Party hindered any challenge to that conservatism.

Until 1918 the Party had a relatively loose federal structure. It had no individual membership (except through the affiliated societies: ILP etc). In many areas the Trades Councils carried out the functions of a Constituency Labour Party.

After the first world war the Party leadership responded to the ferment in the working class through tightening the Party structure (with the individual membership constitution, and the rejection of CP affiliation, finally made definite in 1925 - though the CP's principal predecessor, the BSP, had been affiliated). Sectarianism on the part of the newly-formed CP (only after great pressure from the Communist International leadership did it apply for affiliation to the LP, and then not in such terms as to elicit a favourable response from reformist workers) blocked the possible development of revolutionary influence in the LP. Communists, however, retained important influence in many local LPs, and in the course of the 1920s the Communist-led National Left Wing Movement of expelled CLPs involved up to a quarter of all CLPs.

In the 'third period', however, the CP liquidated the NLWM. With the depression in the workers' movement after 1926-7, the experience of Labour Governments,

and the rapid growth of the integration of trade union bureaucracy and bourgeois state (Mondism etc) the LP became stabilised as a bourgeois political machine.

As a result of the criminal Stalinist mis-leadership of the CP, however, the LP had retained its massive political hegemony over the British working class. Left-wing movements continued inside it. The ILP was a pole of attraction until in the 1930s it broke from the LP - and subsequently, failing to break from centrism, withered away. The Socialist League, later in the 30s, was probably the most 'left' reformist opposition yet in the LP. The Labour League of Youth, founded in 1926, was taken over by the Stalinists but wrecked by them and Transport House in 1939.

The 2nd world war and 1945-51 saw the further consolidation of the Labour Party as a machine for running capitalism and of the integration of the trade unions and the state. The TU block vote was the reliable bulwark of the right against the constituency left movements round the Bevanites.

But the experience of 'In Place of Strife' shows not only that the 'political wing' can take on an autonomy, but more importantly, that autonomy's limits and constraints, and the elasticity and durability of the TU-LP connection. True, the straight bourgeois party, the Conservatives, was equally unable to control the unions. The crucial difference is that the unions were effectively able to restrain and control the LP from the inside, with the aid of very limited direct action: just as there is active collusion and even promotion of Labour Gov't policies today by the TUC.

The basis of Labour reformism throughout the LP's history has not been any direct control by petty-bourgeois elements, but the direct control of the bedrock organisations of the working class, themselves dominated by the bourgeois ideology of working within the system. Stalin-Bukharin in the mid-'20s attempted to construct a theory of a sharp differentiation between the right-wing politicians of the LP and the TUs - "the policy of the Anglo-Russian Committee... was based completely on the fiction of (trade union) autonomy: the party of MacDonald and Thomas is one thing - taught Stalin - but the trade unions of Thomas and Purcell quite another" (Trotsky). The IMG has recently partly revived this theory, making Wilson/Callaghan/Healey/Jenkins "honorary Tories". But the problem is not that the LP is a two-class party, good proletarians vs. bad petty-bourgeois & Tory agents. The problem is of a reformist mass working class movement, which remains reformist even during mass direct action upsurges as from '71 to '74.

Where, as then, those upsurges do not take on a massive enough scope to go beyond the system to the point of creating dual power or workers' power, the mass militancy naturally ebbs back into the channels and norms of parliamentary reformism. Even if in 1972 we had reached the level of Soviets and dual power, the major force within those Soviets would in political terms have been the LP. Though the LP lacks the organisational monolithism that made German Social Democracy such a powerful force for reaction within the German Soviets in 1918-19, it would have been our major opponent.

Therefore any attempt to counterpose the unions to the LP, as being the fighting organs of the class, is sheer ignorance, not only on the obvious levels that it has rarely been the case that the union machines have fought, that there is a bureaucracy, that there has been a decline in trade union branch life probably proportionately more important than the much-discussed decline in the CLPs - but because the union machinery is the solid basis of the LP, a force for the right against both socialist politics and militant direct action throughout almost the entire history of the LP. It was more than right-wing demagoguery which claimed that the 'Bevanite' disputes were between the workers' movement 'proper' and airy-fairy 'dreamers' of disparate backgrounds.

3. THE 'OPEN VALVE'

The Unions and the LP and TCs etc form a complex, interacting network. When we talk of an 'open valve' between the unions and the LP there is nothing mystical about it. In all advanced capitalist countries there is a symbiotic interaction between the trade unions and the mass parties based on the working class. The LP is organised on a constituency basis consisting of wards and affiliated trade

union branches; the possibility exists of a free flow between the unions and the LP and in so far as the existing working class movement in Britain is politically active even in a minimally independent sense (i.e. the organisational sense) it is through such channels that the activity takes place. It is for example possible - and desirable - for most I-CL members who belong to a union to get nominated as delegates to their local CPMs.

Discussion about the quantity of such activity is useful and necessary for rational deployment of our resources. But to deny that it is so, or to ignore the organic link between the MP and the unions, is to make any rational allocation of forces for work in the labour movement in its all-round totality impossible.

4. ARE THE TRADE UNIONS THE 'CENTRAL FIGHTING ORGANS'?

By focusing on "the unions" as "the fighting organs of the class" we implicitly take on a syndicalist coloration, and indeed it is a right-wing accommodationist 'syndicalism' which sees the unions as a homogeneous bloc and ignores both the control of the bureaucracy and the central responsibility which the unions as a whole, and their modus operandi, bargaining within the system translated into Parliamentary politics, have for much of what we find obnoxious in the LP*. In so far as the focus on "the unions" is meant as a focus on the centrality of working class direct action, it is a mystified and extremely confused expression of that focus, and one which stops us from seeing and intervening in the labour movement as a whole, and thus militates against us preparing to do the maximum in developing our own organisation to help working class direct action, above all to help transform it into conscious communist politics.

In so far as the workers in the last decades have 'looked to the unions as their fighting organs', it has largely been to shop floor organisation. The authority regained by the unions in the last few years was paralleled by a re-growth (astonishingly rapid given the 1964-70 record) of LP candidates after 1970-71. It is necessary to relate to both, to understand the complex of inter-relationships. We all vastly underemphasised the importance of the opposition of first the trade union organisations as a whole against In Place of Strife and then of the unions and the LP as a whole against the Industrial Relations Act, in evoking the explosive atmosphere that triggered spontaneously when the 5 dockers were jailed: yet the contrast between the response to the 5 and to the Shrewsbury pickets illustrates nothing if not that.

The power of the official movement, acting according to the reformist logic of taking responsibility for the system in creating the present working class acquiescence to wage cuts etc in face of capitalist crisis is only another illustration of the same phenomenon. The working class has not been beaten except by the combination of the limits of its own reformist outlook, the limits of direct action (1969-74) which is not revolutionary either by the consciousness of its participants or objectively by the massive scope it takes on, and the tremendous power of the apparatus of the labour movement.

For a number of generations the working class has "gone to school with Labourism" (the phrase is Trotsky's, writing almost half a century ago about one then very pessimistic but possible variant of development: the variant that we now have to live with and overcome). That has been possible precisely because of the role of the trade unions in the '20s, '30s (Bevinism), and in the right-wing domination that was so all-pervasive thereafter until the '60s - and because of the inadequacy of the revolutionaries. The developments of the late '60s and early '70s were no more than a kink within the pattern. The present relationship of the unions to the Labour Party and of both to the Callaghan government and to the bourgeois state illustrates it graphically. Those who insist on the major focus on "the unions and the industrial milieu", who counterpose "industrial milieu" and "LP milieu" as totally separate, who see the LP as qualitatively different -

* 'Syndicalism' usually has left-wing connotations, as in relation to the pre-world war 1 revolutionary syndicalism which Trotsky described as "a remarkable rough draft of communism". But there has also been right-wing syndicalism, like for example the Jouhaux group which dominated the French CGT after world war 1.

- a) obscure and mystify our real central focus - working class direct action;
- b) by an ignorant syndicalist fetish will unwittingly deprive the organisation of the possibility of relating flexibly to the working class movement - creating a quasi-syn icalist sect;
- c) impose on the organisation a way of looking at the complex reformist labour movement, political and industrial, that is so selective that it phases out of the picture whole areas of the interconnections and criss-cross interactions of the political and industrial segments of one organic movement - precisely those areas where a clear understanding is vital for the organisation.

An equivalent of the one-dimensional picture H/E/L draw would be to take a map of extremely difficult terrain, with inadequate roads, produce a simplified version, mainly of the roads, with much of the essential detail removed, get someone to memorise the simplified version and then set them to travel over that territory blindfold. Blindfold? Yes, because otherwise your senses would allow you to see when you were in forest territory and likely to crash into a tree, walk into a ravine, or drop over a cliff.

In the labour movement direct sense impressions can allow a certain amount of empirically adequate reaction to seen events. (For example,

H & E's limited degree of recognition that the LP may be important 'in some areas' before the fusion; or, more strikingly, the attitude of one leading comrade of the Workers League who, in conversation with Reynolds and Smith, said that he agreed with Hindess's analysis of the LP - that it had lost all working class roots - but agreed with the WL working in the LP in certain areas, and was himself seriously thinking of joining his local CLP.) Often, however, your immediate impressions and experiences will lead you to see the opposite of the actual relationships. The general revolutionary-left reaction to the industrial militancy of 1969-74 is an example; so is the case of the SLL, briefly WF, member, who concluded from 1972's events that a revolutionary party was not necessary since the working class was spontaneously doing a great job. (He was even wrong on the spontaneity, not seeing its connection with the official campaign! WF did not begin to see it until early 1973). We need full and adequate maps of the terrain and the interconnections, to take account not only of the gut reaction against the MP - which is good for political neophytes, but criminal for supposedly mature revolutionaries - or of the 1969-74 direct action, but also of the whole analysis our movement has made over many decades of the British labour movement as a whole.

5. A MASS LEFT CURRENT IN THE LP?

But what does the open valve mean concretely here & now? Evans in particular insistently asks and re-asks the question: is there a mass influx into the LP, do we expect one, etc.

There has, beyond dispute, been a serious re-growth of individual LP membership since 1970, which continues active - and there is considerable ferment, though it is limited and perplexed because it too often, even at its most 'left', shares many of the ideas about accepting responsibility etc. Nevertheless the Tribunites could, if they had the will for it, organise a serious and substantial movement against government policy, one that could actually lead to growth and draw a serious influx into the LP. An illustration of this is the massive response by factory convenors, to Benn's proposals on nationalisation.

The period now resembles the period from 1947 to the resignation of Bevan, Freeman, and Wilson in 1951 - ferment, disgruntlement, no focus, no leadership - with the additional restraining factor of the fear of the government falling. Whatever the effect on the morale of the Tribunites of the attitude of the union leaders and of people such as Foot significantly they retain an oppositionist stance. Whatever the future personal fate of Foot or of Benn, it is a gross mistake to write off even this sort of element. Shortly before he resigned, to re-emerge as the leader of the scattered left-wing forces and to trigger the internal crisis that lasted from 1951 to 1955 and even later, Aneurin Bevan was responsible as a minister for bringing militant London dockers to trial under wartime regulations against strikes. (They were acquitted - the dockers struck

under the slogan "While they are in the dock, we remain out of the docks"). Organised opposition and some influx, though hardly a mass influx is possible. We do not expect a mass influx. We cannot make any infallible prediction on the likelihood of the Tribunites leading a serious fight-back; baldly, we do not think they will. In any case, to clarify the issue, we would be willing to argue with our opponents on the basis of such an assumption. For cd Evans' insistent question is fundamentally misconceived.

While objective conditions, trends and movements in the class and in the class struggle, etc, are the parameters of our work and our strategy - in this case, an orientation to a reformist working class - we categorically reject the view that the tactics of a group the size of the I-CL can have any direct automatic or mechanical relationship to such trends. Because of its size, the I-CL has an immense autonomy in tactical manoeuvres to put on muscle, put down roots in the class, relate to layers of militants, etc. It will only do this if it is tactically flexible. Only in the final analysis are its tactical and organisational manoeuvres related to and restricted by the big trends in the class struggle etc. One illustration of this is the American Trotskyists' breakthrough to leading industrial mass actions, in 1934: the Minneapolis coalyards were by no means the centre of US industry - they were simply where the Trotskyists were able to find an opening.

In the dispute in the I-CL now our side is simultaneously arguing for an orientation to the mass trend in the workers' movement - reformism - towards the great epochal task posed to communists in Britain, of overcoming reformism; and for a flexible approach to small-group building, which is our immediate, next-step, priority. It happens that the two coincide.

However, if we as we are now were faced with an IS-like group of 2,000-5,000 in a condition such as 1968 when about a dozen WF members entered an IS of about 1,000, then there would be a very strong argument for 'fusing' with - entering - that organisation. Some of us might advocate it. Inside such an organisation we would simultaneously argue for a correct appreciation of the LP and the task of eliminating reformism. (For an organisation of a few thousands the appropriate tactic would probably be serious partial fraction work in the LP now. But not self-evidently. IS is not a proscribed organisation for the LP. Depending on circumstances we might advocate total entry). (See Appendix on IS).

6. TACTICS & STRATEGY

For us the LP as the mass reformist party is central and we refuse to adopt any but flexible tactics towards it. For L, H, E things are different. They denounce us - so dishonestly or maybe just stupidly as not to merit refutation here - for allegedly seeing I-CL tactics as totally separable from the class struggle and working class trends: while themselves failing to rise above an utterly crude and empirical impressionistic attitude to the LP (on the IS mould) and.... advocating catch-penny opportunist tactics as on the Walsall by-election. The coherence? Quite simply they have neither a stable view, nor an adequate theoretical appreciation of the problem of dealing with reformism, nor a mature view of tactics.

Here E's obsessive questioning about how we see the 'trends' etc in the LP developing is most instructive. For us it is not the determinant - given that there is a serious, though limited, ferment in the LP, that it relates to forces now politically active, vast, and with deep roots in the working class, compared to our present size, and that no other comparable and contradictory opportunity for intervention to build the I-CL in the labour movement exists.

In the '30s the Trotskyists talked of entry in a number of different circumstances, usually to do with growth, ferment, crisis (or, as in the USA, freakish re-growth) of centrist or social-democratic forces.

Self-evidently if there is no political life one does not enter. * But it was

* At the same time one would keep in mind that even a shrivelled social-democratic sect can have a political weight and resonance out of all proportion to its size - precisely because of reformism of a TU sort in the working class, and the synchronisation of Social Democratic ideas with both bourgeois indoctrination of the working

only - to my knowledge - after the development of vulgar evolutionism in the post-Trotsky 'Fourth International' that the question Evans obsessively poses about evaluations of mass trends in existing parties became central. Trotsky also analysed mass trends, general tendencies, etc - for example in his argumentation on entry into the French SP (though in relation to Belgium the case for entry rested much more on the general centrality of the LP in the workers' movement and on perceived openings for "the lever of a small group"). However, for Trotsky tactics were always a matter of revolutionaries seeking a real, active relationship to the working class where opportunities presented themselves, not of revolutionaries chasing after the waves and currents of History. Thus, even in the French case - where the sharpness of the immediate social/political crisis made gross trends of much more immediate relevance to revolutionaries - Trotsky's argument did not rest on a view of the SP developments as the centre of politics in France: he recognised the 'miserable' social composition of the party and the fact that most advanced militants were outside it. In post-war Trotskyist entrism, on the contrary, the concept of a necessary objective trend towards a mass left current in the Stalinist or social-democratic party became central - with the would-be revolutionary protagonist being ancillary to that trend.

Masses and mass trends are relative. If there were genuine mass influx into the LP, we could not gear into it directly anyway - we would relate directly to individuals and handfuls of people. In fact the question Evans poses as central to any MP tactic - will there be a mass influx? - only became central to Trotskyists after they ceased to regard entry in a short-term perspective of political self-promotion and growth, and developed the tactic of deep entry; that is, started to see their central role as one of spotting the right evolving trend in which to immerse themselves. E has picked it up uncritically - it is after all the predominant idea after a quarter of a century of vulgar pseudo-Trotskyism. Without realising it, he has the vulgar-evolutionist 'Pabloite' conception. Or a caricature of it - the early 1950s 'FI' forces after all worked out their ideas seriously, attempted coherence and rigour. Evans parrots these ideas not realising that an official group position which he formally accepts - on the FI - has as its centre a critique of the whole vulgar-evolutionist conception.

Politically and psychologically E represents here a passive, academic, consumerist tendency, forever ready to discuss trends, influxes and outflows etc. Nowhere is there a driving will to find a road to growth, to the real labour movement, for the I-CL. The tendency is not unlike that of the Naville trend in French Trotskyism which Trotsky criticised bitterly: "But if.. and then.. and if? To foresee everything and to provide for everything in advance is impossible. It is necessary to understand the situation clearly, to determine the tasks and to proceed with their fulfillment".

The present issue is certainly not ex-WP versus ex-WF, as H, E & L attempt to present it. We will however point out that the WF tendency developed from a nucleus of 4 to a national tendency because it started in 1966 with a - limited - critique of vulgar evolutionary Trotskyism, and thereafter aggressively pursued, with the writings of Trotsky and Cannon as guide, a policy of organisation-building linked to a focus on the mainstream of the labour movement. As it happens we think that entry should be the norm in Britain, and superficially that may seem to parallel deep entry. No. It is not with us, as with the M, a matter of riding to 'power' with Labour, but that the openness of the existing mass party of the working class in this country is, almost uniquely, such that revolutionaries can exist in it more or less openly, making no concessions except for a few trivial organisational precautions. And because it is the mass party of the working class, that is where revolutionaries ought to be.

However, Evans and the others who for the moment are making fools of themselves peddling the formula that we should have $\frac{1}{3}$ (scientific precision!) in the LP and $\frac{2}{3}$ outside operate with a strange romantic view of the past of the LP. They demand

.../...
class on the nature of the state, etc, and a vague, undeveloped socialism or yearning for change. "On the eve of the 1924 legislative elections, the bureau of the ECCI in a special appeal to the French CP pronounced the SP of France 'non-existent'. I protested in vain in a letter to the bureau against this light-minded evaluation, explaining that a reformist parliamentary party may retain very wide influence with a weak organisation and even a limited press" (Trotsky, Wr.1930,p.42)

of us that we give them some guarantee, or at least commit ourselves to the hope, of a mass upsurge in the LP wards. They seem to believe there was once a thriving LP life bearing some relationship to the nominal individual membership. As far as we know there has never been that! Probably in the period from 1945 to 1954-5 there was more involvement - certainly there have been some shifts in working class participation levels and so on. But nothing qualitative - unless you want to argue that the upsurge since 1970 is such. Certainly there is more life in the LP now that since the unilateralist/Clause 4 controversies of 15 years ago - and with younger and fresher forces often involved, more likely to engage in a campaign comparable to the post-'51 Bevanite campaign against the Party leadership than just to fade away as did so many between 1964 and 1970. It is in the nature of social democratic organisations that their active membership usually is tiny as a ratio of their support. It is not in relation to the vastly inflated nominal membership of the LP, individual or affiliated, that we should judge the present LP and YS - but in relation to the I-CL, its size, its tasks, and the opportunities in the social-democratic arena for us.

7. AN ILLUSTRATION: AND SOME OBJECTIONS

As illustration of why, we will take Tower Hamlets CLP (probably a bit better than the average LP). About 70 delegates attend the monthly GMCs, more than half TU delegates, not ward activists. Where is there a more typical, minimally politically active, body of workers for us to reach, moreover workers 'representing' organisations numbering tens of thousands? Trades Councils? Sometimes. We should be there too. It is much more accessible to most of our members to be in wards and CLPs. Aren't they backward and reformist? Some - some are militants, reformist militants. Aren't we lending credibility? We have little to give - on the contrary, we gain a hearing, integration, contacts, including industrial contacts. Isn't it corrupting to encourage working class militants to become involved in such a milieu, to draw any of the few worker contacts we have into active LP work away from the pure proletarian situation of the factory? If such a person is close politically, it can (a) be a training in how to fight reformism in the factory and (b) be a drawing of her/him into active collaboration with us in a way that is meaningful in combating the general reformism s/he will meet - and finally, into the I-CL. If the person in question is not politically active at all, or is not politically active outside TU activity, but is a reformist in electoral terms, in outlook etc, then drawing him/her into active struggle on specific issues can be the beginning of politically transforming him/her. Reformism demands passivity. Sincere reformist workers drawn into activity in the reformist mass party, in association with revolutionaries, can be transformed into revolutionaries.

Our approach - building our organisation on the basis of our politics, actively seeking to find a route to transmit those politics - allows that flexibility. The petty bourgeois workerist tendency, lacking a rounded view of the whole labour movement, and having a superstitious fear of the Labourite face of reformism (though not of the TUist face of the same reformism), are helpless in dealing with such problems.

They confuse technique - factory bulletins, paper sales - and geography - the shop floor, more usually standing at the factory gate - with politics. No: they substitute technique for politics. Or again - No. They substitute a fantasy about a magic technique (and a few magic slogans) for either a real technique or real politics.

But don't we lose credibility, prestige, face, by the limited camouflage we adopt in doing this entry? Have we much to lose? A group our size will recruit on propaganda for its full programme. It will engage in actions, attempting to use transitional slogans in struggle and as part of that struggle to draw some people further along the line of linked demands, beyond the immediately relevant slogan or slogans to our full politics. Very occasionally - usually not under circumstances it can control or plan for (cf. the Minneapolis example again) - it will engage in an exemplary action that will focus a lot of attention on the grouping responsible (suitable self-identification, publicity etc is obviously not something we fore-swear). In so far as one can make sense of their conception, and especially the

way they counterpose their - fantasy - plans for exemplary industrial work as a means of gaining credibility for the I-CL, H/E/L operate with a mental image of a valiant I-CL doing "propaganda by the deed", as opposed to our more traditional conception of propaganda by explanation. Even apart from the fact that a propaganda group gets its ideas across through all-round explanation, and that in the very most favourable circumstances only a limited amount can be got through to people by exemplary action, this is self-evident nonsense. By definition we are weak in ability to perform because... barring freak situations we are weak. The propaganda of the deed approach counterposed to a more rational conception is another fantasy - the 7-stone weakling from the body-building advertisements kicks sand in the face of the giant 17-stone bully to 'prove' he is stronger and tougher. Since things in reality are not quite like that, immediately subsequent events are very likely to provide 'an example' of the opposite....

8. ENTRY WORK & THE UNITED FRONT - AND WORKERISM

We lose almost nothing - we can gain enormously. Entryism is a variant of the United Front; the tactic developed by the Communist International after 1921 to win over the social-democratic workers, who were a big minority or a majority in most European countries. Essentially it meant communist organisational and ideological independence, coupled with unity in action with reformist workers, dictated by real class interest; the reformist workers would learn in action. For Britain the CI advocated affiliation of the CP to the LP.

Lenin outlined the reasons for this approach in Britain: the CP could, apparently, make open propaganda, calling the LP leaders traitors, without automatic expulsion - "the British Communists must demand and get complete freedom to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens". So can we today, without the formal affiliation.

The Trotskyists of the 1930s, having decided the CI was dead for the revolution, sought for ways of building their own organisation. Entryism was frequently used. It is the united-front tactic adapted to conditions of terrible weakness of the revolutionaries. I-CL cannot with much success approach IS even for unity in action. We can just about make such proposals to the IMG. IS, IMG, I-CL together could not realistically proposed united-front unity in action to the LP. Entry means by-passing the formalities.

