

Resolution on the Labour Party ..... Carolan

Parts of a draft document on women ..... Parkinson/Fraser

### Introduction to Carolan resolution

This, in its political content, is the same as the resolution I wrote during the November NC and read out. The NC decided to discuss and vote on it at the January NC. The political points have, however, been expanded.

I remind comrades that the purpose of the resolution was to bring out explicitly and sharply the controversial points in Cunliffe's resolution at the November NC and counterpose to them the views that underlie the approach of Hill, Kinnell, Gardiner, Parkinson, Collins, myself, and I believe, Levy, and the proposals we argued for.

In fact Cunliffe's document merely codifies views expressed repeatedly in the discussions by other comrades, too - if, that is, I have understood them properly. I have posed the issues sharply because I think the future of the organisation depends on our decisions about labour movement work; but I do not intend to caricature anyone's views, or foist on anyone opinions or nuances they do not hold. If the views attacked in this resolution are not really views held by anyone on the NC, then they should have no difficulty in voting for the resolution, perhaps with amendments to make the balance more to their liking.

The only way we will make any progress in this discussion - even progress towards clearly defining our differences, if important differences there be - is for the comrades who objected to the initial proposals of Kendall and myself (IB 21) either to vote for the resolution (amended as necessary) or to counterpose to it a developed alternative. Cunliffe's resolution is so far the nearest they have come to that.

This resolution should be read together with Kendall's and my resolutions in IB 21. The full text as it stands is not suitable for voting: relevant passages will have to be selected as a basis for voting to summarise the gist of it.

The Labour Party is not a mere aspect of the work of Marxists. It is the mass political movement of the working class, organically tied to the bedrock organisations of the working class, the trade unions. It shares a vast common affiliated membership with the trade unions. 7 million trade unionists have full Labour Party membership rights if they choose to exercise them.

The LP is for now and the foreseeable future the pivot of mass working class politics in Britain. Therefore it is central to the work of the TSL, which sets itself the task of renovating, reorienting, and transforming the existing labour movement, trade union and political wings alike.

Always and everywhere we advocate, promote and prize most highly the mass self controlling direct action of the working class, on the trade union and also on other fronts, all the way to soviets and to the working class seizure of power. But it is to engage in metaphysical hair-splitting to pose abstractly - as various sectarians do, sometimes basing themselves on good quotes from the Communist International (or even from CP and the I-CL) - the question: which is more important for us, what is our no.1 priority, the trade unions or the LP,.

The British labour movement now is indivisible. The LP in the final analysis is controlled by the TU block vote. The recent setbacks for the broad left came from the unions - on the issues at stake we had won the CLPs. Conversely, the performance of Labour in government (1974-9), and the efficiency, seriousness and militancy (or the lack of any of these qualities) in 'Her Majesty's Opposition', has in turn massively affected the options, the climate, the expectations and therefore the militancy and combativity of the trade unions, right down to the most basic shop floor level. Right now, if the LP were to fight the crusade we have advocated (withdrawal from collaboration, mobilisation, pledges for what it would do when re-elected, etc.), even on the basis of its present limited or muddled politics, it might radically change the climate on the shop floor and call into being a storm of militant working class struggle.

A different, more militant LP, even while formally remaining within the confines of reformism, would have secured a different working class response to the slump and Tory onslaught after 1979.

Therefore, for now, there can be no sense in which for us the LP is counterposed to TU work or TU work to the LP. Marxists do labour movement work. Central to the role of Marxists in the labour movement is to work to break down the barriers artificially created by social democrats on one side and by right and left trade-unionists and syndicalists on the other, between the political wing and the trade union wing of the labour movement (the linking up of the unions and LP in the struggle for labour movement democracy, for example).

Neither, therefore, for us, can the LP be counterposed to the struggle on the shop floor, nor, especially, to the struggle for leadership there. Nor can the shop floor be counterposed to the LP. The LP is the vehicle for developing our TU work into mass working class politics in the next stage ahead, and for transforming passive reformism into the fight for reforms and for transitional demands. Within that, by linking trade union and political aspects, and by our agitation and propaganda, we must fight for revolutionary working class politics, and build the next

stage of the revolutionary party by recruiting individuals and more or less small groups to the WSL.