Most of the objections to taking opportunities such as participating in meetings of 70-odd delegates (like Tower Hamlets CLP monthly meetings) in conditions of very great political freedom of propaganda are strangely coupled with a quite peculiar idealisation of workers in the factory place. The factory is the heroic battle-front - especially to the petty bourgeois who have never been in one, or never ^{for} more than a few months. The GMC, or ward, is the grubby place where the political consciousness that is the dominant one among our class - including in the factories! - is starkly revealed. From this flows the psychological need to deny the organic link between the two, to blinker oneself to the fact that even in the 'heroic' phase of a strike action the basic political concepts and framework of ideas usually remains that so starkly and uglily bared at the GMC or ward. Idealisation and romanticisation of "the worker" in the factory on the one hand, and, to speak frankly, something akin to snobbishness in relation to the real political consciousness of the real workers on the other - that is the mark of petty bourgeois workerism. It is a killer disease for an organisation like the I-CL because those 70 Tower Hamlets GMC members just happen to represent the only working class we have got in the area - apart from the few CP sectarian-stalinoid social-democrats and the 'revolutionaries'. They are not meaningfully separable from workers in factories (!), and they are often more accessible to us - though certainly when they move into strike action may well be a time when they - and other workers presently more backward - are most accessible to our ideas, and show the 'true essence' of the proletariat bestirring itself in a way that bears some relation to its historic role as we conceive of it.

The 'revolutionaries' who indulge in a combination of 'workerist' romanticism, usually from a distance, or peering in fascination at the mysterious world beyond the factory gate where one is trying to sell papers, and squeamish or snobbish reluctance to probe into the realities of the reformist consciousness

that dominates our class, are sick. They also belong to a distinct class category - petty bourgeois workerism. That is the general coloration of the H/E/L tendency. It is clearly expressed in Johnson's attack on the idea of colonisation, in IB5. He quite explicitly approaches the question from the angle of the petty bourgeois, and his or her problems after a period of higher education in adjusting to factory-type conditions. Does he think workers actually like that romantic place, the factory? Hardly. But he forgets that for a group with a heavy petty bourgeois coloration the problem is first of all to make it possible for the organisation to be inhabitable for workers; that it first concerns itself with implanting itself amongst the working class, with the problems of workers, especially young workers roused to a painful awareness of their educational deprivation simultaneously - and inescapably so - as we arouse them to political consciousness. Johnson's article shows beyond question that petty bourgeois workerism is alien and antagonistic to building a real workers' revolutionary organisation. His crudity and explicit expression of the attitudes more subtly expressed by H/E/L is valuable for that very reason.

9. MP WORK VERSUS INDUSTRIAL WORK?

But, all that apart, it is agreed that working class direct action is central and that it takes place mainly in the factories. In terms of scarce resources isn't there a conflict between MP and industrial work?

What is industrial work? (a) Work within a factory; (b) from the outside, around it; (c) trade union work. At the Trades Council level the line is already scarcely worth drawing, in contradistinction from the GMC level. MP work is attendance at meetings, doing a tiny amount of work for the Party. As the I-CL, in both TU and MP work, our primary business is fighting the battle of ideas, building a revolutionary nucleus. Pushing forward this or that partial struggle, building this or that rank & file grouping, left caucus, or YM branch, is important, and has weight in making our basic tasks easier or more difficult - but for Leninists what is central is the task of revolutionary propaganda and building a revolutionary organisation. We do not counterguess that task, as the Healyites do, to the building of partial movements and struggles - but still less do we dissolve it into or subordinate it to that building. Such a subordination is implied by H/E/L's prioritisation of a search for "where the sanctions and forces can be mobilised" over a search for openings for I-CL propaganda and active intervention.

A clash of resources at a given time and place is possible - yes. A serious I-CL member or branch - first and foremost I-CL, and not MPist or TUist - will intelligently choose.

There is no general clash, either logically or empirically. Logically, there would only be a clash if all members had enough serious industrial-militant contacts to talk to, help, 'service' etc so that no time was left for anything else. That is not the case, and scarcely ever likely to be the case. If it were, however, the case, then what would we say to those militants? We would try to educate them to I-CL politics and recruit them - yes. What line would we propose they take with the reformist mass of workers, on a routine day to day basis? "The I-CL is the only answer"? How would they relate to the fact that compared to the MP (or CP or IS) the credibility of the I-CL wouldn't be very great even if we were much much bigger? They would have to relate to the MP and passive MP supporters by making demands on the MP. Even if they lived in the situation most ideally corresponding to the thinking of H/E/L our comrades would have to relate to the MP. But why only from outside? Again, logically, only if there was an ever-expanding circle of 'pure' industrial militants to occupy them fully. Here, even logically, the theory becomes absurd. It is not logical or conceivable, given the reality of the labour movement, that this expanding circle would not overlap with elements of the MP, militants already within it. Even IS, a pure model of what H/E/L have in mind (though they have empirically doctored the model to allow for 'some' - but not more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of any branch, absolutely not! - MP entry) wound up hauling in workers some of whom remained members of the MP - and all of whom had to vote Labour. (Oliver describes how in Coventry IS, around election time, the worker members would disappear... off canvassing for the MP!) IS also

had to relate to Labourite workers. And the cry "build IS" has not noticeably answered the problem. The I-CL is anyway committed to the use of transitional demands, and does not see itself growing into a mass party in a molecular growth - or wouldn't H/E/L agree? Do they have a new analysis of IS to offer us? Do they want to abandon what they used to call 'transitional politics' and, following the encouraging examples of the WRP and IS, adopt the cure-all slogan for us of "build the I-CL"?

Looked at empirically the experience of the I-CL is annihilating for their case. It is branches like Not**, St**, Nor**, E.L**, which do the best industrial work - branches which also do serious LP work.

Looked at logically and followed through to its conclusions, the idea of a basic or serious conflict between LP and industrial work (work in the economic and political reformist working class organisations) leads us straight to IS-sectarian politics. Actually it only leads us back to them. For H/E/L operate with a mish-mash political consciousness still bristling with IS prejudices, of which the LP fear is one, and their failure to go beyond beginning to understand the method of transitional demands is another.

Both theoretically and empirically, the counterposition, "LP work versus industrial work" - the cornerstone of the H/E/L argument - is untenable.

RESOLUTION FOR CONFERENCE

Preamble

We recognise that the industrial working class is necessarily central to communists, that working class direct action is the raw material of communist consciousness, and consequently that work to recruit industrial workers, put down roots in the factories, and orientate the whole organisation around the life of the working class, is the first and central concern and priority of the I-CL at all times and in all conditions. We go to the workers where they are active and organised in a way that is meaningful for our work - factory committees, TU branches, the mass party of the working class, etc. "Industrial work", for the I-CL, can flow partially through the LP in certain periods because of the peculiar conditions of the British labour movement, where there is a very low level of differentiation between industrial reformism (the TUs) and political reformism (the LP). Both wings are organically linked - ideologically, politically, and organisationally through an open valve that allows a free flow of members and large-scale joint membership. While our aim is always fundamentally to build roots in the workplaces and to fuse our programme with the direct action of the working class, for which the workplaces are the principal site - and therefore intervention in the trade unions and workplaces has a constant place in our tactics which work in the LP does not necessarily have - neither the 'industrial' nor the 'LP' path of working for that aim has any necessary superior virtue; nor are they contradictory. The group will depoly its resources in the class on the basis of a permanent review and reassessment of the concrete situation. It is the duty of members of the I-CL to belong to both the industrial and political reformist working class organisations and to act there under the direction of the leading organs of the group.

Therefore:

1. Given the low level of differentiation between the political and industrial reformist movements, and the exceptionally 'open' character of the LP, the norm for revolutionaries is to develop work inside the LP/YS.
2. In '67 and after, the LP underwent a tremendous decline just as a big radicalisation (many segments of it initially nurtured inside the LP) developed outside the LP. Revolutionaries left the LP. Attitudes since have been coloured by sour memories of the opportunist entrism tactics in the 50s and 60s.
3. Since the early 70s the LP has revived seriously, while the radicalisation outside the LP now exists generally only in atomised form. Recently there has been a very steep decline in industrial struggle.
4. There is a possibility of a post-'67-type sharp decline in the LP in the next

period, but all the probabilities point to an increase of political life inside the LP. (Relative disillusion with straightforward industrial struggle, recognition of need for 'politics', fact that some fight is starting in LP already, fragmentation of extra-LP left, relatively 'fresh' character of new LP activists, etc). The IMG and WSL are already doing partial entry work, and the IMG is dithering over a decision for serious entry; other revolutionary groups will follow.

5. We have had major chances over the last 3 - 4 years, and we have largely muffed them. There is some time left. We must act energetically now.

6. Because of the existence (even now) of substantial extra-LP struggles, and because of our basic political principles (i.e. priority of working-class self-mobilisation), we work to turn the LP outwards, always using as our touchstone the direct class struggle.

(a) We actually have to build and mobilise YS branches, therefore we must avoid operating as we would in (for example) an IS meeting, conducting a debate as among Marxists, 'making our intervention', standing at the door selling our paper, and then going away. In particular, we must deal with M as reformists (i.e. to be challenged fundamentally on 'what will you do about this specific problem') not as Marxists (i.e. to be debated with theoretically).

(b) Building new YS branches, or taking over and developing branches which at present are only shells, is actually preferable to trench warfare with M in an established M branch. We should be prepared to use discos etc to do that.

(c) We will sustain YS branches by campaigns (unemployment, cuts, support for particular disputes, WWC, Troops Out...) and regular education/discussion meetings.

(d) Our work inside LP/YS branches can only be as good as our work outside them, i.e. our base and our contacts in the area. We should try to get YS branches involved in cuts campaigns, anti-fascist work, TOM work, etc, but we should avoid getting our own comrades trapped in a cycle of one 'committee' after another, where the YS branch will appear as 'just another meeting'.

(e) In the adult LP, comrades should (i) get positions of Political Education Officer or Youth Officer; (ii) try to build a YS branch where none exists; (iii) introduce political debates; (iv) try to turn the branch/constituency outwards; (v) if possible get a left caucus going, while retaining I-CL political identity and independence; (vi) secure delegations from their TU branches to GMCs.

7. The LP/YS work should be a uniform national tactic, exceptions to be made only as a deliberate decision. I.e. it applies to all branches and the value of the work should be assessed in terms of our national perspectives and not just in terms of its local value.

We set a medium-term aim of building a national tendency in the YS; that is, establishing a national tendency in the YS (not necessarily directly associated by name with WA, but on WA/I-CL politics) which can not only intervene at annual conference and have a presence in various local YS branches, as we do at present, but coordinate and initiate national campaigns, speaking tours, schools etc. A special publication oriented to the YS is a vital tool to this end.

8. It must be understood that 'fraction work' in the LP/YS is not just one fraction alongside half-a-dozen others, but is one of the two main pillars of the framework of our activity.

9. The great majority of our members should be involved in fraction work in the LP or YS. I.e. it should be the norm for comrades to be involved in that work and individual exception are decided by the branches or the PC on the basis of comrades being involved exceptionally deeply in industrial or (sometimes) other work.

APPENDIX: ON IS & THE LABOUR PARTY

It is a fact that it is impossible to understand IS's evolution without understanding its relationship to the LP. The Cliff tendency was part of the syndicalist and sectarian majority of the (maximum 500-strong) RCP in the '40s which fought against an active tactic of LP entry. It collapsed with the survivors of that majority into the LP in 1950 (together with the current 'Militant'). By 1960 Cliffs...

One of his booklet on Luxemburg, justifying Luxemburg remaining in the German Social Democracy and the post-1916 Independent Social Democracy until 1919, in terms of rationale and self-justification for a completely passive LP existence. (Cliff on Luxemburg, like Cliff on Lenin, tells us more about Cliff than anyone else - or at least about Cliff's position at the point of his writing, or revising: see the shameless unacknowledged changes, on crucial points changes of 180 degrees, in the 1968 edition of the Luxemburg pamphlet). John Palmer reportedly put it most sharply if crudely: "Only when the revolutionary workers are in the streets fighting will it be appropriate to leave the LP".

Then came the 1964 Labour government and the growth of opposition to it, with IS accommodating to the beginnings of the wave of industrial militancy, adapting gropingly and empirically. By 1967 Cliff is ready to publish 2 articles in Socialist Worker (then Labour Worker) showing what had been available in excellent book from from Ralph Miliband since 1961, that Keir Hardie had never been a 'good socialist' etc. They drifted out of the LP, like they had drifted in. By early 1969 J Higgins could write that the evolution of the LP was irrelevant to IS, as if reformism was being evaporated by the heat of industrial militancy.

WF had in 1966 published the first Trotskyist analysis we know of since the 1930s establishing the elementary fact, anathema then to all the other groupings, that the LP was a capitalist party, though one based on the working class. In early 1969 WF replied to Higgins by saying that, on the contrary, the LP was central to the whole future of IS (see forthcoming pamphlet on the party question). The same people who were a few months later to begin to fight (we now think mistakenly, though we do not repudiate the critical approach that led us to those conclusions) against a blanket endorsement by IS of all LP candidates and argue instead for attempting to throw IS's weight into widening the split between the TUs and loyal TU and pro-TU MPs, and the Wilsonites, over In Place of Strife, voting for the former and not the latter. It was in our estimation of the weight IS could dispose of and of the dynamic of LP/TU relations that we were wrong, not the general approach.

The same individuals (Landis, Price, Cleary) now advocate a serious involvement in the LP, without any withdrawal from meaningful industrial work. Wild zig-zagging? Only apparently. The central appreciation of the centrality of reformism has remained constant, so has the crucial question for communists of having a clear scientific view of the LP and flexible & adaptable tactics. On that we have a constant record for 10 years.

AFTERWORD.

This document has outlined the general views on the LP question of the pro-entrlist ideological tendency within the I-CL. There are a number of nuances of opinion within that spectrum of 'LP entrlists' - or, more precisely, of those advocating all-round communist cadre development as against petty-bourgeois workerists, which is what our opponents are, and what their own contributions to the discussion, especially that of ed Johnson, prove them to be.

Some of those nuances and differences of emphasis do - and we have none of us denied it - contain the potential of serious disagreements in the future: but only political children believe that political alliances on concrete questions are marriages 'for life'. Now, however, the central problems facing the I-CL are those of liquidating the phase of ultra-left childishness and syndicalist illusions for which we have all in the past been in varying degrees responsible. Here, for the life or death task - life or death for the I-CL - we face on this question, those nuances, now, have no meaning.

I should make explicit the spirit in which I wrote this document.

Firstly, I believe that there are sufficient resolutions, documents, and extensively minuted discussions for decisions to be taken on the MP question, and that there are no grounds for anyone who approaches the subject in good faith to suspect Price, Reynolds, Lonax or myself of secretly plotting to liquidate the I-CL into the MP, nor any grounds for doubt as to where we stand. The draft of 'Building the I-CL' indicated clearly our position on the MP - a section of it was deliberately written to cover the lack of the 'MP perspectives document'.

Secondly: 'perspectives' fetishists and perspectives-mongers have in my view played a terrible role in our movement since the death of Trotsky. Apart from exceptional theoretically creative efforts like, say, Trotsky's "Results and Prospects", 'perspectives' documents, especially those written to order for conferences, are - inescapably - largely codifications and balance sheets of the organisation's previous analyses, resolutions, etc, and extrapolations from them to guide work and orientation. If the organisation's leadership is mature, it will be very cautious indeed with the extrapolations part.

The primary purpose of such documents is educational. We need education, but that is a very separate question from the attitude to perspectives documents that some comrades have adopted, some sincerely, some (ed Hunt) demagogically beating the drums about a secret Price/Cleary conspiracy to liquidate the I-CL into the MP (it is inconceivable that he really believes such a conspiracy exists).

Thirdly, and finally, I believe the 'discussion' to be largely a pseudo-discussion. Nine months ago there were real differences on the MP question within the fused organisation. Today very few comrades indeed are opposed to MP work, or are outside the MP. Since no-one holds a 'deep entry' position, wants to concentrate exclusively on MP work, or to abandon industrial work or united-front work on such questions as racism, women, Ireland etc, then any dispute about MP work can only amount to arguments, related to specific circumstances, about concrete allocation of resources.

Yet as the actual basic disagreements on the question have diminished almost to vanishing point, the factional heat of eds Hunt, Laing & Evans has intensified. Why? One must look for reasons other than the MP issue, other than that which is ostensibly being discussed. Ed H is clearly using this and every other issue he can find to rationalise what one can only define as an a-political personalised factional campaign for prestige, standing, leadership etc in the I-CL. The very fact that he has flip-flopped wildly, shifting ground politically so often and so consistently - while maintaining an intransigent factional stance - proves that it is the personal factional stance that is the stable element, and the politics of the moment nothing more than the convenient pretext/rationale/argument in the service of the a-political factionalism. (For accounts of his shifts, volte-faces, etc see the various minutes, Reynolds' documents, or, if you weren't at the Rugeley affair yourself, ask someone who was about H's india-rubber man, waltzing on ice, performance there).

Ed H learned his organisational politics in a very bad and corrupt school - IS - and he has not yet unlearned them. According to the testimony of ed Evans, the leadership of the former Left Faction learned much of their politics from the WF group - and ed Laing has more than once insisted on this point at the PC. It's a pity ed H did not learn his organisational politics, as well as his formal political positions, from the WF group - which learned them from the school of Trotsky and Cannon. Had he done so, he would understand that his personalised a-political factionalism will not earn him authority or prestige in the I-CL - but the contempt, condemnation, and refusal of tolerance of every comrade in the organisation, ex-WF, ex-WP, or ex-neither, who values and will fight for the traditions of our movement, the political/organisational tradition of Trotsky and Cannon.

If comrades make political statements it is necessary to argue with them on their merits. The over-patient and prolific ed Reynolds has already summarised in a long document the various discussions with H, E, L & J on the PC & NC. I have briefly spelled out the arguments on the **MP**. But I refuse to go through the charade of pretending to think that the formally stated issues are the ones that give the present I-CL situation its dynamic. If they were, we would be having a friendly discussion about allocation of resources, not a nasty brawl. This, basically polemical document, has been, unfortunately, part of that brawl.

Cleary
7-9-76

8. "We will not abide by conference decisions"

a. Extract from minutes of I-CL Political Committee, 10 September 1976.

Matganna: This is not a Star Chamber. If you choose not to answer the questions, that is your choice; but people will draw their own conclusions. Laing said "a fusion conference". But it is not a fusion conference! Fusion was last December! The fusion is not in jeopardy; the prospect is of a small group putting themselves in jeopardy by splitting. Abernism? - there is Abernism round E/H/L; there is also a cult round Hunt. "Rugeley circus"? Laing had been in favour of having a conference without delay - and then switched to thinking even a preconference was impossible! The "circus" element was people like Hunt changing their positions in mid-debate and thus discrediting themselves. Charges of factionalism? That wasn't our charge - we charged a political factionalism, factionalism without adequate political basis. With Evans one can sometimes change his views in serious political discussion - scarcely so with Hunt. These organisational questions are political; I have long been convinced they are the basic questions. They show a tendency to a Cliffite attitude on the party.

Lever: Laing said the fusion was based on a large degree of political agreement & the possibility to argue differences. Then he said "maybe we have been disabused". It is important he clarifies that. Effectively he alleges that the constitution has been breached in its provisions for free debate.

Stocking: Firstly I want to chronicle the record since fusion. We argued in WP against the 'den of sharks' view, saying there were no serious programmatic differences and the tactical differences could be argued out. We were even prepared to go ahead for fusion if some WP comrades would not come with us.

Hornuag: I don't doubt that.

Stocking: But Price offers no explanation of our presumed attitudes. You undertook the first factional behaviour. We experienced a series of attacks. Cleary accused me and then later singled Hunt out as the chief factionalist.

Matganna: I was wrong.

Stocking: No, there was no mistake, it was systematic. Cleary has destroyed democratic centralism and the unity of the organisation by character assassination. It is not true that the fusion has taken place. We have had smears, not political argument, from Cleary/Price/Reynolds. It is ridiculous to ask us, would we join the WL. If we wanted to, we would have done so before. Your tactics were first an attack on Evans, then on Hunt. We have been loyal and have not factionalised except on the question of industrial work. Debates have been derailed; the new statement is just part of the onslaught on us. We and other comrades will vehemently oppose this line. It would not be a fusion - we would be signing out own political death warrant if we accepted the method of debate so far. You have split the fusion, poisoned minds, played on the prejudices of ex-WF comrades. We have to say the fusion is a failure, and state our perspectives for any organisation. We have to take a clear position against your characterisations. The fusion, at the political level, has failed miserably, and so we appeal to comrades on the line of the ex-WF group. We will discuss with those comrades whether conference decisions can be abided by. That depends on your behaviour. The ex-WF membership have been miseducated, and it will cost you dear in the coming months, whatever organisation you have, to have created a membership not prepared to look at political issues. The fusion is fundamentally fractured.

Matganna: Does that mean you do not commit yourself to abiding by conference decisions if you are in a minority?

Stocking: Yes. This is my own position. Unless all charges are dropped, etc, the conference will not be competent.

Matgamma: Would you disavow your recent document as part of a general ground-clearing exercise?

Stocking: Would you disavow the June Cleary/Price document?

Matgamma: No.

Stocking: Then my answer is also no.

Hornung: It would be an unprincipled procedure to disavow previous positions as part of an organisational agreement. We could however discuss some sort of moratorium proposals. Does Laing think the same as Evans?

King: The same.

Thomas: It is nonsense to talk about the fusion not existing. For example, look at 29 issues of the paper - and the biggest dispute on political line that over 'Recall the TUC', which was in any case Cleary & Reynolds vs Morant, not at all ex-WF vs ex WP. Evans talks about "ex-WP" positions - does he mean his own present positions, or positions of WP pre-fusion? - they are different, e.g. on MP work. What is Evans' attitude to democratic centralism in the period up to the conference? Evans rejected the possibility of an orientation towards the WL - what about the IMG which I also asked about?

Hornung: I would like to ^{re-}raise just one of the charges you make in your document, about abuse of power by the Secretariat. Can you answer my questions on that?

Stocking: There has been a long-standing disagreement on the nature of the paper. Cleary & Reynolds have often expressed the opinion that at present the paper is too light and tends to the "La Commune" syndrome.

Matgamma: Yes - but in arguing against Landis!

Stocking: I have said that I agree the paper should be more heavy. But there are disagreements on what way it should be more heavy. Reynolds says a "communist cultural review". I oppose that. Price now seems persuaded of Reynolds' view.

Hornung: I always have been persuaded. I want a more analytical paper.

Stocking: I see a 'heavier' paper in terms of more material relating to advanced militants. The background to the discussion on the paper was an un-stated project by C/P/R which I oppose. The Secretariat simply took a position and that naturally aroused my suspicions. Reynolds raised the Secretariat decision on the PC - I said I agreed, but what we wanted was serious articles on the TUC conference, LP conference &c.

Thomas: And what did I reply?

Stocking: I don't remember.

Thomas: I agreed with you and asked Evans to write an article on the LP conference, Hunt one on speed-up, & I said I would write on Argentina. The only hint of argument was when Evans said 'yes, a heavier paper, but not more articles like on Daunier' - to which I replied 'in fact I think we do want more articles like on Daunier, but that is not the main point'.

Stocking: It was a question of a project/^{which} I rejected and was not openly stated.

Hornung: In any case why did you not raise your objections on the PC or NC?

Stocking: There are other questions involved. But how do you explain your position on not having Hunt on the Secretariat?

Hornung: The reasons are minuted. Of course our attitude was factionalism in a certain sense.

Stocking: How can you say a fused leadership exists when comrades can make charges such as you made against Hunt?

Hornung: If that is what you think, why did you not raise objections at the time?

b. Circular, "Defend the Unity of the I-CL!", by Sean Matgamna, 14 September 1976.

"Are you a circle, or a body of party officials?

"If you are a circle, then why this hypocrisy and sham, these phrases about a party?... Have you not brought matters to the point of a split, have you not refused to submit to the CC and the Council? Have you not placed yourselves outside the Party by saying that for you Party Congresses are not divine, ie. not binding? You trample upon the institutions and laws of the Party..."

(Lenin: C.W. vol. 7 p.140, 'To the Party Membership')

"You are placing yourselves above the conference, above the League, and you are sabotaging the leading body of the League.

"Basically, this is an action of splitting the organisation. For the leaders of your group, this is a demonstration, a 'vote of no confidence', in a word, a parliamentary game. This is not the way proletarian revolutionists act; it is the way of petty bourgeois anarchists, who scoff at parliamentarism in words but imitate it in deeds".

(Trotsky: 'Writings' 1932, p.26, 'Reply to the Jewish Group')

Lenin was writing in the aftermath of the Second Congress of the RSDLP, in a situation where a minority (the Mensheviks) had disrupted the Party. The precise details do not concern us here. His conception of party Congresses does (and note that he does not talk of the specific Conference whose decisions the Mensheviks were violating - he talks of the attitude to Congresses in general): "Have you not placed yourselves outside the Party by saying that for you Party Congresses are not.. binding?"

The I-CL is now at the point of a split..

Cds Laing and Evans declared at the PC of 10-9-76 that the forthcoming Congress could not be binding on them, that there would have to be a gathering of "comrades on ex-WP positions" to decide on what attitude to take to the Congress and its decisions. At the Midlands Regional Aggregate of 12-9-76 cd Evans repeated and defended his position. Cd Hunt (who had been absent from the 10-9-76 PC) came out in emphatic solidarity with the E/L position and attitude. In reply to a direct and formal question from Cleary as to whether or not he would, if in the minority, undertake to abide by the decisions of the first I-CL Congress, in the preparation of which he has played a central part, he reiterated that the decisions of the Conference could not be binding.

H/E/L's statements were not accidental outbursts, alien to their real intentions. They had plenty of opportunity to retract. At the Midlands meeting the implications of those statements - that they were putting themselves outside the I-CL, and that the formalisation of that was simply an administrative matter - were repeatedly pointed out. It was also stressed that if they considered the preparation of the conference unsatisfactory, there were many courses of action they could propose for and within the I-CL; postponement of Conference; reference back of some or all of the documents at Conference; calling in the Control Commission, etc... They still stuck to their course of not recognising the authority of Conference.

* * *

The Secretariat and the PC, on the contrary, insist on the following as elementary rules of life for any democratic centralist organisation - that decisions arrived at by Conference are binding; that the Constitution agreed to unanimously at the fusion meeting of 14 December 1975 is binding; that we conduct discussions for the purpose of arriving at decisions and that once arrived at those decisions are binding on the members of the organisation.

The I-CL is not a discussion club, nor a federation within which each component, faction, 'circle' or grouping does what it likes - we are a democratic centralist organisation, of which the highest body is the Conference.

Stocking : In the light of the characterisations made and the degenerate Cannonite approach, it is impossible for me to consider myself bound by the discipline of the organisation.

Hornung: Can you explain exactly what you mean? As I understand it, that means you are resigning from the organisation.

Stocking: What I mean is that the pre-conference discussion has been aborted, the fusion does not exist, and the conference is therefore not competent to take binding decisions.

Hornung: Do you consider yourself within the daily discipline of the organisation now?

Stocking : Yes.

Hornung : Does Laing have the same attitude?

King : Yes.

MEETING CLOSED.

Any grouping which is dissatisfied with the adequacy of the preparations or which fears that ~~disruption~~ may occur unless some adjustments and rearrangements are made, has a right (and, if it feels any sense of responsibility to the organisation and has not given up all hope for the rest of the organisation other than its own circle, the absolute duty) to make proposals for alternative arrangements, postponements, etc (as did Price and Cleary last June). No individual, no tendency, no faction has the right to declare itself outside - and by implication above - the I-CL.

In an organisation of voluntarily-selected individuals, there is always the possibility that comrades or groupings will not accept decisions of the PC, NC, or Conference, and withdraw or provoke expulsion. Any individual or group of individuals who arrogantly declare before a conference which has been nearly 6 months in preparation that they will not undertake in advance to abide by its decisions are declaring a split programme.

They are declaring in advance that for them the Conference - the highest body of the organisation, and, in the I-CL, the full gathering of all the membership in which every full member has a vote - is a charade. They are therefore demanding that the rest of the organisation go through the charade with them, downgrading the highest body of the organisation to a chattering-shop and openly calling into question the organisational integrity of the I-CL. The PC has the responsibility of defending the integrity of the I-CL. So have all serious members.

H/E/L challenge not only the organisational integrity of the I-CL as a democratic-centralist organisation, but as a democratic organisation. No trade union body at branch, regional or national level would allow participation and voting in deliberations that it intends to have govern its activities for the coming year by people who said categorically in advance that they would not be bound by the decisions in which they were exercising the rights of democracy - it would not give power with advance and explicit repudiation of responsibility!

In a revolutionary democratic-centralist ^{organisation} such monstrous presumption, such insane arrogance, brands those guilty of it as an irresponsible and politically corrupt family circle or clique. The political positions they put forward at any moment may not be corrupt, may indeed be correct - but its methods, its conception of party political life, are totally corrupt and alien to Bolshevism.

* * *

In this case what the attitudes of L, E, & H signify is a panicky attempt to retreat from the work of building the I-CL as a democratic-centralist League, governed by and training its members in the methods and spirit of a Bolshevik-type party, back to the existence of a cosy circle not governed by strict rules.

H & E have talked about 'the fusion not existing'. This is nonsense - it is nothing but cover for a revolt against the I-CL animated by circle spirit. The I-CL has existed, intervened in the labour movement (YM Conference, WWC Conference, Labour Assembly, Tricos, Longbridge...), produced 29 issues of a paper, one issue of a magazine, pamphlets.... with only very mild disputes (and those not "ex-WP" vs "ex-WP") as to the political content of any of those interventions or publications.

H/E/L now propose to call a meeting of "ex-WP" comrades or "comrades accepting ex-WP positions". They have not made clear whether by "ex-WP" positions they mean their own present positions - by no means shared by all ex-WP comrades! - or their (different) pre-fusion positions. This in itself testifies to what they are and what they now stand for. They appeal to former connections, they try to resuscitate old associations, old loyalties, they try to gather an "old WP comrades' associations" - they do not appeal to politics.

Under the I-CL Constitution H/E/L have every right, and in certain conditions would have a duty, to form an I-CL tendency or faction, on the basis of stated political positions, and to fight inside the organisation, to convince the organisation of those positions. They prefer, even when they talk about political positions, to refer to them as "ex-WP positions", to attempt to pit one part of the I-CL against another not only on the current differences, on which the line-up is not consistent on every disputed issue, and very far from being a matter of ex-WF vs ex-WP, but on previous associations, loyalties of a sub-political kind at best and a cliquist, cultist kind at worst.

* * *

Are they motivated by alarm about the outcome of the coming conference? Undoubtedly. But the contrast between their behaviour now and that of Price/Cleary in June is further evidence as to what E/H/L represent politically. P/C did express fear of a split - they did not threaten one. Far from presuming to put themselves above the conference P/C's statement took it as self-evident that what the Conference decided would stand until the following conference, was therefore too important to risk being botched, and they proposed a postponement.

H & E are the former leaders of a faction within IS which originated 4 years ago but did not have a continuous existence even for 4 years. P/C are former leaders of an organisation which, next October, would have had a continued autonomous existence for 10 years. H/E/L do all they can to appeal to the WP 'tradition'. P & C made no attempt to appeal to ex-WF "traditions" (which are rather substantial, and from which Evans and Laing at least admit they learned much of their politics). The ex-WF members up and down the country and the voting record at NCs and until last June at PCs testify that no appeal was made to "ex-WF". We make no such appeal now. The difference is between people desperately trying to turn the hands of the clock back to their previous faction/circle existence, and their own former pre-eminent within it, and people who are & were struggling to preserve and develop the I-CL, who are and were unwilling to attempt to sink back the qualitative breakthrough which the I-CL is back into only one of its component parts. The difference is one between a programme of party-building and one of personal circle/cult building.

H/E/L know that they are likely to be in a minority on many questions at the I-CL Conference, are painfully aware that they suffered a major political rout at Rugeley: they are first and foremost circle men and not party-minded people who understand that the I-CL, its development and survival, is the central question - for all these reasons E/L/H want to break up the I-CL.

Their tendency has been clear for months - though how conscious of it of it they were, we could not judge. It is probable that E & L went much further on 10-9-76 than they would have done had the factionally more astute and prudent ed Hunt been there. Nevertheless all three of them have now declared themselves - and the PC & Secretariat have acted decisively against them.

* * *

H & E say they have been victims of 'political character assassination'. An a-political category. Even if they lose on the vote, events can prove them right or wrong on the political issues. Their very conception has to do with 'prestige', 'face', 'standing'.

However, suppose that all H/E/L's charges against the majority of the PC, and all their political characterisations of PC/NC majority policies, are true. Suppose the PC/NC majority policies do represent a propagandistic or Labouristic tendency; suppose the organisation will deviate in that direction if Hunt's nine amendments to the 'Theses on

Orientation' are not carried by conference. Suppose the membership has been 'poisoned' against H/E/L. Suppose all that is true. What then would be a responsible, party-spirited course of action for H/E/L?

They would accept the conference decisions and bide their time until they could re-raise the issues. They would not do that, of course, if they considered that the political differences between them and the NC majority were so grievous as to warrant a split; but they have not claimed that and could not claim that. If they had any confidence in the membership, they would be confident that in due course the injustices against H/E/L would be remedied. Their attitude to the conference is not an objection to the PC majority, it is not an issue between H/E/L and the PC majority; it is an objection against the membership, it is an issue between H/E/L and the membership. In taking its present action, the Secretariat is only safeguarding the rights of the membership to exercise democratic control over all members of the I-CL, however 'eminent'.

* * *

Are not the PC and Secretariat encouraging, provoking a split? Yes and no. The PC/Secretariat decision lays the issue straight on the line - for or against the I-CL. That is now the question number one. It supersedes and overshadows all the previous issues in dispute in the organisation. They were/are issues about what the I-CL should do. The question H/E/L pose is whether or not the I-CL should exist.

L/H/E say, and they say it with increasing explicitness: No. The PC says: Yes.

It is our duty to do so. If E/H/L and a group of their supporters are determined to commit political suicide, we cannot stop them. We can dramatise and make plain the issues to the whole organisation. Our action against H/E/L does that. In any case we had no choice.

The majority leadership - that is, the responsible leadership - of an organisation which lacks the nerve to strike decisively at members of the organisation who are not only clearly preparing a split, but have the arrogance or stupidity to declare their intention openly on the PC, is not fit to lead a branch of the LPYS. Those who would disrupt the I-CL will get no quarter from us. 'War to the knife and the knife to the hilt' - to quote J Connolly, who knew what serious politics was about - that is our approach to such people.

* * *

Nevertheless, the Secretariat has kept its measures against H, E & L to the minimum possible - while keeping in the front of their minds that if they persist in their present course they are most bitter enemies of the I-CL and must & will be treated as such.

We suspend them. But we ask for no more than firm assurances that they have the same attitude to the I-CL as we do and will respect and will respect and abide by the decisions of its conference. Given those assurances we will agree to restore them not only to probationary membership, or membership, but to the posts they held until a few days ago.

This is not out of respect for the 'mighty men' involved. Normally we believe in being most harsh with the most prominent members, less harsh with the raw, the new, the misled. Here, however, we recognise that we are in a pre-conference period and H & E are the most prominent representatives of a series of positions of a tendency in the organisation. Those positions are entirely containable within a democratic-centralist I-CL.

Our quarrel with H & E is that they deny the democratic-centralist

integrity of the I-CL. To ensure a proper unfolding of the political issues in dispute, we make these extraordinary concessions, on one condition only - that the comrades in question recognise that the discussions, and the decisions, will be I-CL decisions, binding on all participating I-CL members: if they accept we will welcome them as comrades - if they attempt hypocritical dissimulation we will act accordingly.

* * *

Evans & Hunt & Laing will say that the raising of 'factionalism' has queered the pitch to their disadvantage. Maybe. The I-CL adheres to a political tradition - that of V I Lenin, LD Trotsky, and JP Cannon. When we see unprincipled, personalised, cliquist factionalism intertwined with real political differences, we insist on saying so, and on separating them out. That is a clear political attitude.

Those of us who hold such conceptions seriously have a duty to live by them. Cleary has at least (!) as much right to believe and say that the central question is and has been a-political factionalism by H/E/L (factionalism that changes its clothes regularly, the faction as a permanent element, the politics a convenience) is the central question, and that the 'discussion on orientation' is a degrading charade in which H/E/L are not serious, as H/E/L have to their almost paranoid assessment of the situation.

That assessment sees every move made by those whom (as we can now see) they have long regarded as their opponents, in the light of the IS experience, where everything was manoeuvre, duplicity, manipulation, and where no-one in the leadership could be trusted beyond the point at which the breath which expressed their words had merged itself into the surrounding air.

* * *

At the conference votes will be taken on specific positions and documents only. In the event that they decide to come back inside the I-CL E/H/L will be part of the leadership. The suspensions, on the terms they are posed, mean no more than that we have placed E/H/L before an open door and demanded of them that they decide to go out or come in. For now, it is their decision.

Beyond that, we cannot offer them any guarantees. We cannot offer them the majority leadership. Maybe - though we doubt it - the conference will do so (in which case the present leadership will be a loyal minority).

Unfortunately they appear to want the majority leadership and will only 'accept' a conference where they will get it. "Better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven", says Satan in the words of Milton. Better our little group outside the I-CL than collaboration as a minority within it, say - no longer implicitly, but explicitly - H/E/L. That's their choice.

* * *

Other comrades also should have a choice. Choice demands knowledge. The thinking of H & E is their own property. The objective possibilities open to them, however, can profitably be spelled out for comrades who may for political sympathy on one or another issue be tempted to follow them out of the I-CL.

We insist, despite the protests of H/E/L that the very posing of it is "conspiracy", on spelling out the possibilities and options. They can be listed with almost mathematical precision.

Comrades should be clear that H/E/L intend to split the I-CL. Where they will lead whoever goes with them, for whatever reason?

A) To an independent reconstructed "WP"? Myth! WP, like WF, is dissolved in the I-CL. They will have to reconstruct a new group to call "WP". How many people will split? 30 maximum; probably less than 20. That is precious little basis for an independent organisation.

Can the issues in dispute in the I-CL be better clarified if a couple of dozen comrades decide to lop themselves off from the rest of the organisation? Self-evidently not. Can the industrial work be better done by the forces which will split from the I-CL than even by an I-CL in which industrial work was a much lower priority than any-one wants to make it? No, no and no! E&H themselves can't possibly believe it.

And what will comrades who split say to workers who previously knew them as I-CL and WA supporters? How will they account for their split? "We wanted a different emphasis on MP work and we thought the leadership intrigued against H/E/L". Such an explanation would appear pathetic to the eyes of any class-conscious worker.

B) They will go out of politics - not intentionally.

C) They will fuse with the Workers League with the intention of taking it over. Possible. But unlikely. Evans was very convincing in his disavowal of that perspective on 10-9-76.

D) That leaves the IMG. Unthinkable? Yes, for now, to the majority of potential split-companions of H/E. But if you place a man at a cross-roads, the options for travelling are clearly defined, and H/E are at a cross-roads. Only the IMG option is even thinkable.

The IMG is a federation and would therefore accommodate the clique nature of the hard-core Hunt grouping. If H/E can bargain with the Birmingham branch and Crawley branch, they could 'get terms' with the IMG. The FI? H&E basically see this in nationalist terms. They never understood the I-CL position on the FI. The IMG conglomerate is bound by the FI fetish, yes: but exceptions are possible. The dead-end permanent factionalism of the IMG - that's the world of H/E. If they go out of the I-CL, either that or oblivion.

Let us assume H/E don't know it - but the logic is inescapable. We estimate that they do know it. E said nothing at the 10-9-76 PC on the IMG, and when the question was again pressed repeatedly at the Midlands region, he confined himself to asserting what is undoubtedly true, that if expelled from the I-CL tomorrow he would not then join the IMG.

The strategy appears to be a split on a - totally unreal - perspective of recreating the WP group, which never had a serious independent existence even when its membership was double its present potential. Then H/E will manipulate/bargain towards the IMG.

Birmingham and Crawley are crucial here.

Slander? No - cold assessment, even if H & E haven't made it yet - which we admit is a possibility.

* * *

The I-CL exists and will grow. We are the only tendency that has grown seriously in the last year. If some comrades break, the I-CL will survive politically - those comrades will not. H/E/L are out of the I-CL unless they accept the conditions laid down.

The PC is calling an emergency NC for 10am on Friday 24th Sept. Because H & E are spokesmen for a tendency within the I-CL, the PC intends to recommend to the PC that H & E be allowed into a number of regional meetings to argue for their political positions, and that they

should be allowed to make a contribution at conference on the documents they have produced, and which the PC itself will submit for a vote, even if no-one else is willing to do so. They should also be admitted in the 'credentials' section to appeal against our present ruling. They will be admitted for the relevant sections only, and only if they agree in advance to abide by the terms here set down by the I-CL.

Let us re-emphasise, however, this: any comrade who accepts I-CL discipline - including H, E or L if they decide to accept that discipline, as laid down in the Constitution - has the absolute right to argue for H & E's documents at the Conference. Those documents remain on the Conference agenda. There is no question of penalising or prohibiting the ideas contained in those documents. All that is penalised is refusal to respect the democratic rights of the membership.

It is possible that some individuals or groupings sympathetic to H/E/L will attempt to get the decision reversed by pressurising the PC; it is possible that the closest followers of H/E/L within the I-CL will attempt collectively to issue an ultimatum to the PC to reinstate E/L/H as the price of their participation in the conference. Let us save each other's time. Maybe the emergency NC or the Conference will over-rule the PC. Nothing else will. There is still an open door back into the I-CL for H/E/L. But there is only one door - acceptance, without dissimulation or reservation, of the conditions we have laid down.

Any comrades who do believe H/E/L's charges against the PC/NC majority are true, but who also have some elementary confidence in the I-CL membership, should support the Secretariat's action - since it is only by upholding the democratic rights of the membership at large that any possible bureaucratic malpractice can be corrected.

The suspension is not definitive. The choice of coming back is entirely that of H/E/L. The suspension focuses on the real issue - for or against the I-CL. That question is separable from all the political issues that are currently in dispute within the I-CL. By their arrogant declaration before the conference that they did not recognise the conference, H/E/L have rendered the organisation the unwitting service of sharply separating the political and organisational questions. The membership has between now and the conference to learn to understand and disentangle the political questions in dispute within the I-CL from the organisational practices of those who want to scrap the I-CL. Comrades will have to think and decide in conditions of the issues being focused sharply and clearly.

* * *

If this circular appears to some comrades partisan, one section of the I-CL bashing another, then they have missed the whole point. The challenge to the organisational integrity of the I-CL puts all differences within the I-CL into the background, or rather separates them out clearly from the differences about whether or not the I-CL should continue. The positions of the PC members on the disputed issues are known. The I-CL also includes comrades who agree with the political position H & E were putting but regard them as bitter enemies when they place on the agenda for the I-CL the question - to be or not to be. The I-CL will sort out the internal political disputes and reach a decision according to democratic centralism. Issue number one now is to sort out the would-be wreckers from the comrades who talk about politics and dispute positions because they want to build the I-CL.

There must be no quarter, no squeamishness, and no sentimentality in dealing with the would-be splitters, the incorrigible circle men who want to wreck the product of the most important advance in British revolutionary politics in recent years - the I-CL.

c. First I-CL statement on the split

AT A meeting on 19th September 21 comrades, led by D. Hughes and D. Stocking (two former leaders of the I.S. Left Faction/Workers Power), decided to desert the I-CL.

As Trotsky wrote of similar dead-end splits in his period, "They split from us not because we are intolerant or intolerable, but because they themselves did not and could not go forward".

The split has no foundation in revolutionary - internationalist principles. In the course of the five-months preparatory debate for the forthcoming I-CL Conference, Hughes and Stocking came forward with only relatively minor differences on national tactical questions.

Their chief argument centred round the view that the I-CL gave insufficient priority to "industrial work", and claims that the I-CL majority tended to "sectarianism", or "propagandism", or concessions to Labourism. (Only one of those participating in the split has claimed that the political differences were large enough to justify it.)

When other Political Committee members protested against the unprincipled factionalism inherent in the workerist demagoguery about "industrial work" (when Hughes and Stocking were unable to earmark a single actual difference as to what, concretely, should be done in relation to "industrial work") and in the usually caricatural presentation of the majority's arguments, Hughes and Stocking set up a hue and cry about the minds of the membership being "poisoned" against them. They were eventually to demand — as an ultimatum — that the other PC members *disavow* their political assessment of Hughes' and Stocking's methods.

It appeared virtually certain that Hughes and Stocking would be in a minority at the forthcoming first I-CL Conference. (At the August National Committee their documents had received only a tiny minority vote.) At the Political Committee on 10th September, Stocking and his co-thinker S. King suddenly declared that they did not recognise the authority of the Conference, that they would not undertake to abide by its decisions if they were in a minority.

Circle spirit

Stocking, King and, later, Hughes, reiterated over three days their position of not recognising the authority of the Conference. It was put to them that if they considered Conference preparations unsatisfactory, they should propose postponement, alteration of the agenda, reference-back of documents, etc. They made no such proposals, but adamantly held to their position of non-recognition.

The PC majority was then obliged, in defence of the most elementary democratic rights of the I-CL membership, to suspend Hughes, Stocking and King. At the same time the door was left open to them by a provision that they would be completely and immediately reinstated, even onto the PC, if only they agreed to recognise the authority of Conference.

Hughes, Stocking and King remained obstinate and went on the path of split.

They present the split as a "de-fusion", a reversal of the December 1975 fusion between *Workers Fight* and *Workers Power* which formed the I-CL.

This is a dishonest trick. A large proportion of the ex-WP comrades (including leading ex-WP comrades) remain loyal to the I-CL. In a special appeal, they condemned the invocation of the "ex-WP" label: "*Its aim is to advance the fortunes of a narrow circle... It is an attempt to appeal to comrades on the basis of past friendships, loyalties, and allegiances as opposed to political programme.*"

The split represents the revolt of circle politics against party spirit. As a result of fusion arrangements, Hughes and Stocking had a degree of power in the leading committees of the I-CL corresponding more to their former pre-eminence in the Left Faction/Workers Power than to their real influence in the I-CL. A declaration signed by most members of the NC majority had already committed its signatories to support the granting of places on the Political Committee to Hughes and Stocking (in contrast, Hughes and Stocking, in the last period before the desertion, announced a programme of removing all members of the

PC majority from the leadership!)

Desertions

However, the perspective was one of Hughes and Stocking being a subordinate part of a collective leadership, not emperors in their own circle. They could not tolerate that. And so they took the course of split, appealing to old loyalties rather than to any politics. They bolted rather than subordinate themselves to the work of party-building.

The Hughes-Stocking grouping has no political future. It will either expire or gravitate to a large group — most probably the IMG, in whose chronic factional dog-fighting they will feel at home. Its main platform inside the I-CL was "more industrial work" — but Hughes himself has already admitted that outside the I-CL his grouping will not be able to do any serious

industrial work, and will orientate to "lots of" work in the mass reformist party.

At the Hughes-Stocking meeting of 19th September, a group including the only serious proletarian element at the meeting (the I-CL cell in an important Midlands factory) argued an anti-split line. They maintained that if Hughes and Stocking were serious about their politics, they would form a faction of the I-CL to fight for them. They declared that they themselves would fight for their positions — which are close on some issues to those put forward by Hughes & Stocking in the pre-conference debate — inside the I-CL, probably by forming a faction.