The only possible conflict or clash between LP and TU work for Marxists now would be in allocation and deployment of our resources. This would have to be discussed and resolved concretely in terms of an assessment of the choices and costs and perspectives for the work in any given situation. To try to pose any conflict over resources, or to extrapolate from such a conflict, in general political terms or in terms of a general and abstract, that is a metaphysical, seeking to know which is no.1 or 2 in our list of priorities, is to introduce political confusion and disorientation into the organisation.

- 2 -

The notion that one can only relate politically to reformist workers who are also factory workers/trade unionists/militants with direct and fully labelled Trotskyist propaganda implies a dual-labour-movements conception of the trade union and political wings of the British labour movement. We reject it as out of touch with reality.

As a consequence of this, we reject the notion that while a broad paper not bearing our stamp and not necessarily fully controlled by us may suffice for LP work, a party paper fully under our control, openly flying the flag of the WSL and regularly and directly exhorting people to join the WSL is irreplaceable for TU work.

This position implies that there are two labour movements qualitatively distinct from each other in their concerns, in their political and ideological level, in their approach to industrial-struggle/political/social questions, and in the way members can be brought into the WSL and set to work for its perspectives.

The approach even implies two, parallel, Marxist organisations: one operating on the political reformist terrain with the broad group, broad paper approach, which takes as its goal to develop the Marxist organisation within the work of the broader left, while the other operates on the trade union terrain, presenting the full party face, identity, etc. and recruiting to the WSL by way of involvement in trade union struggles and full Trotskyist propaganda. How would the two approaches, the two labour movements, the two Marxist organisations, interact, enmesh, and flow together?

They could not: at best you would have an incoherent federation of disparate trends, which would paralyse the organisation and prevent it doing its central ideological/political work - linking the elements of the three fronts of the class struggle (ideological, political, economic) into a coherent working class strategy against the bourgeoisie and its state.

Thus we see that a dual approach to the separate wings of the labour movement would inescapably imply bringing the separation between trade unionism and politics into the Marxist organisation itself.

In the world in which we have to work, the indivisibility of the labour movement means that even very militant workers vote Labour, if sometimes with gritted teeth. They look to Labour as

the governmental alternative (and tend to look away from governmental alternatives when they despair of Labour: in the '60s and into the '70s that meant a primary reliance on direct action). Our task is to develop perspectives and ways of political organising that overcome the trade union/political reformist division, and focus the normally passive (i.e. voting only) mass reformism of the trade union rank and file on the task of energising, transforming, reclaiming and renovating its own industrial and political labour movement, and turning it into a fighting organisation, even if initially on the level of the fight for reforms and against counter-reforms.

That is, we must politicise the trade unions, in our sense. It is nearly always wrong to talk in terms of a necessary sequence of development towards revolutionary politics by way of known stages: however, right now it is, I think, indisputable that if the existing reformist movement could be made to fight for its own reforms, that would be a tremendous advance from where we are at. In terms of ideas we can put and demands we can make with a wider immediate mobilising power than our own full programme, this is very important.

Such is the approach of the Transitional Programme, and it is what separates the TSL from all mere trade union routinism and syndicalism on the one side, and from the sincere 'hard left' in the LP on the other.

Therefore, while we take into account the differences between the staple activities of trade union/shop floor militants on one side and exclusively LP militants on the other; while we recognise that it would be absurd to pretend that the TUs are the LP, and vice versa; and while above all keeping in mind the latent power directly at the disposal of the trade union and shop floor movement when it deploys and generalises its fighting force, the TSL nevertheless uses the same political approach in both the LP and TU arenas.

If it is true that in certain circumstances it would be reactionary and cutting against the logical development of the class struggle to focus on the prospects of a reformist Labour government, and not on developing the direct action/soviet potential of a general strike, for example, we can still make no STP-style general fetish of the industrial raw material of working class politics to be found at the point of production. We recognise that in the historical perspective of the struggle for power (as distinct from a syndicalist or purely point-of-production perspective) a large-scale political mobilisation now, even on reformist or limited objectives, could be of tremendously more importance to the political development of the working class than routine activities of the trade union movement - and would in any case, as noted above, react back on those activities.