The I-CL entirely upholds the right of these comrades to form a faction. It leaves its doors open to any comrades who took part in the split but have second thoughts. They will be entirely free to argue their positions within the democratic-centralist framework of the I-CL, and to receive proportional representation on the leading committees.

The Political Committee of the I-CL has in any case guaranteed that the Hughes-Stocking documents on I-CL orientation will remain on the agenda of the conference to be debated by the membership.

The I-CL will not waste time mourning over the desertions. If comrades wish to commit political suicide, in the last analysis they cannot be stopped. The I-CL will learn the lessons from the example Hughes & Stocking gave us of circle politics, and go forward, continuing our programme of publications, intervention in the working class, and international dialogue, debate and collaboration.

**Political Committee
International-Communist
League**

d. WP statement on the split

IN October 1975 we were expelled from IS for our refusal to dissolve the Left Faction. Holding that a process of principled fusion was the only way to regroup the fragmented forces of Trotskyism we entered into discussion with the Workers Fight grouping. The decision to open discussions with them was not a casual or a chance one. In fact we had both independently adopted positions on key points of principle which divided us from the rest of the left (the general strike, abstention on the Common Market and solidarity with all those fighting British imperialism in Ireland). After exchanges of documents and two months' discussion the fusion to create the ICL was agreed to.

Certain programmatic differences remained unsolved — the nature of 'the Stalinist states', the causes of the ideological degeneration and organisational disintegration of the Fourth International since the Second World War. These were agreed as vital scientific questions to be debated in a non-factional manner. Tactical differences remained between the two groups' attitudes to work in the major reformist party and to work within TOM.

Apparent agreement existed on the need to redevelop and re-elaborate the 1938 Transitional Programme in relation to the new period of crisis opening in the seventies and the crisis of leadership in the working class and its vanguard nationally and internationally. This was seen as central to the tasks of building the revolutionary party, of building an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement in the trade unions and a left wing movement in the reformist party. The WF leadership claimed no differences existed on these questions [and] S. Matgamna agreed to produce a draft action programme. On production the draft was subjected to serious criticism on the I-CL PC and NC.

At this point what was to become a feature of the internal life of the I-CL first manifested itself. The ex-WF PC members held a private meeting and submitted charges to us of unprincipled combinationism over the action programme, of orchestrating a "cry for perspectives" and encouraging a personal vendetta against S. Matgamna.

Rebutting the charges we proposed a political debate on our

view of the action programme and the manifesto that Matgamna had produced. Such discussion was soured by new charges of 'catastrophism' and 'programme fetishism'. D. Stocking and D. Hughes produced position papers on the new period of capitalist crisis and the crisis of working class leadership. Faced with these documents the ex-WF leadership did not justify the catastrophism characterisation or withdraw it — Matgamna 'reserved his position'.

In the pre-conference perspectives discussion differences emerged principally on the orientation to the reformist party and the priority of this work relative to work in the trade unions. Hughes and Stocking produced perspectives documents arguing their position, M. Thomas produced a document weighted towards work aimed at the reformist party. Matgamna who was commissioned to write a document arguing for such a major turn failed to produce it.

The differences between the two sides were political. The compatibility, or otherwise, of the positions within one organisation depended on a serious commitment from the ex-WF leadership to honest and open debate without which no serious political fusion could be achieved. The conference itself, when held, was to mark the end of the fusion process, the ironing out of common perspectives and the end of federal relations on the leading committees.

Within three weeks of the conference S. Matgamna and A. Hornung produced a slanderous document aimed at postponing conference on the grounds of the "a-political factionalism" etc of Hughes and Stocking and characterising them as wishing to turn the I-CL into 'a semi syndicalist sect'. Further charges were made of wishing to split the I-CL and enter the IMG or the Workers League.

We agreed to postpone the conference to September on the condition that debates on the political issues took precedence over charges of the type mentioned above. This, however, did not occur. Matgamna did not produce the document on the reformist party. Thomas produced a document reproducing most of the old charges. Only after this did our PC members reply in writing to the charges

and express serious doubts as to the success of the fusion.

Two of them, attending a PC meeting, were immediately confronted with the demand that they recognise the conference (two weeks distant) as the conference of a fused I-CL fully competent to take decisions. They were asked to state unconditionally their willingness to abide by these decisions. This we refused to do, saying that the refusal of the ex-WF leaders to debate political issues, the repeated slanders and the determination of the ex-WF leaders to make them the *issue* of their side of the debate put the fusion in question. A meeting of supporters of this position would be held within a week. However, we accepted the 'normal discipline' of the I-CL despite repeated charges that we were splitters and were planning to join the Workers League or the IMG.

Two days after this the three ex-WP members of the PC were suspended at a PC meeting to which they were not invited. The Matgamna group thus organised a split which they hoped would only involve Hughes, Stocking and King and a few comrades in London.

They have been disappointed — despite claims of a 'desertion' of between 12 and 20 individuals some 38 comrades (80% of the Workers Power grouping, all its pc members, 12 out of 14 of its NC members) have decided to terminate what remains of the fusion. They have done this because the Matgamna leadership had hi-jacked the leading bodies, had obstructed and undermined all attempts at open and honest debate. To have gone to the conference would have been to recognise the Matgamna grouping's claim that the fusion was successful and completed.

It should be known on the left that the Matgamna leadership has shown itself politically and organisationally incapable of maintaining a democratic centralist regime, thus turning the I-CL into a hardened sect. It should be known that far from being a factor in "breaking the logjam on the left" Matgamna's organisation is one of the most obdurate though not the most significant logs in the jam.

Workers Power will fight for its own politics in Britain and internationally. We are commit-

ted to debate, poiemic and dis-
cussion with other tendencies in
a genuine attempt to aid the
breaking of the logjam.

Workers Power Steering Cttee
25th September 1976

e. Second I-CL statement on the split.

Dear Comrades,

We write to ask you to open your columns to a brief reply to the press statement from 'Workers Power'.

Rarely in the history of the workers' movement has a would-be revolutionary organisation announced itself to the world in such a miserable way. The 'WP' statement includes not one hint of principled political positions.

All we have is a tale of how Hughes, Stocking etc were 'hard done by'. Even if that tale were true, Leninists would never use it as a basis to split. Instead Leninists would fight for the I-CL membership to call to order the alleged scoundrels. And what better opportunity than the I-CL conference due 4 days after these people split!

Split

But the split represented — fundamentally — a circle of personal associates running away from any political fight inside the I-CL. Even though Hughes and Stocking have, in the confusion, taken with them some valuable and serious comrades, this split is not a 'de-fusion'. The pre-fusion groups had ceased to exist or to function organisationally or politically as separate entities. No positions were put forward in the I-CL in the name of either group, nor did either meet to discuss political positions to be put forward in the I-CL or the 'progress of the fusion'. The I-CL has been a unitary democratic centralist organisation, as it was agreed it should be at fusion. The alleged 'de-fusion' thus consists of part of a group that had been in political hibernation; whose leaders' current politics, having changed in the course of the year, existed on the basis of no debate in the alleged 'group' that was to 'de-fuse'; and whose remaining ties could only be personal ones.

The best traditions of the old WP/LF — represented by those comrades and leading members of the old WP who remain loyal to the I-CL — were summed up in its break from IS politics and its participation in the I-CL fusion. Hughes' and Stocking's present course represents, if anything, a reversion to the most negative aspects of the WP/LF tradition: the IS conceptions which it grew away from as it advanced politically in the period 1972-75. (And not "independently" as they now say, but very

much under the influence of Workers Fight, by their own frequent admission until now.)

Those IS conceptions were revealed in the workerist bias of Hughes/Stocking's arguments inside the I-CL; their demagoguery about "industrial" or "trade union" work, their characterisation of the trade unions as "fighting organs" not steeped as far in reformism as the Labour Party, their counterposition of "agitation" as active and dynamic against "propaganda" as passive and sectarian.

Their trend is towards an IS conception of a revolutionary party as a machine for servicing trade union struggles. Hughes and Stocking are reverting to the notions they expressed in 1973: "Revolutionaries ... seek to win the leadership ... on the clear understanding that their politics enable them to be the best shop stewards". (IS Journal no.57).

With those conceptions, ideological clarity and honesty become secondary: the rule for revolutionaries becomes, not 'to tell the truth, however bitter it may be', but to say what is organisationally advantageous.

The 'WP' press statement is grossly dishonest on many points. We take a few.

The complaint ex-WF comrades made over the Action Programme debate was that Hughes & Stocking were failing to work actively to break up the old factional cohesion of WP/LF in favour of integration into the I-CL. The complaint was raised not when they criticised the draft, but later, when despite requests and promises they failed to produce any written concretisation of their criticisms or their alternative.

The statement claims that "the Matgamna leadership had hi-jacked the leading bodies". How? The only leading body modified (other than by voluntary withdrawals) since December 1975 was the executive sub-committee of the Political Committee — the Secretariat. (It was the Secretariat which decided on the suspensions and not, as stated, an improperly called or 'hi-jacked' PC.)

The Secretariat, starting in December with an "ex-WP majority", latterly had (by mutual agreement) an "ex-WF majority" and finally, when Cde. Stocking withdrew for personal reasons, no-one from "ex-WP". Hi-jacking? Never once, on the

PC or NC, did anyone allege improper procedure or raise a call for correcting the composition of the Secretariat.

The first I-CL conference was not scheduled to "mark the end of the fusion process". The "end of the fusion process" was last December! (See fusion resolution in International Communist No. 1). Thereafter it was agreed, as Stocking himself once said at a PC meeting (25.3.76): "Differences from pre-fusion would come up — but through being contained in comrades' heads, individually."

Hughes and Stocking still insist that it is "slandering" to say they were conserving a factional grouping on no clear political basis. But now they have formed not merely a factional, but a split grouping, on no clear or adequate political basis, and they declare that it has existed all along!

This is the sort of "slander" which they claim "put the fusion in question". What in fact put the fusion in question was their adherence to clique methods of operation. What brought about the split was the refusal of three leading members to recognise the democratic centralist authority of the conference — just five days after attending an NC at which they raised not a single objection to the basis or agenda of that conference.

We were faced with three individuals suddenly trying to re-define the organisation as federalist.

It was to uphold the democratic centralist integrity of the organisation as agreed and defined at fusion and as it had functioned without question for 9 months that the three were suspended. They had only to revert to their positions of the previous week to automatically quash the suspensions and return as full members to the leading bodies. Alternatively, their supporters on the NC could

have called an emergency NC to challenge the suspensions. This they refused to do.

The 'WP' statement says success depended on "a commitment from the ex-WF leadership to honest and open debate." But what about a commitment from their element of the ex-WP leadership?

While the NC majority pushed the written debate as far as reducing Hughes and Stocking's differ-

ences to eight short amendments to 'theses on orientation' prepared for conference, the real obstacle to "honest, open debate" was Hughes' and Stocking's persistent political and ideological slipperiness. Their statement gives two examples of that.

At fusion, they say, one of the tasks was seen as "building a left wing movement in the reformist party". In fact, the Hughes/Stocking position at that time was for piecemeal and strictly ancillary work in the reformist party, according to local circumstances — i.e. not for building any national movement. In their statement they have simply plagiarised some ideas from the grouping (mentioned in the first I-CL press statement) which at their 19th September meeting opposed the split. Plagiarised — and backdated!

And there is another backdating. Hughes and Stocking discover that they had at the time of fusion "programmatic differences" on the Fourth International question. Such differences would, of course, cast grave doubt on the principled character of the fusion from any but a nationalist standpoint. But in fact they are a new invention! The positions of "The I-CL and the FI" were published without a murmur of criticism or opposition from Hughes and Stocking.

Why the new invention? It could be to clear the tracks for a move toward the IMG. Or it could be part of the retreat towards IS-type positions. (Some philistine comments about "orthodox Trotskyism" from them recently give weight to the latter interpretation.)

Either course — toward the IMG, or toward an existence as a small state capitalist sect — can only confirm that the issue in the split was: Leninism or circle politics.

Political Committee, I-CL

9. "A warning for us: Workers' Power"

I-CL internal document, 22 February 1978, by Sean Matgamna and Martin Thomas (extract).

THE DANGERS OF SECTARIANISM

The concrete dangers we face:

- In the workplaces: to focus exclusively on 'high politics', failing to appreciate class consciousness when it expresses itself in more elemental and primitive forms.

- In relation to contacts, especially in the workplaces: to fail to pay proper attention to raw people, to fail to approach people starting from their concerns rather than ours, to focus over-much on contacts who are already 'political', to fail to do what can be done with contacts who are not prospects for recruitment. Either to preach at contacts, or to remain tongue-tied (or even avoid contacts) for fear of 'making a mistake' or because of 'not knowing exactly what to say'. A spirit of turning in on ourselves.

- In relation to the YS: confining our activity to proving to our own satisfaction that militant are not revolutionary Marxists.

- In relation to the LP: failing to link up with left wing currents where possible.

- In relation to the women's movement: focusing our propaganda on saying, in effect: 'you should not be feminists, you should agree with our programme instead'.

- In relation to revolutionary unity: if any real opportunities for realignment should emerge, holding back from seizing them or getting involved, contenting ourselves with commenting to our own satisfaction on its imperfections.

- There is also a spirit of sectarianism in relation to ourselves: a spirit of purist quibbling passivity in relation to our own activity.

A WARNING FOR US: "WORKERS' POWER"

Many of these problems are on the border-line between questions of individual psychology and approach, and its generalisation into a political method.

For a clearer view of the dangers, we can look at "Workers' Power". They have formal positions similar to ours on all major questions except the

class nature of the Stalinist states. But those positions are always expressed in the form of pedantic advice to or criticism of this or that 'specific layer of militants'.

Proposals and demands to other political forces are an essential part of the work of a Marxist tendency; indeed, it would be sectarian to confine our calls to action to what is possible for our own forces to put into effect. One slides over into sectarianism in the other direction when the demands, criticisms etc become consolations or cover-ups for one's own impotence.

The criticisms and proposals acquire a peevish, querulous tone.

For an approach to the working class, WP substitute a polemic against others on how to approach the working class (this has obvious roots in their existence inside IS). Advice to the Leyland combine committee (for example) to adopt 'transitional politics'... is ultimately the same road as the Militant.

WP is a 'ready-made' political party, or general staff, floating freely, whimsically taking up the 'command' of different forces from day to day, issuing instructions. It lacks any idea of building up forces; it is locked into an unreal view of itself, its possibilities, its environment. The structure of this is that of a self-justifying (therefore self-serving and irresponsible) clique whose members have allotted notional 'roles' to each other (Dave Theory and Dave Practice) and who 'conspire' together to defend their common delusions.

Lenin said opportunism cannot be trapped by a phrase; this example shows how sectarianism cannot be trapped by a phrase, how easy it is to slip over the dividing line from personal jadedness to political passivity.

The essential problems of theory and method involved were argued out in the polemic over programme and perspectives in 1976.

10. "No responsibility other than to spout its thin wisdom"

a. WP article on the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, WP no.2, November 1978 (extract).

The thinking of *Workers Action* is summed up by an interview John O'Mahoney member of its editorial board and the SCLV's steering committee, gave to the journal *International Communist* (No 9). O'Mahoney thinks that the key question facing British revolutionaries in the struggle against reformism is "whether one can most effectively fight Callaghan from within 'his own' castle or outside it". He plumps decisively for the latter course. "Callaghan's castle" is too impregnable to external attack. Worse, attempts to do so have resulted in the political deformation of the attackers. 'Premature independence', competition with the Labour Party leads to bowdlerisation of your politics, to 'cutting corners' he claims.

This argument hardly stands up to five minutes thought. The supporters of Gerry Healey and Tony Cliff were all in the Labour Party in the 1950s yet both made drastic concessions to the Bevanite milieu on the left of the party. On the other hand tendencies within the Labour Party today like *Militant* and the *Chartist* have cut more than a few corners of Trotskyist politics. Did the independent 'Workers Fight' group of 1971 to 1974 show a greater drive to bowdlerise its politics than today's *Workers Action*?

O'Mahoney is frightened of 'sectarianism', of failing to implant his grouping 'in the broad labour movement'. But by a piece of sleight of hand this movement is identified with the Labour Party which is defined as "a mass reformist party of a structure unique among reformist parties for its relative openness". O'Mahoney is obviously aware that the Labour Party is a 'mass reformist party' only by virtue of its Trade Union affiliations and therefore justifies the centrality of work in the constituencies by positing a perspective whereby these masses will flood into the CLPs via the 'open valve' to struggle with the right wing leaders. Much as he dislikes 'schemas' this certainly is one!

The SCLV represents a mechanism for relating to this radicalisation. In fact this approach is fundamentally the same as the IMG's 'class struggle left wing' or the SWP's rank and

file movement. It identifies a different location for this radicalisation but it adopts the same process of producing hybrid programmes adapted to a hypothetical 'radicalised' or 'aroused' Labour Party left. It confuses two distinct things, a united front on limited but vital issues of the class struggle in which revolutionaries combine in joint action with reformist workers and leaders, and the building of a revolutionary tendency around an adequate programme of action. Instead at the level of platform *Workers Action* supporters are compelled to bowdlerise themselves.

Indeed O'Mahoney is caught in the act of trimming within the confines of one and the same article. The SCLV he tells us has worked out a platform that "roughly answers the objective needs of the working class now".

Later however he maintains that "we haven't insisted that people joining the campaign agree with every dot and comma of the platform".

The problem is that the platform has no cutting edge committing the reformist leaders who give it verbal adherence to actions other than addressing meetings or writing articles for *Socialist Organiser*. Some of them are councillors, some prospective candidates for parliament. How will they vote when Callaghan demands support for the government on existing anti-working class policies? How do they act now on issues like fighting racism? The SCLV platform says "The labour movement must mobilise to drive the fascists off the streets". Surely this is not just a 'dot and comma' it would be sectarian to insist upon, in a platform claiming to represent 'socialist' policies. Figures like Ernie Roberts and Ted Knight are given credentials as fighting lefts. Yet the weakness of these figures was glaringly displayed in this very issue at the ANL Carnival 2.

Despite the fact that the SCLV advised its members to protect Brick Lane, Ernie Roberts was chairing the ANL's platform in Hyde Park. He issued no call to go to Brick Lane whatsoever. Ted Knight welcomed the ANL revellers to Brockwell Park, likewise with no call to go to the

East End. Indeed Roberts' unbroken connection with *passive* left reformism was demonstrated by his rapturous introduction of Wedgwood Benn in Hyde Park, praising his record in the fight against racism. The Labour Party rank and file could "do no better than elect him as the next party leader".

Meanwhile, *Workers Action* remains silent on the weaknesses of these leaders. In essence their method is to apply the 'class struggle tendency' approach of the IMG to the stagnant waters of the CLPs. *Workers Action* claims that it wants to put this "new organised movement of the left of the Labour Party and the unions - with a class struggle programme [in] the forefront of organising support activity for strikes against the 5% limit".

Workers Power argues that this cannot transcend vague talk about 'socialist policies' unless it tackles head on the question of Callaghan's central blackmail weapon, the preservation of the Labour Government. To win these struggles, to generalise the offensive workers must be won in practice to a 'no holding back to preserve Callaghan' position. This is the key litmus test for the 'new left' fighting reformists also. A united front with these leaders is highly desirable if they mobilise their supporters for struggle and if revolutionaries are honest and open in their criticisms of every weakness, vacillation or backward step they make. The SCLV has so far, in line with the politics of *Workers Action* steered its course towards the CLPs and towards a mish mash of 'left' propaganda, a strategy least likely to meet either of these criteria. It will thus, on its present course neither win workers in the Labour Party to a consistent revolutionary programme or organisation nor will it build support for today's struggles. *Workers Action* supporters should ask themselves whether imprisonment in Callaghan's castle is not taking a heavy toll.

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b. Workers' Action "Notes to Organisers", 10 July 1978 (extract).

As a minority tendency we find that much of our work consists of minority critical interventions in arenas dominated by other political currents. Naturally that fact produces a certain pressure for comrades to see that minority, critical stance as the hallmark of principled politics. In reality it is necessary for Marxists to know how to be intransigent in defending our views even when we are in a minority; equally it is necessary for us to know how to lead broad movements without constantly itching to turn the movement into a schoolroom for us to preach our full programme at.

We expected the Campaign to be a relatively modest affair of ourselves and our periphery plus a few others. It turns out that it has 'keyed in' to the preoccupations of a much larger spectrum of left-wingers. That provides us with tremendous opportunities - and puts us to the test, perhaps more than ever before in our entire history, for our ability to lead a broad movement without falling into sectarian 'take it or leave it' attitudes. That is what is new about the Campaign. The basic political criteria we are applying, in seeking unity of action with militant left reformists and semi-revolutionaries on a limited platform which is nonetheless adequate for this limited purpose, are fundamentally no different from the criteria we have discussed and explained many times in relation to rank and file movements in the trade unions. It is only the transposition of the problem to the political sphere, and, probably, some syndicalist prejudices in our minds, that creates any impression that we are advancing some basically new policy.

What will determine whether the Campaign is a step forward for revolutionary politics or an empty bit of left-Labourite flummery is:

- a) whether the Campaign is built actively, with effective local groups and so on;
- b) whether, in particular, it is built in the factories.

c) whether we, within the campaign, argue, make contacts, convince people, recruit, and use the people who are not recruitable as 'bridges' to people who are recruitable.

Those will be our tasks in the months after the Campaign conference. Our aim at the conference is to make sure we are enabled to do that work.

Workers' Power presents a problem: they have submitted a long list of amendments to the Campaign platform, up to and including one on the Workers' Government. Some of the amendments taken individually might be perfectly reasonable and correct; taken as a whole, however, they are quite incongruous to the character of the Campaign and become virtually 'wrecking amendments'.

Absolutely central is the idea that we do not go to the conference with the idea that our job is to pick a fight with anyone not agreeing with full I-CL politics. We unreservedly support the SCLV platform as a completely adequate basis for what the SCLV is attempting to do - and we unreservedly support what it is attempting to do.

We believe the politics of the SCLV platform are fully adequate as the basis of a working class campaign to indict the government's record, to pose the way forward in terms of the objective interests of the working class and to create a serious tendency oriented to the working class struggle within the mass reformist labour movement.

The planks in the SCLV platform could be rendered perhaps more precise and made more comprehensive by addition, if our purpose were to write a 'revolutionary programme'. That is not the purpose of the SCLV. It is an election campaign conducted within the mass reformist labour movement with the purpose of countering the lesser-evil-ist, the 'demon Tories are worse than Callaghan' campaign of the right wing and the trade union bureaucracy. The purpose of the conference is to launch the campaign on a political basis adequate to meet the needs of the working class in this situation and to create the basis for a large scale campaign throughout the labour movement and Labour Party between now and the election.

The SCLV platform is drafted so as not to exclude those wide layers of the labour movement who can be organised on a campaign for the working class interest, but who would hesitate or refuse to identify with a precise and scientific revolutionary programme (such as, for example, the I-CL manifesto). The planks in the platform are therefore general and fundamental class struggle ideas - not a scientific programme. To attempt to substitute a scientific programme would be to sterilise the potential of the Campaign. For us it would be to abandon our responsibility to organise a vigorous counter-Callaghan/Healey election campaign & sink to the level of irresponsible literary heroes and pedants.

The SCLV provisional steering committee will be moving resolutions (e.g. as in the Birmingham motion, IB26) designed to improve the basis of the Campaign. We will be supporting these resolutions.

However, we will firmly oppose any amendments or resolutions designed to transform the existing platform into a scientific programme - such as WP's.

Such a sectarian approach at the conference signifies an irresponsible attempt to perhaps win over a few unclear people by making propaganda speeches (etc) at the conference, at the cost of destroying the SCLV's potential for reaching out to many hundreds of unclear but class-struggle oriented people in the labour movement - who will not be at the conference and are not on the SCLV mailing lists, but who can be taken a great step towards scientific revolutionary politics by the SCLV campaign. It is a narrow and short-term petty factional approach.

WP, which abandoned the struggle to build the I-CL as a democratic-centralist organisation in 1976 and opted for building a circle of friends, now goes to conference for the purpose of making irresponsible propaganda - that is, it accepts no responsibility to the movement or the various meeting other than to spout its thin wisdom. Thus it attended a recent conference and proposed, in effect, that instead of the focus of the campaign being to defend Alan Thornett and the 9 TGWU members in Oxford threatened with expulsion from the TGWU, the conference should address itself to the task of building a general rank and file movement for trade union democracy... One of their resolutions at the SCLV conference in effect wants the SCLV to start an organisation to support the Irish struggle.

Such an approach moreover would disrupt the existing support for the SCLV on the basis of its platform. We, who think the SCLV platform adequate for its tasks, oppose any such disruption.

We believe that the experience of the SCLV so far (i.e. over a few weeks) shows that the potential for a broad campaign on a roughly adequate platform the election campaign is very large. (An attempt to make the platform 'exactly' adequate rather than 'roughly' adequate is necessarily a pedantic exercise; the nature, structure, aims and tasks of the SCLV are not such that it can be the bearer of a 'precise' programme). The work of organising this campaign is a great step forward for the left and for tendencies like our own. To attempt to impose a 'scientific communist' programme on the campaign now would be to cauterise and sterilise it. Those who go to the conference accepting no responsibility other than to make a few propaganda points will, if they have their way at the conference, quickly return themselves to having to make their propaganda minus the SCLV. We want the SCLV to be built. Elements within it will find their way, with our help, to our full programme - far more numerous elements than if we join the sectarians in destroying the SCLV.

11. "Wrong to demand the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan".

a. WP articles on the USSR invasion of Afghanistan, WP no.12, February 1980 (extracts).

The strategic aim of all revolutionaries must be the self organisation of the Afghan proletariat and feudal elements to organise their own state power, independent of the Stalinists and the imperialists. At the present time, however, a withdrawal of Soviet troops would almost certainly open the way for an imperialist backed regime in Afghanistan. So demoralised and disoriented are the Afghan masses, so small and scattered are the progressive forces, as a direct result of Afghan and Soviet Stalinism, that there could be no other outcome at present.

For this reason we consider it tactically wrong for revolutionaries and, indeed, all anti-imperialist forces to demand the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

At the moment this call can have little meaning other than a tacit acceptance of a victory for Afghan domestic reaction and US/British imperialisms' designs against the Soviet Union and the liberation struggles of South-

West Asia. As and when the forces exist in Afghanistan which can mobilise the masses for the major democratic and socialist goals, and hold the pro-imperialist forces at bay, then, socialists should call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

In the present conflict between the Soviet Armed Forces (SAF) and the pro-imperialist rebels, we are not neutral. We are for the defeat of the pro-imperialist forces. This does not mean that we give political support to the Karmal government or the Soviet bureaucracy's policies.

* STATEMENT *

DURING THE PAST YEAR WORKERS POWER HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN A REASSESSMENT OF OUR CHARACTERISATION OF THE USSR AS A STATE CAPITALIST AND IMPERIALIST COUNTRY. IN ANALYSING THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN AND DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR REVOLUTIONARIES IN THE FACE OF A NEW 'COLD WAR OFFENSIVE' WE FOUND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO ADVANCE A PRINCIPLED REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAMME FROM ANY OTHER STANDPOINT THAN THAT OF CHARACTERISING THE USSR AS A DEGENERATED WORKERS' STATE.

THESE ARTICLES ARE ALL WRITTEN FROM THAT STANDPOINT.

b. Workers' Action statement on Afghanistan, WA no.166, 9 February 1980 (extracts).

Afghanistan had for 25 years been a client state of the bureaucracy and from 1978 had drawn very close to the USSR, which dramatically increased the number of its 'advisers', military and civilian.

As the regime increasingly showed ineptitude and fell apart, the Russians were drawn in to substitute for the PDP and the disintegrating army. The logical finale was the invasion, which marked the end of the Army-PDP experiment and opened a new chapter.

Russia invaded

- because of lack of confidence in the 'leftism' and intransigence of the Amin regime and its obvious incapacity to stabilise Afghanistan.

- because defeat of the PDP-Army regime would have placed in power a hostile regime on its borders (though this should not be exaggerated: the invasion has done just that in the case of Pakistan, now being rearmed and reinforced by imperialism).

- because to allow defeat of its client could undermine its relations with other client states like Ethiopia.

- because — and this is probably the fundamental thing — the disarray and weakness of imperialism following its defeat in Indochina and the recent collapse of Iran as a military power seemed to allow the possibility of the Russian bureaucracy expanding its area of control with impunity, and in a strategically important area.

Further expansion through Baluchistan to the sea may well be in the minds of the Russian bureaucracy. In the '40s it seized and plundered territory in Eastern Europe and Manchuria, with the consent of imperialism. The USSR is not imperialist in the sense of being based on monopoly capitalism, with its inherent drive to expand and divide up the world — but the bureaucracy does seek to gain and plunder new territories when it can. As Trotsky indicated:

"The driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy is indubitably the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues. This is the element of 'imperialism' in the widest sense of the word which was a property in the past of all

monarchies, oligarchies, ruling castes, medieval estates and classes."

The foreign policy of the USSR today is that of a relatively stable bureaucratic degenerated workers' state. Since World War 2 it has increasingly been the co-equal of imperialism in terms of military power, in a world where the H-Bomb has led the rulers of imperialism and the bureaucracy so far to rule out full scale war as a means of trying each other's strength. In that period the bureaucracy has been the twin pillar of world counter-

revolution, the other being American imperialism.

It has taken opportunities to expand its area of control by agreement with imperialism as after World War 2. Competition with imperialism has led it to support a number of autonomous, mainly Stalinist-led, third world anti-imperialist movements, of a relatively progressive character.

In underdeveloped countries, the USSR's post October Revolution social

system has allowed the Kremlin bureaucracy the possibility of relating to revolutionary movements in a seemingly positive way. Its own social structure has allowed it to seem in line with the anti-imperialist and even anti-capitalist objectives of the revolutionaries.

It has 'evoked' revolutionary movements in areas such as Eastern Europe — and almost immediately, or simultaneously strangled them, imposing a repressive totalitarian regime as the social instrument of the rule of a parasitic bureaucratic caste, on top of the revolutionary transformation it has carried through or helped through.

At the same time, the bureaucracy's limited rapprochement with imperialism has meant that CPs under its influence in the advanced countries have betrayed the revolutionary movements of the Italian, Belgian, French and other working classes repeatedly. And the awful example of the USSR and its satellites, presented as socialism by the reactionaries, has been a major dead weight on the struggle of the world working class for the socialist revolution.

For all these reasons, the bureaucracy, taken as a

whole in its relation to world politics, has been a fundamentally reactionary and anti-revolutionary force.

In Afghanistan, to have any hope of creating a friendly regime, the Russians would have to carry through the land reform and other reforms. They have the strength, including the military resources and the physical power that the PDP-Army regime did not have, and therefore could carry through these changes.

If they do, it will be on the basis of the subjugation and conquest, with a greater or lesser degree of violence, of the vast majority of the people of Afghanistan. The most relevant experience here is Tibet/China.

Other possibilities are open, including withdrawal under pressure.

Simultaneously, with any social transformation, the Russian bureaucracy will impose a totalitarian regime on Afghanistan, hitting most sharply at those elements of a labour movement that exist or will come into existence.

In the overall context, such a transformation, paid for at such cost, cannot be progressive. Trotsky argued: "The occupation of eastern Poland by the Red Army [in 1939-40] is to be sure a 'lesser evil' in comparison with the occupation of the same territory by Nazi troops. But this greater evil was obtained because Hitler was assured of achieving a greater evil. If somebody sets, or helps set a house on fire and afterward saves five out of ten of the occupants of the house in order to convert them into his own semi-slaves, that is to be sure a lesser evil than to have built the entire ten. But it is dubious that this firebug merits a medal for the rescue..." The argument against 'lesser evilism' applies equally to Afghanistan too.

As Trotsky indicated:

"The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or that area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organisation of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one, and

the only decisive standpoint, the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, completely retains its reactionary character and remains the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution."

And again:

"The statification of the means of production is, as we said, a progressive measure. But its progressiveness is relative; its specific weight depends on the sum-total of all the other factors. Thus, we must first and foremost establish that the extension of the territory dominated by bureaucratic autocracy and parasitism, cloaked by 'socialist' measures, can augment the prestige of the Kremlin, engender illusions concerning the possibility of replacing the socialist revolution with manoeuvres, and so on.

This evil far outweighs the progressive content of Stalinist reforms in Poland. In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas, as well as in the USSR become a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say socialist development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy...

We do not entrust the Kremlin with any historic mission. We were and remain against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin."

We call for the withdrawal of troops because of their overall reactionary role, in terms of political pulverisation of Afghanistan, strengthening of the Russian bureaucracy, and reactionary effects in world politics (reinforcement of Stalinism and cold-war forces). We argue for the mobilisation of progressive forces in Afghanistan independently of and against the Russian Army.

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c. Socialist Organiser editorial, "Reassessing the Eastern Bloc", SO no.371, 15 September 1988.

The most common idea on the left is that the USSR and the East European states it controls are some sort of socialist societies.

We, however, don't think so — never have. We have subscribed to the so-called 'orthodox Trotskyist' notion that the Stalinist states are best categorised as "degenerated and deformed workers' states" — far from socialism because of their bureaucratic regimes, but an advance on capitalism because of their nationalised economies.

We have long said that the "degenerated and deformed workers' states" formula was unsatisfactory. By now, most supporters of *Socialist Organiser* no longer believe that the designation "workers' state" — degenerated, deformed, or whatever — makes any sort of sense.

The paper's National Editorial Board voted last Sunday to review our nominal adherence to that formula, and to open a discussion in the paper on the Eastern Bloc states. This editorial explains why.

Our programme

We are for workers' liberty East and West. We are for working-class self-liberation East and West. We are with the workers when they demand the right to organise and speak freely, the right to freedom for individuals and for nationalities, and the right to control economic affairs — East and West. We are with the workers when they fight for wages and conditions — East and West.

We are therefore with Solidarnosc — for its right to operate and its fight for the wages, conditions, and liberties of its members — against Poland's rulers. We are with Solidarnosc even when, as at present, its leaders call for a market economy.

The official trade-union organisations in the Eastern bloc are not real workers' unions. They are agencies of the factory managements and the government. We are therefore for trade unions in other countries breaking links with those state unions, and establishing links instead with Solidarnosc in Poland and the pioneer free trade union groups elsewhere.

We are for the democratic right to self-determination of nations, as the only basis for international workers' unity. In accord with that

principle, we have opposed the USSR's military occupation of Afghanistan.

We are for:

- Disbandment of the police and armed forces, and their replacement by a people's militia.
- Breaking up the bureaucratic hierarchy of administration, and replacing it with a democratic regime of councils of elected and recallable workers' delegates, with freedom to form many political parties.
- Workers' control in industry. Free trade unions.
- Abolition of bureaucratic privileges; reorganisation of the economy according to a democratically-decided plan.
- Abolition of the bureaucracy's monopoly over information; freedom for working-class newspapers, meetings, radio and TV stations, etc.

We are for nationalisation of the major means of production. But what exists now in the Eastern Bloc is no form of socialism. Nationalisation is a means to an end — working-class liberation from the economic exploitation of those who control the means of production. That is not achieved when the nationalised economy and the monopolising state are in effect the property of a ruling elite whose upper layers lord it over society as the aristocrats and capitalists do elsewhere.

We advocate the replacement of the system of nationalised economy under a state-monopoly bureaucracy with a socialised economy under the democratic control of the working class.

Trotsky's approach

All these positions follow from our basic goal of working-class self-liberation, and our belief — based on the evidence of the Russian Revolution of 1917, France 1968, Portugal 1974-5, Hungary 1956, Poland 1980-1, and many other struggles — that the working class can liberate itself and reconstruct society on socialist lines.

None of these positions depends on, or is affected by, precise sociological definitions of the states with nationalised economies and structures similar to the USSR's. Whatever progressive significance we attach to the fact of nationalised property — even if it is a large one — it cannot outweigh our allegiance to the living struggles of the working class.

In taking this approach, we follow Trotsky. "The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organisation of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones..."

The statification of the means of production is, as we said, a progressive measure. But its progressiveness is relative: its specific weight depends on the sum-total of all the other factors.

Thus, we must first and foremost establish that the extension of the territory dominated by bureaucratic autocracy and parasitism, cloaked by 'socialist' measures, can augment the prestige of the Kremlin, engender illusions concerning the possibility of replacing the proletarian revolution by bureaucratic manoeuvres, and so on. This evil by far outweighs the progressive content of Stalinist reforms...

In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas, as well as in the USSR, become a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say socialist development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy".

We also follow the Trotskyist movement of 1948.

"It will be necessary to continue this revolutionary class struggle consistently and uninterruptedly in the case of the occupation of any given country by the Russian army, even though the revolutionary forces clash with the Russian army, and also in spite of the military consequences which this might entail for the Russian army in its operations against the imperialist military forces. In any case, the use of military means remains subordinated to the necessities of the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat in whatever countries it may be. Thus, our defence of the USSR remains identical in all cases with the continuation of the revolutionary class struggle..."

'Deformed workers' states'

After 1948 the Trotskyist movement went off the rails. It lost its clear focus on the working class as the agency of socialist politics. Often it looked instead to a vaguely-defined 'process of world revolution'. Working-class action was *desirable* for this process to go

forward rapidly and healthily — but the world revolution could very well progress without or despite the working class.

Undeniably, this wavering of focus accompanied the Trotskyists' codification of a new analysis of the Eastern Bloc states, as "degenerated and deformed workers' states". We have accepted that codification, but dissented from the conclusions that most of its adherents have drawn from it.

Trotsky, right up to his death, regarded the USSR as a "degenerated workers' state". He considered that its nationalised and planned economy, created by the workers' revolution, defined it as a form of workers' state — a society beyond capitalism — but that economic base was combined in a contradictory and unstable structure with the totalitarian rule of a vicious bureaucracy, "different from fascism only in more unbridled savagery". The bureaucracy had all the vices of a ruling class, but had not yet demonstrated the stability and substantial historical role of one.

Such an attitude did not lead Trotsky to waver in any way in his political focus on working-class self-liberation.

In 1945-9 the Trotskyists saw the basic economic forms of the USSR — those which had for Trotsky defined it as a sort of workers' state — established in many other countries. Political regimes similar to the USSR's were also established in those countries. If the USSR was a degenerated workers' state, then these countries must also be some sort of workers' state. They could not be called "degenerated", because they had been bureaucratic police states from the start. So they were "deformed" workers' states — states in which Stalinist political formations or the USSR's army had created as much as survived of 'the conquests of October 1917', together with a Stalinist regime.

On the face of it, this conclusion need not lead to any weakness in our allegiance to working-class self-liberation in the states thus

designated "degenerated and deformed workers' states". If it means that we call the workers' anti-bureaucratic revolution there "political" rather than "social", then — as Trotsky explained back in 1939 — the difference is in terminology rather than programme.

Perspective

The Trotskyists in 1945-51 were in part influenced by issues of broad historical perspective. If the Stalinist states were "degenerated and deformed workers' states", then the following perspective could be deduced.

Capitalism must be in extreme decay: that was why post-capitalist states had been created even under

bureaucratic leadership and therefore in such aberrant forms. The aberrant forms were inherently and acutely unstable. A world of collapsing capitalism and unstable aberrant bureaucratisms put workers' power on the agenda as soon as the necessary political leadership came forward.

In 1939 Trotsky had written: "The historical alternative, carried to the end, is as follows: either the Stalin regime is an abhorrent relapse in the process of transforming bourgeois society into a socialist society, or the Stalin regime is the first stage of a new exploiting society". Now the alternative was posed not only for the USSR but also for Stalinist states covering one third of the world.

If these were not workers' states, then what were they? They must be new exploiting societies, and new exploiting societies of undeniable dynamism. Capitalist development was leading not to socialism but to a new revived form of capitalism (state capitalism) or to a new form of exploitation (bureaucratic collectivism). Where did this leave socialists? As helpless utopians?

Some Trotskyists in 1945-51 did try to formulate "state capitalist" or "bureaucratic collectivist" analyses. But they dealt unconvincingly with the issues of historical perspective. Most of them became hopeless sectarians.

The name-tag and the theories

But what in fact did the mainstream of the Trotskyist movement achieve with the codification of the "degenerated and deformed workers' state" thesis in 1951 at the Third World Congress of the Fourth International? Not a coherent theory with a grip on reality. They achieved only a name-tag — "degenerated and deformed workers' state" — behind which over the years accumulated a wide variety of different theories.

What the "workers' state" name-tag signified was the acceptance of the Stalinist states as in some way progressive. Within that framework, the description and analysis differed widely in both detail and implications.

For Ted Grant, of what is now the *Militant* tendency, a nationalised economy was ipso facto a workers' state, no matter how or by whom it was created. For Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, the deformed workers' states were nationalised economies created by some sort of working-class agency — by the USSR's state authority in Eastern Europe, or by dissident Stalinist parties in Yugoslavia and China which were in fact "deformed workers' parties". For Joseph Hansen, the "working-class" character of the agency in Yugoslavia and China was defined by the mass pressure on the Stalinist

parties — although these parties remained Stalinist, they had been forced to go further than they wanted.

None of these theories was satisfactory. Grant's theory implied

that workers' states could be created without, despite, against, or in the absence of a working class. It pointed Trotskyists towards supporting such creation without, despite, or against the working class as a major if flawed step forward towards socialism. It could be sustained only by saying that state capitalism and bureaucratic collectivism were by definition impossible — a view Trotsky never took.

The Pablo/Mandel or the Hansen thesis could be sustained only by gross illusions about the nature of the Yugoslav and Chinese (and later Vietnamese, Cuban etc.) revolutions. These were not workers' revolutions. The social base of the revolutionary parties was mainly peasant; the parties were heavily bureaucratised and militarised; their ideology was Stalinist; and, far from being pushed against their wishes by the working class, they clamped down on the workers.

These theories were advanced by sincere and militant anti-Stalinists. Yet they all led to softness on some bureaucracies, some times — whether it be Grant's steadfast support for the USSR's murderous occupation of Afghanistan, or the illusions of various parts of the Pablo/Mandel/Hansen current (represented in Britain today by *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Outlook*) on the Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutionaries.

Most Trotskyists have wallowed in confusion and vacillation — glorifying a succession of Stalinist totalitarian bureaucracies from Tito through Mao to Castro and Ho Chi Minh. One staggering fact: it was 20 years after Mao took power in all of China, clamping down on the workers and jailing the Chinese Trotskyists, before the mainstream of post-Trotsky Trotskyism decided that a political revolution was necessary!

The last 40 years

A number of facts are unmistakable from the evidence of the last 40 years, central to clear assessment of the struggles in the Eastern Bloc, yet obscured by or difficult to reconcile with the "deformed and degenerated workers' states" codification.

1. The position of the working class in the command economies is generally worse than in the market economies. Low rents and food prices, and fairly full employment, do make the poorest in the Eastern Bloc better off than the poorest in the West. Yet average working-class living standards are lower, even at

the same level of general industrial development.

Work conditions, despite the sluggish pace of work in many Eastern Bloc factories much of the time, are worse. And — centrally — the ruling bureaucracies repress all independent organisation by the working class.

South Korea is a society based on ruthless exploitation and brutal repression: yet it has allowed some openings for trade unions to develop against the odds. North Korea has allowed no such openings. The contrast between the two Koreas reflects the general picture.

And this is not an extraordinary situation of acute short-term crisis — as the position in the USSR in the '30s could perhaps be viewed at the time. It is a stable pattern over 40, 50 or 60 years.

The command economies have built up large and powerful working classes, working classes which have shown tremendous socialist potential. In that sense they have created preconditions for socialism. But in their repression of the working class they are further away from socialism than many market economies.

2. The development of the productive forces may be progressive even if the immediate results for the workers are bad. Many post-1951 Trotskyists have let the goal of working-class self-liberation be obscured by the goal of national economic development, because that national economic development is where the "workers' states" are supposed to display their superiority over market capitalism. Some command economies have indeed developed industry fast.

But so — since 1945 — have many market economies. The command economies can certainly show no general, clear superiority over the market economies in developing the forces of production. Indeed, relative stagnation in the USSR and Eastern Europe is now the starting point for Gorbachev's reforms.

The command economies are not a stage beyond capitalism in developing the productive forces. Rather, they have emerged from underdeveloped capitalist societies with a big load of pre-capitalist or colonialist drag, and done broadly the same work as capitalist development.

A cooperative commonwealth — a nationalised economy planned under workers' democracy — will produce more efficiently and distribute more equally than any market economy ever can. We have no reason to doubt that.

But the sort of nationalised economy that exists in the Eastern Bloc has no superiority over a market economy — neither superiority in the conditions it creates for the workers, nor superiority in long-term development of the productive forces.

The bureaucracies

3. Outside the USSR, the ruling bureaucracies are not usurpers of the nationalised economies: they

created them. They did not create them because mass pressure forced them to do so against their will. They created them according to their own wishes and their own designs.

The bureaucracies are not acutely unstable. For 40 to 50 years they have been stably self-reproducing organisms. If we do not call them "ruling classes", it can only be on a technicality.

Although sometimes when in power the bureaucracies seek to recruit individuals from the working class, the core of these bureaucracies is certainly not a segment or a product of the working class. They come from the middle class. Perhaps nowhere is this seen more plainly than in Afghanistan, where a very large part of the middle class and the military and technical intelligentsia tried, in the 1978 coup and after, to transform themselves into a bureaucracy on the USSR model.

Trotsky spoke of the Kremlin bureaucracy as balancing between its social and economic base and the pressure of capitalist imperialism. Such a view is no longer tenable.

The USSR is the second world power. In Vietnam, China and elsewhere the bureaucratised revolutionary forces were able to defeat the old order and beat down the working class *simultaneously*. Even while they were revolutionary against the old order, they were simultaneously counter-revolutionary against the working class.

4. The USSR does not correspond exactly to Lenin's picture of imperialism in his 1916 pamphlet. But then neither does any other country today. Today we commonly use the word "imperialism" in a wider sense than did Lenin, for whom "imperialism" started only around 1898-1902. In that broader sense of the word "imperialism", the US, Britain, etc are imperialist — and so is the USSR.

Nearly 50 years ago Trotsky wrote: "The driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy is indubitably the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues. This is the element of 'imperialism' in the widest sense of the word which was a property in the past of all monarchies, oligarchies, ruling

castes, medieval estates and classes".

Today the USSR has in Eastern Europe an empire with over 100 million people. You can deny that the USSR is imperialism only by saying that imperialism is only the form of monopoly-capitalist imperialism described by Lenin, and nothing else. And that would be to deny the existence of the Athenian and Roman, the Spanish and Ottoman empires, or indeed of the British Empire for all but 70 or so years of its 300-year life.

The conflict between the US and the USSR is chiefly about competition for spheres of influence and control, rather than a dispute of

market economy versus nationalised economy.

Pessimism?

One other fact of the last 40 years puts things in a different light. In the 1930s Trotsky saw capitalism in an impasse. The productive forces had ceased to grow. The working class had ceased to grow, and was being eroded by mass unemployment. The USSR, however, was developing. Call the USSR a new exploiting society, and you said that the contradictions of capitalism led not to socialism but to that new form of exploitation.

Since 1945 capitalism has grown enormously — faster than ever before. The working class has greatly expanded. Dozens of new countries have industrialised. Seen from the perspective of 1988, the USSR's growth in the 1930s looks not like a bold stride beyond capitalism, but like something essentially parallel to the industrial growth of Japan in the same period, of several Latin American economies in the '30s and '40s, and of many Third World countries since 1945.

In the first place, this makes nonsense of the idea that "deformed workers' states" develop because of the utter impasse, decay and collapse of capitalism. Look at South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand, and it is hard to argue that China, Vietnam and North Korea could not have developed any further on a market-capitalist basis.

In the second place, it does away with the argument that to call the Eastern Bloc new exploiting societies is to commit ourselves to pessimism about the prospect for socialism, or to abandon it altogether. Whatever we call the Eastern Bloc, we have lived through 40 years of expanding capitalism. A "new exploiting society" may have grown — but the numbers and potential of the working class have grown also.

Post-1951 Trotskyism

In the polemics gathered together in the book *In Defence of Marxism* Trotsky insisted that the discussion on the class nature of the USSR could not be about labels only. It was and had to be essentially about the perspectives implied in the different name-tags.

On the level of name-tags, the post-1951 Trotskyists were extending Trotsky's theory of the USSR — as a degenerated workers' state in which the bureaucracy was in agonising contradiction with the nationalised means of production — to new "deformed workers' states". This did not square with the facts. The post-1951 Trotskyists tried to ignore or define away many facts; but the facts took their revenge.

The post-1951 Trotskyists retained Trotsky's name-tag. But in fact

they threw out his theory and perspective. Under the name-tag, what they described was a new form of society in which the nationalised economy was the creation of the bureaucracy. The bureaucracies — this would come through unmistakably despite efforts to present them, or some of them, as segments of the working class — were essentially new ruling classes. And they had the mission of developing backward countries for a whole historical period.

The "orthodox Trotskyists" who continued to mouth Trotsky's formula about the degenerated workers' state were actually describing the sort of new "bureaucratic collectivist" society which some of his opponents in 1940 described. Only where Trotsky's 1940 opponents put a minus sign on these new societies and called them barbarism, the neo-Trotskyists put a plus sign and called them the socialist revolution. That was the essential and only meaning of the "degenerated and deformed workers' states" tag.

Isaac Deutscher made this clear. His writings on Stalin and the Stalinist states greatly influenced the post-1951 Trotskyists. Yet, in a reflective summing-up published just after he died in 1967, he avowed that maybe the bureaucracies were new ruling classes. In substance — there can be no doubt about it — his picture of the Stalinist states was that of new societies which were progressive, but had no 'working-class' imprint on them at all.

This has been the fundamental tendency of all the post-1951 "workers' state" theories. It has been accompanied by another tendency, which *Militant* perhaps brings out most clearly: to write Stalinism into the socialist programme as a progressive (if limited) and perhaps necessary (if regrettable) stage between capitalism and socialism for underdeveloped countries.

The general pattern of post-1951 Trotskyism's response to Stalinist revolutions has been this: for a period to pretend that the revolutionaries are somehow "working-class" or at least part of the "world revolutionary process"; then finally to recognise that the regimes repress the working class, but to continue to see them as somehow progressive.

History took an ironic revenge on the ghost of Leon Trotsky. His most literal and "orthodox" followers embraced the politics of some of his most despised opponents on the left in the 1930s, the so-called "Brandlerites". These were the "Right Communists", the co-thinkers of Bukharin, expelled from the Communist International after 1929. They were much more numerous than the Trotskyists in the 1930s. They criticised the Comintern and the USSR for specific

policies and for lack of democracy, but refused to define the bureaucracy as a distinct social formation and rejected Trotsky's call for a new — 'political' — revolution.

The mutation of neo-Trotskyism into neo-Brandlerism began in 1948. Tito fell out with Stalin. The neo-Trotskyists started to pretend that Tito's regime and Tito's bureaucracy were somehow part of the 'world revolution'. Since then the official Trotskyist movement has combined, in an unstable melange, Trotsky's revolutionary programme for the USSR with a critical-Stalinist reformist programme for a succession of other Stalinist states — Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam.

Our politics

Our political attitude to the workers and bureaucracies in the Eastern Bloc has been quite different from that of other Trotskyists following the 1951 formula of the "degenerated and deformed workers' states". We should have been more explicit and outspoken about Vietnamese Stalinism — we did attack the illusions widespread on the left, but only, so to speak, in footnotes — but beyond that we have nothing to reproach ourselves with in practical politics. We did not — as did the Healyites — prattle about the danger of capitalist restoration in Czechoslovakia in 1968. We supported Solidarnosc's call for a working-class boycott of Polish goods when martial law was imposed in 1981. We demanded the withdrawal of USSR troops from Afghanistan from day one.

Over the last 30-odd years, many Trotskyists have made many efforts — often very intricate — to formulate better theories to underpin the 1951 codification. But aren't all those efforts scholastic? Isn't the shift of focus from the working class to the nebulous, classless

'world revolution' a logical product of the attempt to define Yugoslavia, China, etc. as somehow distorted socialist revolutions? (For sure the working class was not centre stage to make those revolutions socialist. So what was? The 'world revolution'.) Isn't the great instability of official Trotskyism, its constant wavering in its attitude to the Eastern Bloc states, an inescapable consequence of the *unviability* of the 1951 formulas?

Increasingly, the formula "degenerated and deformed workers' states" plays no role at all in our substantive political arguments. Our conclusions are derived from factual assessment, and the formula sits uncomfortably on top of that factual assessment as a formula, no more. Isn't it time to reassess?

The provisional nature of Trotsky's formula

Trotsky, and the Trotskyists up to 1948, made it clear that they saw the description of the USSR as a "degenerated workers' state" as provisional — a makeshift term for an unstable contradictory structure. In *The Revolution Betrayed* (1935), Trotsky's summary definition of the USSR appears under the heading, "The Character of the Soviet Union Not Yet Decided by History". In 1939 he commented on his definition of the ruling bureaucracy as a caste.

"Its relative superiority lies in this, that the makeshift character of the term is clear to everybody, since it would enter nobody's mind to identify the Moscow oligarchy with the Hindu caste of Brahmins. The old sociological terminology did not and could not prepare a name for a new social event which is in the process of evolution (degeneration) and which has not assumed stable forms".

And again: "Symptomatic of his oncoming death agony, by the sweep and monstrous fraudulence of his purge, Stalin testifies to nothing else but the incapacity of the bureaucracy to transform itself into a stable ruling class. Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?"

And in 1948 the Trotskyists wrote:

"Under these conditions, the progressive character of the productive relations means nothing else but that a change in property relations is not necessary for the overthrow of the bureaucracy. The production relations and bureaucratic management are more and more inextricably bound up. Consequently, the progressive character of the Russian economy, which is determined by its capacity to develop the productive forces, tends to become eliminated by the bureaucracy. The greatest attention must be devoted to the study of this development..."

If we apply the term 'degenerated workers' state' to this social organism, we are perfectly aware of the necessity to constantly bring up to date the complete and precise meaning of this definition. In reality, it is impossible to give any exact definition of present Russian society without a lengthy description. The relative superiority of this formula in comparison with all the others proposed up till now lies in this, that it takes into account the historic origin of the USSR and at the same time emphasises its non-capitalist character and the instability of its social relations, which have not yet acquired their final historic physiognomy..."

Time to reassess

"The greatest attention must be devoted to the study of this development..." But the attention

has not been devoted. After 40 years — and after many years of increasingly clear political divergence between us and the post-1951 Trotskyist mainstream — it is time to reconsider.

The only political, programmatic consequence of dropping the “degenerated and deformed workers’ state” codification would be to drop the formula of “defence of the USSR” in war, or, as the Trotskyists of 1948 more precisely put it, “defence of what remains of the conquests of October”. But we said long ago that that formula was a “tenth-rate issue” politically. In the era of nuclear weapons, it is difficult to see what such “defence of the USSR” could mean practically. How can you “defend nationalised property” in a nuclear armed-geddon?

It is time to reassess. It is time to examine the idea that the Eastern Bloc states are exploiting economies essentially parallel, as regards the development of the forces of production, to market capitalism.

It is a good time to reassess, too. Often in the past discussion among Trotskyists on the Eastern Bloc has been stifled by loud noise about “capitulation to imperialism” and “Shachtmanism”. Today, when US imperialism and the Kremlin are on better terms than for many years and the bourgeois press is feting Gorbachev, such clamour is more difficult.

No doubt some will try to clamour. But we have learned enough in recent years not to be fazed when we are accused of “capitulation to imperialism” by those who think that supporting Argentina’s mini-colonialism or the USSR’s imperialism are the height of “anti-imperialism”.

And what of “Shachtmanism”? Max Shachtman was a leader of the American Trotskyist movement who split with Trotsky in 1940 over reactions to the Hitler-Stalin pact and shortly afterwards developed a theory of the USSR as a new “bureaucratic collectivist” society.

Shachtman never fully sorted out his ideas on the place of “bureaucratic collectivism” in historical perspective. Initially he saw it as progressive compared to capitalism; later, as utterly regressive and barbaric. In old age (he died, politically isolated, in 1972) he is said to have supported the US’s Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and its bombing of North Vietnam.

Clearly we do not want to follow Shachtman in those respects. But that is not all there was to Shachtman.

As late as 1948, he was present at the Second World Congress of the Fourth International. The Congress Theses on ‘The USSR and Stalinism’ made a distinction bet-

ween ‘revolutionary’ bureaucratic collectivists — meaning Shachtman — and reactionary bureaucratic collectivists like Dwight Macdonald and James Burnham. There was serious talk of a reunification. In that period — there is no doubt about it with hindsight — Shachtman was far clearer and sharper in his assessment of what was happening in the Eastern Bloc than were the official Trotskyists. There are positive things to learn from Shachtman.

How to discuss

We must conduct the discussion carefully. Too often discussion of the command economies on the left has been just a search for a label that can then be wielded as a sect badge. But a label is no substitute for detailed, careful, factual analysis.

We have seen that the *substantive theories* under the “degenerated and deformed workers’ state” name-tag are various forms of “progressive bureaucratic collectivism”. Under other name-tags, too, operate a variety of quite different and often incongruent theories.

Take the British SWP as an example. It calls the USSR state capitalist. That is its sect badge.

But read its basic text, Cliff’s book of 1947. It says that capitalism is collapsing; the USSR is forging ahead industrially; the USSR’s economy is regulated by international arms competition rather than the law of value; not even labour-power is a commodity there; it has no trend to overproduction; and so on. In fact it portrays the USSR as a “progressive bureaucratic collectivism” — a new form of exploiting society productively superior to capitalism. Cliff then evades the logical conclusions of this analysis by sheer moralism.

And what about the other Eastern Bloc states? They are called state capitalist, but no attempt is made to extend to them the thesis that arms competition regulates their economies and makes them capitalist.

In fact the SWP’s “state capitalist” label is only a label. Underneath that label it chops and changes between a variety of substantive theories and political conclusions, with no clear accounting.

We are concerned, of course, to find the best label. Some of us think that some term like “bureaucratic collectivism” is the best approximation. Others would prefer “state capitalism”. This must be discussed. But we have no intention, no intention at all, of finding a label according to a preset timetable.

Our concern is first and foremost to develop an exact, concrete assess-

ment of the workers’ struggles and the bureaucracy’s operations in the Eastern Bloc, and to fight for a programme for workers’ liberty East and West.

For too long the Trotskyist movement has been dominated by sect labels and shibboleths on the question of the USSR. We intend to break that domination. We hope other working-class socialists will join us in our discussion.

12. "Our ally was the Argentine nation"

a. WP "Open Letter to the Workers' Socialist League", in WP no.34, July/August 1982 (extracts)

COMRADES- We address you because in your ranks are one time supporters of Workers Fight and Socialist Press, both of which had a conscious project of criticising and over-coming the opportunism of Healy, Mandel and Cliff. But now, after a period of systematic revisionism enshrined in the pages of Socialist Organiser, your organisation has failed the test of an imperialist war against Argentina. It failed even to recognise the imperialist character of Britain's war. Your paper has become a vehicle for the propagation of social pacifist politics. Your leaders have proven themselves incapable of defending, let alone developing, the principles and programme of revolutionary Marxism.

Those of you who remain committed to the struggle against revisionism and opportunism must realise that this means waging a battle *now* to remove your present leadership. To take any other course means admitting defeat in the face of the degeneration of revolutionary Marxism.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN ?

The Falklands war has proved to be a decisive test for all the organisations in Britain claiming to stand in the traditions of Revolutionary Marxism and Trotskyism. This is hardly surprising. Wars have always proved a make or break question for the workers' movement. They reveal in the starkest light the real character and the mettle of rival organisations.

The Falklands war was a deadly serious affair for British imperialism. However the Socialist Organiser leaders claimed that it was merely a "war to save the face and prestige of Thatcher" (SO 6.5.82). Such a position could only be considered valid by people with the shallow analytical equipment of a Labour MP.

The ink that has been spilled on surveys of Antarctica and the South Atlantic points to the real, underlying cause of the war. British imperialism has strategic and economic interests of capital importance at stake. The 'Economist' magazine spoke for its class when it said that the security of the Falklands was vital as a link in the chain that ties Britain to the Antarctic. This is why the British bourgeoisie was willing to spend billions, to lose ships and military equipment, to jeopardise its extensive imperialist investments in Latin America, and its close relations with the U.S. and European imperialists. Such actions indicate that far more is at stake than the fate of a Prime Minister.

In our view this war marks the opening up of a new period of British imperialism. Thatcher gave the game away in Parliament after her "victory" when she welcomed the war as a means of restoring Britain's dominance in the world.

In conjunction with the Israeli assault on Lebanon and the Palestinians, this war has a further significance. It has heightened world tension. It has increased the "war danger". The Falkland War is an outrider for much greater conflicts. As such the responses to it by would-be revolutionary organisations are a clear measure of their ability to weather the storms ahead.

With the exception of Workers Power, all of the British Trotskyist Groups - from the ultra-sectarian Spartacists to the ultra-opportunist Militant - have failed to offer anything resembling a revolution-

ionary perspective in the face of this war. Within this generalised collapse of the left, your organisation has played an inglorious part. Speaking plainly, your leadership has dragged its pretensions to internationalism through the Labourite mire.

We will not repeat at length arguments against the positions that have appeared in the pages of Socialist Organiser which you continue to sponsor. Our paper has already exposed the gulf between marxism and Socialist Organiser's discovery and defence of the supposed "right to self-determination" of the Falklanders. The Falklanders are not only a British settler population *in origin* but have always been economically and militarily so. *They can never be otherwise.* Thatcher has made great play of their right to self-determination because she knows that every Falklander's choice will be to remain part of the British Empire!

For marxists the right to self-determination must mean the right to form a separate independent nation state.

To be exercised, this right involves the ability to do so, and the Falklanders have never wished to be anything beyond a Crown Colony because they are not and could not be an independent people. They can only exist as British colonists.

In the letters page of Socialist Organiser certain clowns have pointed to the settler *origins* of Argentina itself, or indeed the U.S.A. and attempted to draw a parallel between these peoples and the Falkland islanders. The 1,800 kelpers - many of whom were born in Britain and will retire to Britain or New Zealand - who are largely employees of a British company, living on land owned by British capitalists, dependent on British supplies and now on a British garrison and war fleet - are clearly not an equivalent national entity.

Unlike Foot you have not dared deduce from your support of the Kelpers' rights, support for Thatcher's war. No, instead your own political conclusion is to repeat the social pacifist phrases culled from your left reformist allies, and plead with British imperialism to "renounce" its economic (sic) interests in the South Atlantic.

Your leaders now regard imperialism as a matter of "policy", a matter, simply of "economic interests", which working class pressure can persuade imperialism to renounce. Comrades, this is the analysis of the left Labourites. This is the thinking of Tony Benn. Your organisation has begun to think and analyse the world in the same manner as the Bennites!

Are we exaggerating? We do not think so. Lenin's theory of imperialism has not guided your actions in this war. You have implied in articles in Socialist Organiser (especially those of Martin Thomas in SO 87/88) that Argentina is not exploited by imperialism. No doubt it is this discovery that led you to call for negotiations between the British and Argentine capitalists (SO 6.5.82). Your position, like that 'discovered' by Kautsky in August/September 1914, implies that imperialism is potentially peaceful - if only it would negotiate and not fight. Wars are deemed irrationalities - 'face savers' for the imperialist government, 'red herrings' for the imperialised nations. Imperialism, from being an economically predatory system that inevitably spawns war, is reduced to a matter of policy - and the role of communists is reduced to raising the call 'peace through negotiation'.

Your evidence for this position is particularly flimsy. Argentina, we are told, is a 'prosperous'

and 'advanced' country. Since when have marxists used such criteria as a means of characterising an imperialist or imperialised state? Never. We analyse imperialism by looking at the development and dominance of Finance Capital within a country, its fusion with industrial capital, its export of capital and its repatriation of super-profits, its possession of colonies or economic control of semi-colonies etc. Argentina's history, looked at from this standpoint, reveals none of these characteristics. Its history is the reverse of an imperialist power. It is the history of a semi-colony, dependent on imperialism for its development. To be sure it is a relatively wealthy semi-colony but a semi-colony nevertheless.

Was Russia 'advanced' or 'prosperous' in 1914? Was Japan comparable, according to your criteria with the U.S.A. in the 1920s and 30s? Of course not, but both Russia and Japan were imperialist powers, according to Lenin's criteria.

NOT AN ACCIDENT

But this is no isolated 'mistake' by Socialist Organiser. By exactly the same reasoning you have also deduced that Ireland is 'comparable' with Britain today. As John O'Mahoney put it in SO 75 Ireland's bourgeoisie is "now an integral segment of the European capitalist class and in as much control of their state as any EEC ruling class is." Formal control of one's state (in fact of only one part of one's state in Ireland's case) and being capitalist, are sufficient causes to lump semi-colonial Ireland together with the imperialised power whose army still stalks the streets of the North! But then John O'Mahoney has never disguised the fact that for him Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution has no integral part to play in the Irish revolution. The present war has obviously led him to extend his junking of the "old" Trotskyism and Leninism to Latin America. Now the theory of permanent revolution has no use for him in Latin America or Ireland. Comrades, in this you have joined hands with no less than the Spartacists (Yes!) in junking any operative use of Lenin's theory and Trotsky's strategy. Your leaders may think these issues are "old hat", but they won't take this hat off without quickly putting on another one that of Labourite social pacifism.

How has such a position emerged within an organisation that claims to be marxist? We have repeatedly argued that increasingly your positions are determined by programmatic adaptation to the pressure of the left reformists that you hope to coax into your alliance. Your position on the war signifies that you have yielded to chauvinist pressure, mediated via Tony Benn and Reg Race and their brand of semi-social pacifism. We say "semi" because these gentlemen only objected to Thatcher's decision to wage war over the Falklands while both have advocated the use of economic measures against Argentina. Socialist Organiser was quick to praise Benn for supposedly rejecting this call. It has been silent on the fact that, on the very day this praise was proffered, he actually called for economic sanctions. That is he called for the use of the very imperialist economic stranglehold, via the City of London, that you so strenuously deny governs the relations between Britain (and the U.S.A.) and Argentina.

You have failed to stand by the basic marxist position of defending a semi-colonial country against "one's own" imperialism. Instead you dodge behind the misapplied slogan "The main enemy is at home!" True, but as we have argued, in this case our ally

was the Argentine nation because it was fighting a death battle with our enemy in a justified national war.

You did not even pose sharply in your slogans the fact the British socialists should work for the 'defeat' of Britain. The almost complete absence of your banners from national anti-war activities highlights your shame and the fact that the above slogan meant for you 'The main fight is at home; against Thatcher's anti-working

class policies, ie. Trade Union, and above all, Labour Party business as usual. Perhaps this endeared you to your "left Labour" friends and boosted your tally of "socialist" local councillors. But comrades, the failure to mobilise against the war in a serious, sustained and principled way has helped the forces of reaction in this country to enjoy a resounding victory. The walls of "Fortress Islington", behind which your centrist leaders are sheltering, will prove to be a short-lived and feeble protection against the effects of this victory.

The chief protagonists of this position in the paper, are not, surprisingly, John O'Mahoney and Martin Thomas. Workers Power has direct experience of these characters. In 1976 they broke up the fused organisation to which we belonged.

They are seasoned opportunists who have, since the break up of the I-CL, been pushing their supporters further and further to the right in a bid to construct a strategic alliance with the forces of left reformism. They have become impatient with the arduous tasks of developing a revolutionary programme for today's class struggle, they have lost all belief in the possibility of building a revolutionary party.

b. "Britain, Argentina: The enemy at home". Resolution on the Falklands war for WSL special conference, August 1982, by Sean Matgamna, Gerry Byrne, Stephen Corbishley, John Bloxam, Martin Thomas, and Mary Corbishley.

1. MARXISM AND WAR

A Marxist attitude to a war must start from an assessment of which classes are waging the war and for what objectives. On the basis of that assessment we determine our line not as supervisors of the historic process but as militant advocates of class struggle.

Where a war, even under bourgeois leadership, is about an issue like self-determination for an oppressed nation — an issue which is a necessary part of the liberation struggle of the working class — the working class should support the war while maintaining complete independence and the fight to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

Where wars under bourgeois leadership are about no such progressive cause, class-struggle politics demand a defeatist stance — i.e. denunciation of the war, continuation of the class struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie while clearly accepting that this will make defeat more likely in the war.

Where a war between bourgeoisies has no progressive content on either side, we must fight for the defeat of both sides — i.e. against the war and for the defeat of both bourgeoisies by working class action.

In all cases we fight for working class fraternisation. We do not disrupt the international unity of the working class, setting one national section to slaughter another, casually or out of deference to the right of the bourgeoisie to rule as it likes. Where a war has a progressive content, we fight for working class unity on the basis of support for the progressive demands of the progressive side.

As the 1920 Theses of the Comintern on the National and Colonial Question, a basic document of our movement, put it: "... the entire policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based primarily on bringing together the proletariat and working classes of all nations and countries for the common revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the landowners and the bourgeoisie. For only such united action will ensure victory over

capitalism, without which it is impossible to abolish national oppression and inequality of rights".

2. OUR ENEMY IS AT HOME

Britain's war over the Falklands/Malvinas was designed only to preserve a relic of empire and shore up the prestige of British imperialism. A defeatist stand towards Britain's war was therefore the no.1 campaigning priority for Marxists in Britain.

Instead of assisting the Tories in their crisis by 'patriotic' support for the government, the British labour movement should have used the crisis to hasten Thatcher's overthrow in the interests of the working class, and given all material and political support to the Argentine workers in the struggle for democratic and trade union rights and for the establishment of a genuinely anti-imperialist workers' government in Argentina.

We repudiate any legitimacy of British territorial claims in the Falklands or any legitimacy in related British claims to resources in Antarctica.

3. ARGENTINA'S WAR AIMS

But the pretext on which the Argentine junta embarked upon the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas was equally contrived. In taking its action, the junta acted not against imperialism, but in a populist ploy designed to divert and unite the Argentine masses behind the Generals' own repressive rule.

In doing so the Argentine dictators trampled upon the rights of the Falkland inhabitants, who in themselves oppress and threaten no-one and should have the right to decide their own future. Such action did nothing to build anti-imperialist consciousness in the Argentine working class, but rather sought to generate chauvinism and 'national unity'. We did not support this action, and called for the

withdrawal of Argentine troops.

In its seizure of the Falklands/Malvinas, designed to boost its position at home and in the region, the Argentine regime miscalculated about the British reaction, and the US response to the British reaction.

This miscalculation could not however make the seizure, or the war to maintain the seizure, progressive.

Galtieri's invasion did not liberate anyone from colonialism or imperialism. It did not lessen the burden of imperialist exploitation, or improve the conditions for the fight against it, for a single Argentine worker. It embroiled the Argentine people in a war in which they could hope to win nothing of significance, a disastrous war in a false and reactionary cause.

4. REACTIONARY ON BOTH SIDES

On both sides therefore the war was reactionary. The job of Marxists in both Britain and Argentina was to oppose the war, to counterpose international working-class unity, and to continue the class struggle for the overthrow of both the Tories and the military regime.

5. SELF-DETERMINATION FOR FALKLANDERS

Support for the right of the Falkland Islanders — a distinct historical, ethnic, linguistic, economic and geographic community 400 miles from Argentina — to determine their own future is axiomatic for Leninists in the given conditions, where that community exploited no other community, threatened no other community, and was not used as, or likely to be used as, a base for imperialist control of another community.

The Falklanders' right to self-determination cannot be invalidated by a desire by them to adhere to the now-imperialist state that spawned the Falklands community. That desire to adhere to Britain would invalidate their right to self-determination only if adherence had direct imperialist/colonialist consequences for Argentina or some other country, whose right to resist those consequences would (because of their size etc.) outweigh the rights of the islanders. Only then would the 'pro-imperialist' views of the islanders lead to them playing an imperialist role. Nothing like that was actually involved. The agency for imperialist domination in Argentina is the Argentine state, not the islands or any base on the islands.

To use a definition of the islanders as

'pro-imperialist' against their right to self-determination is to introduce inappropriate political categories and criteria, different from those which properly apply. The Falkland Islanders are British. That is what determines their attitudes, not any pro-imperialist views they may have. The WSL is not in favour of the subjugation of a population because it has such views, or because of their origins. The ethnic tidying-up of the globe is no part of the international socialist revolution.

Support for the Falklanders' rights plainly does not necessarily mean any support for military action to enforce those rights. In the actual situation, with Britain an imperialist power, we rejected and opposed the British military action. We look to the international working class, and especially the Argentine labour movement, to secure the Falklanders' rights.

Such a consistent democratic policy is the only basis for international working-class unity, and specifically for the unity of the British and Argentine working class (which had to be our central concern) in this dispute.

6. 'AGAINST BRITAIN' DOES NOT MEAN 'FOR ARGENTINA'

The WSL conducted itself as an internationalist and revolutionary proletarian organisation during the British/Argentine war. We raised a variant of the famous slogan of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, 'The enemy is at home', and called on the working class to actively hinder the British ruling class's prosecution of the war by industrial action. We conducted internationalist working class propaganda against the social-chauvinist Labour leaders, while attempting to maintain a dialogue with the pacifistic Labour Left (that is, with those in the working class who listen to the Left leaders) on the question.

It is no necessary part of proletarian internationalist opposition to the war of an imperialist government to side with their opponents. Our response to the fact that it was for the British ruling class a war for authority and prestige was our defeatism; positive support for Argentina could, for communists, only be grounded in positive working-class reasons for such support.

Marxists reject the primitive rebels' approach that puts a plus everywhere that the bourgeoisie puts a minus. We must judge events from an independent working class viewpoint.

We side with our ruling-class enemies in particular conflicts if the struggle serves our politics — e.g. in a national liberation struggle, even under the leadership of a Chiang Kai Shek.

But in no way could the policy of the Argentine proletariat be deduced as a mere negative imprint of the policy of the British bourgeoisie.

The tendency justifies the pro-Argentine position with the view that "a victory [for Argentina] would quite likely mean the downfall of Thatcher... [And] the British have a far more important international role [than Argentina] as a primary carrier and protector of imperialism. This means that the nature of the British regime is a question of immediate international importance..." (second tendency document, p.16); conversely, "[Argentine] withdrawal... would result in another Tory government with a massive majority... it would be an event of world significance..." (first tendency document, WSR2 p.29).

The idea here that Argentine workers' policy should be decided by what is worst for the British bourgeoisie — that the British revolution has priority, and the Argentine revolution should be subordinated to it — is British nationalist and utterly to be rejected as a basis for determining proletarian politics in Argentina.

7. ARGENTINA IS NOT A SEMI-COLONY

Argentina is far more developed than most non-imperialist countries; it is a fully bourgeois state; and it possesses political independence. It also occupies a subordinate rank within the imperialist world economy. This subordination, however, in no way gives any progressive character to the Argentine bourgeoisie.

The Argentine bourgeoisie is not a progressive force, but the major agency for imperialist domination of the Argentine working class and an assistant for imperialist domination throughout Latin America. It has moreover its own predatory ambitions. For the Argentine working class it is 'the main enemy at home'. Quite apart from its foreign connections, it is the class that directly exploits them.

We reject as un-Marxist assessments of Argentina's situation such as this:

"Argentina is economically, militarily and politically dominated by imperialism — not by its own national bourgeoisie — but in particular by the US imperialists. The whole basis of its economy is subject to the international market over which Argentina has

no influence, let alone control and dominance" (second tendency document, page 2).

We reject the counterposition of the Argentine bourgeoisie to imperialism, and the measuring of Argentina's situation by comparison with a situation where the country would escape the international market (which in a capitalist world it can never do).

Every country is more or less dominated by the world economy. No country has control over it — now not even the US colossus which was supreme after World War 2. This situation cannot be changed by war between the weaker bourgeoisies and the stronger. Not such wars, but the international workers' revolution, can change it.

The communist answer to colonial, semi-colonial, and military domination is national liberation struggle; to the domination of the weaker by the strong in the world market (as to the domination of the weak by the strong, and the pauperisation of particular regions, within capitalist nations) our answer is the proletarian revolution.

We reject the notion of an anti-imperialist united front for Argentina (a version of the bloc of classes central to Menshevism and then Stalinism, motivated on the grounds that the Argentine bourgeoisie is an oppressed class in relation to imperialism). We reject the notion that the Argentine bourgeoisie can play any progressive role either within Argentina, where it is our mortal class enemy, or against imperialism, into which it is completely integrated.

8. MILITARY BASES?

In the war over the (maybe strategically important) Falkland Islands there was no conflict over military bases or possible future military bases of a character to give socialists the option or the duty to favour one of the contestants.

Argentina and Britain are in the same imperialist camp. Britain was literally within months of scrapping the naval apparatus that made the re-invasion of the Falklands possible. (But because of the internal crisis in Argentina the junta could not wait).

On the other hand, the Argentine junta had been negotiating with the USA, South Africa, and Britain to set up a South Atlantic Treaty Organisation to police the region (as Argentina helped to police El Salvador by sending troops). The expert commentators are largely agreed that this would have led

to US bases on the Falklands.

That is, had Argentina got hold of the Falklands without falling out with US imperialism, it would have speeded up the work of replacing the decrepit and militarily insignificant British imperialist presence with a military presence of the dominant imperialist power.

The Falklands are maybe strategically important; but neither side in the war would have taken them away from imperialism. Argentina is part of the imperialist system; its war with Britain did not place it outside that system.

9. FORTRESS FALKLANDS

We condemn the Fortress Falklands policy and call for British military withdrawal. But we deny that the present British military base there retrospectively justifies Galtieri's war. It is conceivable that the British forces on the Falklands could be used against revolution in South America. It is much more certain that the Argentine army will be used against any revolutionary movements of the Argentine working class; that at the time of the war it was helping to prop up the military regime in Bolivia; and that its forces have been used against revolutionaries in Central America.

10. THE THEORY OF 'ENCLAVES'

WE reject the notion (point 5 of the September 1982 resolution) that imperialism rests on a "system of enclaves . . . in strategic places round the globe."

Mercantile capitalist 'imperialism', in the 16th-18th centuries, did indeed in many places rest on a system of enclaves. Modern capitalist imperialism in China in the early part of the 20th century also utilised such a system.

But today, imperialism operates overwhelmingly through economic mechanisms (backed up, of course, sometimes, by military intervention). Residual mini-colonies like the Falklands — and various other tiny British, French and Spanish colonies — have no strategic role for imperialism. They are essentially anachronistic loose ends of the period of European settler expansion over the globe.

11. NATURAL RESOURCES

There is no sense in which the conflict had an economic anti-imperialist dimension. British property in Argentina, not to speak of the property of other imperialist powers, was left alone during the war. The Argentine state did not even propose to take the Falkland Islands Company from Coalite.

Better Argentine claims on Antarctica from the Falklands would most likely have led to US exploitation of the Antarctic, with Argentina as a conduit. That is the concrete meaning of the subordinate position of Argentina vis-a-vis the US and imperialism.

Conversely, one of the major reasons why Britain had been trying to give the Falklands to Argentina is that a stable political settlement is a precondition for the viability of the big investments necessary for the capitalist exploitation of the area's resources.

The exploitation would have to be joint exploitation, on one set of terms or another. The war was not about whether the resources should belong to imperialism or not.

The Argentine bourgeoisie is not counterposed to imperialism. And imperialism cannot be identified solely with Britain (conversely, anti-imperialism cannot necessarily be identified with an anti-British stance). The British-Argentine war was a war within the network of imperialism and its clients.

The Argentine regime went to war, not for anti-imperialist reasons, but to strengthen its political position at home. They did not wait to win the Falklands by negotiation because of their domestic crisis. And thus they aborted the process of reaching agreement with Britain.

12. 'WORLD BALANCE OF FORCES'

The Argentine working class should never subordinate its own class struggle to estimates of the 'international balance of forces' between different bourgeoisies. The view that "whatever the implications of that for the Argentinian or British proletariat, we have to base our position on the implications for the international struggle against imperialism first" (second tendency document, p.7), is anti-Marxist.

The assessment according to which British victory was a major blow for imperialism is incomplete. The British bourgeoisie certainly was strengthened by victory politically and in its prestige. But these gains may well prove shallow and temporary (indeed, the continued class struggle has already proved them shallow and temporary), and the British bourgeoisie has gained nothing material — like new military strength, new spheres of influence or new possessions.

The Argentine regime, on the other hand has certainly been weakened by defeat. This

result is a blow against imperialist and capitalist control in Latin America.

Workers in each country can act as internationalists only by fighting their own bourgeoisies, not by acting as makeweights for international bloc politics. For Argentine socialists to support their rulers' predatory war on the basis of the estimate that the British bourgeoisie's predatory war was worse, would violate that principle.

13. CLASS POLITICS VS. BLOC POLITICS

We emphatically reject the notion that the socialist working class can orientate in world politics, and particularly in relation to conflicts among politically independent capitalist states like Britain and Argentina, by constructing a view of the world in terms of two camps, modelled on the division of the world between the degenerated and deformed workers' states and the capitalist states: "We have to determine our position according to the basic class camps, not on conjunctural events... the class camp into which Argentina fits in a war against imperialism..." (second tendency document, p. 4).

Between the USSR and similar states, and the capitalist states, there is a basic historical class distinction, despite the savage anti working class rule of the totalitarian bureaucratic elites. No such gap exists between capitalist states.

The bourgeois foreign policy of the rulers of Argentina, even when it is expressed in acts of war, can in no sense change their class camp. Even should the bourgeoisie of such a state be in alliance with a healthy workers' state, the task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie would be the central task of the proletariat in the capitalist state — a task never to be subordinated to international diplomatic, military, or balance-of-forces considerations.

This was a central teaching of the Communist International, and it was not formally repudiated even by the Stalinists until 1935. Thereafter the notion that bourgeois forces which allied with the USSR thereby crossed the historic class divide and joined the camp of progress was the ideological basis of Stalinism to legitimise policies of class betrayal and popular frontism.

We reject as un-Marxist, and brand as 'international popular frontism', the view that the Argentine bourgeoisie and their state became part of the 'class camp' of the international working class because of their conflict with Britain or during their

war with Britain for possession of the Falkland Islands.

14. THE REGIME AND IMPERIALISM

We reject the notion (implicit in point 7 of the September 1982 resolution and explicit elsewhere) that military dictatorships in the Third World are simply the creatures of imperialism: they are strengthened when imperialism is strengthened, weakened when imperialism is weakened.

Military dictatorships are as common in Third World countries which are relatively alienated from the big capitalist powers — Libya, Algeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Syria, etc — as in those closely linked to the big capitalist powers (Chile, El Salvador, Nigeria, etc).

The political regime is fundamentally a product of internal class relations. Frequently, of course, imperialist powers do intervene to prop up or install dictatorships when that suits their purpose. But dictatorial regimes in the Third World are quite capable of pursuing policies hostile to the big capitalist powers without thereby becoming progressive or unleashing a progressive 'process'. Iran is a clear example.

15. THE POLITICS OF WISHFUL THINKING

Support for Argentina's chauvinist war could not be justified on the basis that it could be the first stage in a development towards militant anti-imperialist struggle. Nor could the war be defined as anti-imperialist by reading an assessment backwards from the scenario of a hoped-for anti-imperialist development.

The scenarios lack the first link: a real national liberation content to the war. A Marxist policy must be based on the realities of the actual war, not on hypothetical speculations or wishful thinking about strategic outcomes.

Argentine workers had no interest in the armed occupation of the Falklands against the wishes of the population; they should have pursued the class struggle regardless of the effects of such struggle on their rulers' ability to maintain the occupation; and it was none of their concern to protect the Argentine bourgeois state against the humiliation it would suffer from being unable to maintain the occupation. These points should have been the basis of Marxist policy in Argentina.

The tactical ways of expressing this principled position could of course be very flexible (following the method according to which Trotskyists developed the 'proletar-

ian military policy' as a tactical expression of the defeatist policy in World War 2).

It would be the job of Marxists in Argentina to seek to develop the genuine anti-imperialist elements in the confused nationalist reaction of Argentine workers, with demands such as arming of the workers, expropriation of imperialist property, and seizure of the factories. While making their own views on the war clear, they should have sought to develop common class actions with workers who confusedly saw Argentina's war as 'anti-imperialist' but wanted to go further in anti-imperialism.

16. A CHANGE OF LINE?

A change in our fundamental attitude to the war could only be justified by a change in the fundamental political content of the war — i.e. so that it was no longer a war restricted to the Falklands/Malvinas issue. If Britain's objectives had shifted so that the war became fundamentally one about an attempt by Britain to make Argentina a colony or a semi-colony, then Marxists should have sided with Argentina's national independence. But that did not happen. It was always very unlikely that it would happen.

17. TROTSKYISM AND THE WAR

The great majority of would-be Trotskyists world-wide took an Argentine nationalist position on the conflict.

The Morenists — the biggest would-be Trotskyist organisation in Argentina itself — called for national unity in the war, and demanded that the trade unions set up recruiting offices for Galtieri's army.

They themselves summarise their position as follows: "To beat imperialism, let us strike in a united way. The war must be won. 'The socialists, who at no moment have hidden and will not hide their irreducible opposition to the military and bosses' regime, are the fervent advocates of the participation in the framework of this national anti-imperialist mobilisation of all sectors, in or out of uniform, workers or bosses, on only one condition: that they should be to defeat the aggressor and to mobilise the people for that end. That is why the socialists call on the CGT, the CNT (the unions), the Multipartidaria (the bourgeois opposition), all political parties and all sectors who are in agreement to resolutely confront the aggressors, to push forward all the mobilisations and actions possible so that the Argentine people can strike with one fist and smash the aggressor.'"

(From their pamphlet, 'Malouines, les révolutionnaires et la guerre', p.9. See the same source for the demand for army recruiting offices).

Politica Obrera — the second would-be Trotskyist organisation in Argentina — was more restrained, but also supported the mini-colonial war and called for an 'anti-imperialist united front' (supposed to include workers and the middle class, but not the big bourgeoisie).

The SWP-USA applauded the speech of Argentine foreign minister Costa Mendes to the Non-Aligned Conference, and reprinted it.

The Mandel and Lambertist currents were more circumspect (the French and West German Mandelite organisations indeed initially took an internationalist position), but still sided with Galtieri's war. The whole USFI press, both SWP-USA and Mandelite, carried an article on Argentina's relation with imperialism which reproduced the crudest notions of middle-class nationalist 'Third Worldism' ('Argentina — a semi-colonial economy', by Will Reissner, Intercontinental Press, May 3 1982).

A similar position to that we took during the war was taken — for varying reasons — only by some groups separate from the Trotskyist mainstream: Lutte Ouvrière, the SWP (Britain) and the RWP Sri Lanka; and by the non-Trotskyist, but important, Workers' Party of Brazil.

This experience sheds further light on the politically degenerate condition of would-be Trotskyism, and the need for ideological regeneration.

The roots of the problem go back to the political crisis which shook the Trotskyist movement in the late 1940s.

In that period the Trotskyist movement declined drastically. (The French section, for example, which was central, suffered an almost complete halt in activity in summer 1948, and by 1952 was only 150 strong, probably less than one-tenth of its peak numbers). At the same time gigantic revolutionary events unfolded on a world scale.

Striving to understand this, the leaders of the movement essentially lost faith in the centrality of Trotskyism and the working class to revolutionary politics. In the aftermath of Tito's surprise 'break' with Stalin and populist measures designed to rally mass support against any Kremlin moves to oppose him, and in the midst of the drive to power by Mao's Stalinist forces in China, Pablo and the Fourth International leaders increasingly looked to some 'objective process' which would repeat such political developments and take them further.

The outbreak of the Korean war and the conviction that World War 3 was imminent lent fuel to his fire, and the schema of the 'War-Revolution' which would automatically line up the forces of Stalinism in the 'camp' of the revolution made its appearance.

The independent role of the working class and Trotskyists was submerged in a conception of global 'class camps' in which the Stalinist bureaucracy, petty bourgeois leaders and sections of reformism were included in the 'proletarian' class camp, in which the Trotskyists merely became respectful advisers and camp followers.

Some Trotskyists took on the role of blustering denouncers of the 'bad leaders' of the 'Revolution' instead of advisers. But their view of the camps and the issues remained the same.

The two sides of tailist 'objectivism' and sectarian arbitrariness into which Trotskyism was thus decomposed were present, in various combinations, in all the currents after 1948-50.

For all the 'mainstream' currents, world politics is fundamentally not so much a story of class struggle as a story of the struggle of two forces — Imperialism and 'Revolution' — deemed to operate behind and beneath class movements. While Marxists seek to analyse events as interactions of class forces, they analyse them fundamentally as interactions of Imperialism and 'Revolution'. Imperialism, for them, is not a system, but a homogeneous force; 'Revolution' is not an event, but a continuous process.

They are, of course, concerned for working class action. They see such action as a desirable feature of the Revolution, even an essential feature for the process to be fully healthy. But for them the (same) revolutionary process goes on, working class action or no working class action. The difference between revolutions is not a class difference, but a difference between more or less healthy and developed manifestations of the same process.

This framework is common to them all: it was common, for example, to those who applauded the Vietnamese Communist Party as good leaders of the Revolution and those who denounced the Vietnamese Communist Party as trying to sell out to US imperialism. Because of their common view of the camps and the issues, none of them could conceive that the VCP was making a revolution, but not our revolution.

There is here a mistaken view of the Stalinist states and the Stalinist-led revolutions, and of the relation of the Stalinist camp to imperialism and to the workers' revolution.

The notion that embraced Galtieri as in our 'class camp' was an extrapolation from a campist attitude to the Stalinist bloc — an attitude completely alien to Trotskyism, and which appears within would-be Trotskyism as a direct reflection of the pressure of Stalinism on the weak and mainly petty-bourgeois would-be Trotskyist movement.

Central to the problems of post-war Trotskyism is the refusal to register in any stable way the fact — attested to by repeated experience in China, Vietnam, etc — that Stalinist forces can be both revolutionary against capitalism and simultaneously counter-revolutionary against the working class. Stalinism is always counter-revolutionary against the working class, including in the process in which capitalism is overthrown to be replaced not by workers' power but by bureaucratic dictatorship on the basis of collectivised property and the repression of the working class.

The campists operate with a concept of revolution in which such key facts as the bureaucratic counter-revolution within every Stalinist-led, anti-capitalist revolution are ignored, treated as mere details, or denied. The 'Revolution' they embrace is nameless and classless, defined negatively by what it is against more than positively by what it is.

This framework led most of the would-be Trotskyists to see the South Atlantic war as a conflict — however refracted and distorted — between Imperialism and 'Revolution'. Since Galtieri was fighting British imperialism, and since Imperialism was seen as one homogeneous force, therefore Galtieri's war was against Imperialism, and must be a distorted, underdeveloped form of Revolution — even if Galtieri was a bad, sell-out leader of the Revolution.

Thus the concrete class forces were obscured and most of the would-be Trotskyists tied themselves to a crude 'Third Worldist' view of imperialism and anti-imperialism. This view increasingly obscures reality given the increasing differentiation in the Third World, with the emergence there of major industrial powers, capital-exporters, and regional big powers, and the increasing friction between the big imperialist powers.

13. Israel and Palestine

a. Article from WP no.1, October 1978 (extract)

Since 1948 a colonial-expansionist Israel propped up militarily and economically by America has acted as the

watchdog of Imperialist interests, dividing the Arab world and defusing anti-imperialist struggle.

Fatah's argument that a West Bank state will provide a possibility for the Palestinian's to establish a military base for further attack on Israel and will represent an advance for the Palestinian people is clearly incorrect.

In fact the setting up of a West Bank state would only take place under the complete military control of Israel, Jordan and possibly the US. In effect the West Bank state would be an Imperialist prison for the Palestinians living there. — a Middle Eastern 'Bantustan' state. The military disarming of the Palestinians would preclude any further confrontation with Israel, demoralise the oppressed Arabs remaining in Israel and the Palestinians outside the West Bank, and be a severe blow to Palestinian self-determination. The bankrupt policies of the PLO, the refusal to

build amongst the Arab working class and Palestinians outside Israel and the surrounding Arab countries, has condemned it to collaboration with the Arab bourgeoisies. The Palestinian 'rejectionists', while opposing the West Bank state offer no concrete strategy, but only the stepping up of armed struggle and attacks "carried out from the cease-fire lines of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan." Neither strategy represents a way forward for the Palestinian people.

There can be no lasting peace in the Middle East until the Palestinians win their struggle for self-determination and smash the racist Zionist state, replacing it with a secular workers state of Palestine. Sadat's sell out of the Palestinians can only provide a temporary lull in the battle against Imperialism.

Changing our view

SO 243, 12.9.85

At a national Editorial Board meeting on Sunday September 8, Socialist Organiser decided to change its long-standing assessment of the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine and to adopt new proposals for solving that conflict. A motion advocating two states for Jew and Arabs in Palestine was carried against one calling for a single democratic state.

For many years the majority of Socialist Organiser supporters have subscribed to a version of the democratic secular state position – that the answer to the Arab-Jewish conflict is a single democratic state in which all are equal citizens.

Following a long and wide-ranging debate – it began six years ago – Socialist Organiser has decided that the secular democratic state is an unattainable fantasy. The creation of such

a state by amalgamation of the two bitterly warring peoples as equal citizens in a common territory is inconceivable.

Although the democratic secular state appears to offer reconciliation between the two peoples and therefore to point towards working class unity, in fact it does not and cannot do that. In reality it denies the national rights of the Jews.

The socialist revolution itself is much nearer than the merging of the national identities of the Jewish and Arab Palestinians in a common secular state. At best it is a consoling fantasy. At worst it is a propaganda weapon of Arab nationalists, the logic of whose position is the conquest and driving out of the Jews.

In reality there is a stark choice in Palestine. In broad terms only two solutions are

possible. Either drive out (or massacre) the Jews, thus restoring the land to the Palestinian Arabs, or divide the disputed territory. This being so, the choice for socialists must be advocacy of compromise and division or redivision of the disputed territory. Despite the immense practical difficulties no other democratic or socialist solution is conceivable. Rejection of Zionist expansion and condemnation of the Israeli treatment of the Arabs inside pre-1967 Israel and on the West Bank is common ground on the left; so should be rejection of the programme of Arab nationalism and revanchism in all its variants, including the democratic secular state, which is understood by its Arab nationalist advocates as a Palestinian Arab state with no more than religious rights for Jews on a confessional

basis.

Socialist Organiser continues to support the oppressed and displaced Palestinians in their struggle for justice – but we do it from our own class standpoint and programme, not by way of endorsing Arab nationalism and revanchism wrapped up in consoling fantasies. We support those Israelis who are fighting against the expansionism and chauvinism of the Israeli state, and for withdrawal from the West Bank.

But we insist that it is no part of a democratic or socialist programme for Palestine to call for or support the destruction of the Israeli Jewish nation – and this is what is implied in the slogan for the secular democratic state and is in fact its only real political content.

The discussion will continue in Socialist Organiser.

14a

14. Ireland

a. Extract from article in WP no.1, November 1978

N.
Ireland is an armed citadel of reaction.

There the troops are trained, the tactics are evolved, the weaponry developed, all under the disguise of 'Anti Terrorist' measures, which will be used to intimidate and destroy the British Labour Movement and Irish resistance. The heroic struggle of the Catholic population is against our major enemy. The British Labour Movement's support and assistance to them is shamefully long overdue.

solidarity

For those who call themselves revolutionaries in Britain it is obligatory to declare unequivocally our support for the IRA and their struggle to drive the British forces out of Ireland. We do not place as a condition of this support that the IRA become socialists or that we approve of their tactics.

In our view the republicans are politically not a party of the Irish working class. Certainly they are not revolutionary communists. We have the sharpest criticisms of many of their tactics. But our criticism is not designed to get us off the hook in the face of chauvinist 'public opinion'. Its aim is to assist in developing the strategy and tactics in Ireland and Britain that will help rid Ireland of 'our' imperialists forever.

Our record on Ireland

Socialist Organiser traces its attitude on Ireland back to the small group of socialists who produced the journal *An Solas/Workers Republic* in 1966-7, under the umbrella of the Irish Workers Group.

We believed that traditional Republicanism was not and could not be a consistently anti-imperialist force; that it was, by its ideas, goals and methods a petty-bourgeois movement; that its petty-bourgeois nationalism was a barrier to working-class unity; that its 'little Irelandism' cut in the opposite direction to the interests of the Irish working class.

We believed — in the mid-'60s — that the adoption of a socialist coloration and the brand name 'Connolly socialism' by that movement was not progressive but confusing, and could only produce a populist mish-mash like the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party.

"...the IRA is just not revolutionary in relation to the objective needs of the only possible Irish Revolution.

"The same is no less true if 'left' slogans are grafted onto the old base, and a nominal 'For Connolly's Workers' Republic' pinned to the masthead. Such talk of a socialist programme, a Bolshevik party, a workers' republic, demands a proper appreciation of the relationship between the party and the working class...It demands a sharply critical approach to the traditional republican conceptions of revolutionary activity. Otherwise these slogans combined with a largely military idea of the struggle against imperialism and the Irish bourgeoisie, will not produce a revolutionary Marxist party, but an abortion similar to the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Russia, against which the Bolsheviks fought bitterly."

We believed that though there was national oppression — especially and directly against the Northern Ireland Catholics — this was in part the product of a split in the Irish bourgeoisie, and not simply a matter of 'British-occupied Ireland'.

"A division of the Irish bourgeoisie, originating in economic differences, led to a split which was then manipulated by British imperialism, according to its practice of divide and rule. The Northern section, having a measure of

political autonomy, kept close links with this imperialism; the Southern section being dominated according to the logic of modern imperialism [i.e. economic weight within more or less free market relations].

"In maintaining their closer links with Britain, the Northern capitalists were aided by British troops, who also assist in holding sufficient people to make the state viable. Despite this, talk of 'British-occupied Ireland' obscures the real identity of the garrison in Ireland — the Northern Ireland bourgeoisie."

(Editorial of Irish Militant, paper of the IWG, February 1967. Irish Militant was loosely associated with the British Militant until about 1966 and thereafter had no connection with it.)

Basing ourselves on Lenin's 'Imperialism' and such documents of the Communist International as the 'Theses on the National and Colonial Question' (1920) we believed that the economic domination over Ireland by Britain and other great powers could not be eliminated except by the reorganisation of the world economy through the international socialist revolution.

"The IWG stands against the divided Irish bourgeoisie, Green, Orange and Green-White-and-Orange, and for the revolutionary unity of the workers of all Ireland in a struggle for state power.

"We stand for the revolutionary combat against imperialism and national oppression in every form, whether that of garrison-imperialism, neo-colonialism, or the glaring economic domination of the small nations by the super-powers which is inevitable where the capitalist world market remains as the sole regulator of relationships. But we denounce those who, in the name of 'Republicanism' and 'anti-imperialism', attempt to subordinate the working class to any section of the bourgeoisie, and who counterpose a defunct petty-bourgeois nationalist narrow-mindedness to the socialist struggle of the workers for power. National unity will be achieved, if not by the coming together of the Irish capitalist class under the auspices of the British imperialist state and the capitalist drive towards West European federation, then as an incidental in the proletarian revolution.

"The possibility of any other revolutionary reunification is long since past. The only revolutionary Republicanism is the international socialist Republicanism of the proletariat."

(Towards an Irish October, preamble to the constitution of the IWG.)

We thought that the nationalist (left and right) focus on gaining 'real' independence was both meaningless for the 26 Counties and confusing from the point of view of the Irish working class.

We rejected economic nationalism as being no more than the discarded and discredited former economic policy of the 26 County bourgeoisie (1932-58). It was a reactionary petty-bourgeois programme counterposed to the necessary — and, in so far as it was developing an augmenting the Irish working class, progressive — integration of Ireland into the existing world economic system. It was a backward-looking utopia counterposed to the economic programme of the Irish working class, for whom there could be no purely Irish solution.

"The one serious progressive act of imperialism and Irish capitalism has been the creation of an Irish proletariat capable of putting an end to capitalism's futile existence, and capable, as part of a world revolutionary class, of realising the age-old dream of the people of Ireland for freedom. The best tradition of the old, bourgeois, Republicanism have passed to the socialist working class, the only class in Ireland today capable of transforming society and the subordinate relation with Great Britain — the only unconditionally revolutionary class. The only genuine liberation of Ireland will be from the inexorable — uncontrolled — pressures of international capitalism. All the essential goals of all the past defeated and deflated struggles of the Irish people over the centuries against oppression and for freedom of development and freedom from exploitation, can now only be realised in a Republic of the working people, as part of the Socialist United States of Europe and the world."

(Towards an Irish October.)

We naturally rejected the Menshevik-Stalinist notion that there had to be a two-stage revolution in Ireland — first 'the Republic' (independence) and then 'the workers' Republic'. We rejected the hybrid 'populist Republicanism' — a fusion of the Stalinist two-stage theory with 'native' Republicans who were left-wing but put 'the national question' first — represented historically by Peadar O'Donnell, George Gilmore and the Republican Congress of the 1930s, and in the mid-'60s by the 'left' of the Republican movement, the future Official IRA and Workers' Party.

We rejected the kitsch 'Trotskyist' response to the stages theories and the populists — the reflex invocation of 'Permanent Revolution'. The job was not to match texts with texts, ours against theirs, permanent revolution against stages theories, as in a card game. Instead we had to analyse reality concretely. On this approach, the conclusion was inescapable.

Ireland had had its 'bourgeois revolution'. In the North, bourgeois relations had been established by extension from

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Britain after its bourgeois revolution in the 17th century. In the South, land reform was organised 'from above' by Britain in the late 19th/early 20th century, under pressure of a mass revolt. The national division was not pre-capitalist. The basic problem was the split bourgeoisie and the varying links of its different parts with the British ruling class; and the fact that the bourgeoisie, North and South of the Border, could command the allegiance of the working class.

Ireland was a relatively advanced bourgeois country, integrated into European capitalism, albeit as a weaker capitalism. That the 26 Counties was really independent politically — independent to the degree possible under capitalist world market economic relations — was shown by its neutrality in World War II.

"The division [in the Irish bourgeoisie] prevented the accomplishment of one of the major tasks of the traditional bourgeois revolution — national unification. However, if history and the relationship to Britain make the two statelets peculiarly deformed, they are nonetheless undeniably bourgeois, as a glance at the social organisation and relations of production makes obvious..."

"We who fight for the workers' international Republic know that the present Irish capitalists are the only ones we will get. Calling them traitors is useless — they are not traitors to their class, the only sphere in which real loyalty, as opposed to demagogic talk of loyalty, counts..."

[(Editorial, *Irish Militant*, February 1967.) *Irish Militant* was not linked politically to the existing Militant group.]

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'An Solas', Irish Marxist journal of the 1960s

WORKERS FIGHT ALDERSHOT TRAGEDY



Our political forerunners refused to join the outcry against 'terrorism' in the early '70s

After 1968

The massive revolt of the Catholics in 1969 and after, and then the rapid growth of a new IRA after 1970, forced us to reconsider and modify these assessments, and to respond politically to new facts.

Many Irish socialists responded initially with a 'socialism-is-the-only-answer' message, neglecting the national question. We did not. On the contrary, we were the first on the left to point to the nationalist logic of the civil rights struggle, and to argue for raising the national question boldly.

But we did not forget what we had learned. We did not go in for romanticism and flights of fantasy, in the style of Socialist Action — then IMG — or Briefing, about the Catholic revolt being the socialist revolution. Even when the Catholic revolt was apparently most successful, we pointed to its limitations.

"The Northern Ireland Catholics fight in isolation, in the most unfavourable conditions imaginable. The rearward of the Irish fight for national freedom, they are betrayed and abandoned by the 'leaders' of the Irish nation, and are simultaneously cut off from the allies who would make an advance on a socialist basis possible — the Orange majority of the Northern Ireland working class..."

(*Workers' Fight*, July 23 1972)

We defined what was happening as primarily a Catholic revolt with a limited potential of solving the national question. It was the revolt of the Six County Catholics, not a rebirth of the 1918 all-Ireland nationalist upsurge. It was limited as an anti-imperialist movement

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because it was confined to the Six Counties, and because of the split working class there. Nevertheless, it had to be supported.

When the Catholic civil rights agitation got underway in 1968-9, we supported it, but criticised it on three counts.

(1) Logically the central issue was the national question, and events would inexorably force it to the fore. The basic underlying civil right the Catholics lacked was the right to national self-determination. We said in early 1969 and long before the Republican movement, some of whose members were leading the civil rights struggles, said it: the goal has to be to smash the Six County state.¹

(2) At the same time, because of its petty-bourgeois, Stalinist and populist-Republican leadership, the entire civil rights movement was needlessly divisive. The demands one man (sic) one house, one man one job, one man one vote, were inevitably seen by Protestants as a desire to re-divide and share what little there was. The issue could have been dynamically and progressively posed in these (transitional demand) terms: build more houses, thus creating more jobs, etc., etc.

(3) We criticised the civil rights movement (including such of its leaders as the then IS/SWP supporters in Northern Ireland, like Michael Farrell, who has since become a political satellite of the Provisionals) for political confusion on the national question and on the need to try to unite the working class around the Catholic movement (they wanted to play down the national question in the cause of uniting the working class in the Six Counties around civil rights and socialist propaganda). We also criticised them for organising provocative marches and demonstrations in Protestant areas which were helping stoke up a sectarian explosion.

When the Provisional IRA launched its military offensive in 1971, we critically supported their right to fight against the British government in that way. We defended it outspokenly in the British labour movement.

We did not use our previous assessment of the improbability of a revolutionary reunification of Ireland short of a socialist revolution to draw sectarian and abstentionist conclusions about the actual struggle that had erupted. But we did not forget that assessment. In fact the 20 years of war have in their own way established very clearly the truth of that assessment.

We maintained a critical political stance towards the IRA. In the early

For the record

'70s, when such a thing existed, we reprinted Irish socialist criticisms of the IRA from People's Democracy and from the League for a Workers' Republic. We never had other than derision and scorn for the wild Third-Worldist fantasies and incredible 'permanent revolution' scenarios which the IMG — the closest group to us in its political responses in the early '70s — spun around the Catholic revolt.

At best we believed that the Catholic and IRA revolt would force Britain and the Irish bourgeoisie into a radical reorganisation of the Irish state system. Of course it did: Protestant Stormont was abolished in March 1972 and direct rule substituted. In November 1985 Dublin and London signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, giving Dublin a share in the political decision-making in Northern Ireland.

After 1972

Since 1972, despite many important twists and turns, the basic facts of the situation have remained unchanged, in stalemate. The British Army cannot defeat the IRA; the Catholics cannot defeat the combined forces of the British Army and the Protestants; the British government is not sufficiently energetic or sufficiently driven, to impose a rearrangement on the Protestants.

In the 26 Counties, there have been some impressive one-off waves of solidarity action — after Bloody Sunday in 1972, and during the hunger strikes. But the basic facts of the political set-up have not changed. The two Green Tory parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, remain dominant — as they were in the '60s. The Irish Labour Party remains a tail of Fine Gael — as it was in the '60s.

Thus the Irish national struggle remains essentially confined to 10% of the Irish nation — the Northern Catholics. That does not detract from the justice of their fight. It does limit its prospects.

It is possible that the situation in the North may be transformed by something from outside it — for example, by a revolutionary upsurge of working class struggle in the South, creating a new basis for workers' unity in the North. Socialists should do all we can to help such a possibility emerge. But we cannot guarantee it at will; and in the meantime we have to formulate ideas showing some way forward from the situation as it is now, not as we hope it will be some-

day.

We advocated a federal arrangement within Ireland from as early as 1969, but the importance of this element in our politics has increased with the 20 year stalemate.

In this and other aspects of the Irish-British question we differ from other Marxists. Militant has long refused to campaign in any way for British troops out of Ireland, instead they use general propaganda about the need for socialism to evade the issue. That is contemptible. But the attitude of those many on the left who argue that 'troops out' and 'the defeat of British imperialism' are the crux of the Irish question, and all else is pettifogging and probably 'capitulation to imperialism', is empty phrase-mongering and in its own way just as shameful as Militant's evasions.

'Troops out' is a good slogan. But it is not sufficient. In most national liberation struggles we can say simply: the imperialist power should get out and hand over to the local nationalist movement. There is no all-Ireland nationalist movement. There is a nationalist movement of the Northern Catholics (10% of the population of the island) which is regarded with bitter hostility by the Northern Protestants (20%) and sporadic sympathy, but some alarm, by the Southern Catholics (70%). The situation is further complicated by the political split in the 10% of Ireland's people who are the half million Catholics in the Six Counties. According to election results, only about 1 in 3 of Northern Ireland's Catholics positively support the Provisional IRA or Sinn Féin.

Lenin argued:

"There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a 'negative' Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to 'sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism' without at the same time offering a positive answer to the question of how Social Democracy will solve the problem when it assumes power. A 'negative' slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not 'sharpen', but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation."

Nowhere is this more true than on the slogan 'Troops out of Ireland'. In early 1969 some of us argued against IS/SWP's almost-exclusive concentration on 'Troops out' (until the troops went on the streets, in August 1969, and IS dropped the call!). We criticised the implied illusion that the Catholic civil rights movement would organically 'grow over' into socialism; and argued for propaganda for the workers' republic.

In the mid-'70s we argued against the notion (put forward by the IMG — now divided into Socialist Action and Briefing — and others) that a mass movement could be built in Britain on the single slogan, 'Troops out'.

We use 'Troops out' as one means of focusing the issue in Britain. It is not a full programme, though some on the left sometimes talk and act as if it is. Even the Provisionals, more serious than their

less thoughtful British admirers, put precise demands on the way Britain should get out.

If British troops quit Ireland tomorrow, it is quite likely that there would be a sectarian civil war, leading to repartition.

Self-determination? Unify Ireland? The Provisionals are not strong enough to do it. The Northern Protestants are actively hostile to it. The 26 County ruling class has no real wish for it.

The scene would be set for a section of the Protestants to make a drive for the current UDA policy of an 'independent Ulster'. This drive would involve at least a massive crackdown on the Republicans, and, probably, the mass slaughter, rounding-up and driving-out of the Catholics. The Northern Catholics would, naturally, resist violently. Dublin would give some token assistance to the Catholics but do nothing decisive. There would be mass population movements, a repartition: Ireland would be irrevocably and bitterly split into Orange and Green states. There would be a bloodbath.

The conventional left answer to this, that 'there's already a bloodbath', is no answer. Simmering war with hundreds of casualties is different from all-out war with thousands. Different not only in immediate human terms, but also in terms of the implications for the future possibilities of socialism — ie. of the Catholic and Protestant workers.

The other answer, 'revolutions always involve bloodshed', is no better. There is no comparison between the revolutionary violence of the working class against its exploiters, or of a subject nation against a conquering army, and the violence of two working-class communities slaughtering each other.

All this does not mean that we should fail to support troops out. That the situation and the prospects now are so bleak is in large part Britain's work.

But it does mean that we should couple the call for troops out with politically adequate proposals for a solution within Ireland — and condemn those who call for troops out without such a proposal as mindless phrasemongers.

The only conceivable solution given the present facts of the situation or anything resembling them is a united Ireland with federalism: ie. an attempt to negotiate between the sections of the Irish people and to conciliate the Protestants. This would probably involve the recreation of closer British-Irish ties so that the two islands would provide the broader framework within which the intra-Irish conflicts can be resolved.

The conciliation, realistically, would be backed up with a certain element of coercion — ie. strong indications to the Protestants that prospects for an alternative to a united Ireland were pretty bleak — and would involve some repression against die-hard Protestant groups. But that is different from straight conquest of the Protestants. Logically, conquest is the only alternative to such conciliation, given the Protestants' attitudes. But it is not possible — who

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would conquer them? — and not desirable either, from any working class point of view.

It is possible to evade these issues by wishful thinking. It is possible to fantasise that at the crucial point, the national struggle would magically 'grow over' into socialism, and in some 'dialectical' leap the Protestants would be converted to Republicanism. It is possible to remain blinkered in a sort of inverted British nationalism, saying that 'the defeat of British imperialism' and its effect on the 'balance of world forces' are the things that really matter, and that a positive solution and the avoidance of sectarian civil war within Ireland is a secondary issue.

It is possible to delude oneself with a crude theory of the Protestants as pure pawns of Britain, so that their reactionary ideas would drain away like waters out of a bath once the 'plug' of British troops was pulled out.

But that is not Marxism. It is not serious, honest politics. We will not even be very reliable anti-imperialists if our 'anti-imperialism' is only as strong as our ability to use consoling myths to shield our eyes from uncomfortable facts — until they explode in our faces. Such fantasies and evasions will never allow those socialists who poison themselves with them to make any political contribution to the work of uniting the Irish working class.

The federal proposal might not avert sectarian civil war, either. Whether anything short of a mass socialist movement uniting the workers of both communities (or a big section of them) can end the present impasse in a progressive sense is doubtful. Our programme is to develop that socialist movement; seriously, not by empty schematising about the present nationalist struggle becoming socialist if only it is intensified sufficiently, or national/communal issues fading away if only bread-and-butter trade union issues are emphasised loudly enough.

We should not blunt our socialist programme by false 'realism', by getting tied up in working out 'answers' for the present forces in the situation over which we have no control anyway. But a socialist programme needs to include democratic demands, and a possibility of relating to the political situation now, more concretely than just by saying that a united class movement would be better.

Whether we can have any positive influence on the situation within Ireland depends on there being a material force to fight for such a programme. At present there is no such force. But no force can be gathered without first proclaiming a programme. And no adequate programme can be formulated without first coldly 'saying what it is'.

Our errors

This summary demonstrates, we think, the consistency of the approach that some of us have

had since well before the beginning of the Catholic revolt. Whatever inconsistencies may be found in this or that detail, the fundamental approach is correct.

That does not mean, however, that our politics have been completely adequate. Even in the early '70s, when we put most stress on solidarity with the Catholic revolt, we were critical of the IRA: on the whole, however, we tended to suppress criticism as much as we decently could — and that was too much. The basic principles, views and assessments were correct: but we tended to downplay our own assessments, criticisms and politics in deference to a petty-bourgeois nationalist formation because it was 'leading the struggle against imperialism'. We should not have been so self-effacing.

Footnote

1. We tried to bring the national question to the centre in 1969 by posing it like this: the mainly Catholic areas (about half the land area of Northern Ireland) should secede to the Republic. This was based on the idea that it would make the Northern state unviable.

The belief that secession of the Catholic areas would force the Protestants into a united Ireland was a major reason why the Free State made the deal they did in 1921. Lloyd George promised that a Boundary Commission would in fact redraw the boundaries, thus making Northern Ireland unviable.

In fact secession was anyway the trend in Northern Ireland. Two times before August 1969, Catholic Derry, two miles from the border with the 26 Counties, had set up barricades to keep out Northern Ireland state personnel. In August 1969 Catholic Derry and Catholic West Belfast set up 'free' areas guarded by their own militias. These survived until October 1969.

But in retrospect secession was an artificial way to pose the question of the smashing of the Six County state. In the light of experience since then, there can be no doubt that a Protestant state stripped of the mainly Catholic areas would be viable because the Protestants would make it so.

Some of us were in IS at the time, and our (tentative) proposal about secession was contained in a resolution for IS conference, written in May or June 1969. At the September 1969 IS conference, the leadership used a disloyal misrepresentation of it to distract the discussion. In the meantime they had changed their line from opposition to the British troops to effective support for them, and we were campaigning against this.

The IS leadership said that we wanted the repartition of Ireland. But our resolution explicitly said the goal should be to smash the Northern Ireland state and establish a united Ireland. Because of the weight of the IS/SWP, this misrepresentation of our position is widespread. It is to be found, for example, in the Penguin book 'The Left in Britain', edited by David Widgery.

15. "There is no better high than... wasting the fascists in open battle"

a. WP article on drugs, no.168, June 1993 (extract)

b. AWL "programme to beat racism", from "How to beat the racists", October 1993.

Revolution

Instead of not knowing what's going on because they are on drugs, youth need to make sure they know exactly what's going on. Instead of spending all their time incapacitated by drugs, youth need to be changing the world.

There is no better high than a victorious working class struggle. There is no better feeling than being on a well organised picket line, successfully holding off the police from attacking a demonstration or wasting the fascists in open battle.

Don't let drugs take over your life and stop you from fighting for the ultimate high—revolution.■

A programme to beat racism

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty organises socialists to fight for working class solutions to the crisis. If we do not, then black people, Jews and foreigners will be scapegoated; the working class will be split along ethnic lines; and we will all lose — black and white.

Socialists must be part of the basic organisations of the working class, the trade unions and the Labour Party and help to turn them outwards to campaign on the estates and streets.

- A decent home for everyone! Build more homes that people can afford. Demand government money to enable local councils to undertake a crash programme of compulsory purchase of empty properties, renovation, and house-building, to create new homes at affordable rents.

- Jobs for all! Cut the work week to 35 hours; create useful new jobs by restoring and expanding public services; provide training and re-training at union rates of pay. To pay for this: tax the rich, cut arms spending, take control of the big banks and financial institutions.

- Restore the Health Service and other public services.

- Jobs, training or education for all youth, with union rates of pay or an adequate grant.

- Make the police accountable to elected local committees. Defend civil liberties: fight to replace the existing bureaucratic, hierarchical capitalist state by a regime based on accountability and workers' control.

- Scrap the immigration laws! No more deportations!

- Fight for real equality in employment and housing. Council-house allocation by need, not by race under disguise of a "sons and daughters" policy. Special training programmes to ensure real equality in employment for ethnic minorities.

- Equality in the labour movement. No toleration for racist prejudice: special campaigns to recruit and integrate ethnic minority workers.

- Labour movement support for black communities' self-defence; united black and white workers' defence squads to beat back the fascists.

The labour movement must stand up and fight! That is the only way to beat the Tories, the capitalists and the racists. Help us fight in the labour movement for their ideas. Join the AWL

P. 11, 32, 42