It is only on the level of mass movements, of general strikes which overflow the normal channels and boundaries of trade unionism and routine politics, that 'trade union' direct action can reach a higher level than mass political action, even on reformist politics, by the working class within the existing bourgeois political channels. We reject the STP view that routine trade union action as such is working class politics. Our task is to develop the potential. Part of that work is to draw trade union militants into the struggle in the reformist labour movement on all fronts. It is their own movement to which, typically, even keen industrial militants relate passively in the style endemic to reformist labour movements. We draw them into a struggle to make it fight for their interests.

This means the same political approach to the LP and TUs, the same political perspective, the same broad techniques of organising the

left and militants (with obvious differences of detail).

In practice the WSL already uses the same broad approach in the TUs as the Marxists do in the LP - what are the LAC or the T&G Broad Left but the same 'broad' approach that we use in a different way with the broad paper? Confusingly and incoherently superimposed on this common TU practice are a series of residual conceptions, prejudices and hankerings about party, paper, and identity, derived from the propagandist and viciously sectarian approach of the SLL/WRP. (The SLL/WRP didn't, after the mid-'60s, engage in LAC-type bodies or broad lefts, either, but on the contrary spent much energy and newsprint on denouncing and where it could disrupting them (for example its approach to arguably the most important industrial conflict of the '60s, the struggle after 1966 against the reorganisation of the ports). It operated through a trade-union annexe of the 'party', modelled, though remaining in the unions, on the party-front unions that the CP created and ran in the Third Period. You had to agree with the SLL to participate in it).

- 3 -

It would be of advantage to us to be able to function freely in the existing labour movement under our own name and banner, and with maximum non-sectarian distinction from all competitors. The relationship of forces between us and the reformists decrees that we cannot do this.

To nevertheless do it for TU work would imply dualism - one practice for the unions, another for the LP. (Or rather, one practice in the LP, and in the TUs a corresponding practice plus, superimposed on it, a different, propagandist, practice). It would generate huge practical problems. It would enforce, in effect, a division of the organisation into two contingents. TU militants recruited by the propagandist and (in the circumstances) sectarian approach would either be sectarian on the LP or have to be radically re-educated to be able to work in the LP. Instead of a unifying and dynamic political approach to the whole labour movement, we would get a more or less sharp disjunction in the organisation between TU activists and LP activists, and the possibility of routinism and accommodation on both sides, i.e. the inner collapse of 'the party' into a series of constituencies.

How to make the struggle in the political wing of the movement interesting and accessible to non-political TU militants or to militants who consider the LP a waste of time, is fundamentally a problem of how to convey to them what the analysis, policy and perspective of the WSL for the labour movement are - that is, how to convey to them what the WSL is. Badges, names, profiles and banners will not suffice or substitute for the work of convincing people about our ideas and perspectives. On the other hand, the use of badges, names, profile, banner and a propagandist 'Trotskyist' rhetoric in such a way as to convey an impression that we belong to the sectarian tribe of revolutionary-party-proclaimers, flagwavers, etc, who pose in effect as an immediate alternative to the existing mass political labour movement - that would contradict our actual perspective, which is to renovate, reshape and transform the existing movement, and to build the revolutionary party within that struggle. It would convey a false impression of what we are, and introduce a set of massive incoherences and contradictions into our work.

- The badges/banners approach can only be coherent if it is linked to 'building the party' as an SLL/WRP-STP style sect more or less

counterposed to the political labour movement - and logically (though less so in the case of the SWP) sectarian even in the struggle at TU level.

The avoidance of jargon in our press; a proper balance between LP, TU and other coverage and the elucidation of the links between them and the Marxist organisation; making the issues discussed in the paper, including LP affairs, accessible and interesting to not-very-political trade unionists whom our factory nuclei relate to and organise - these are very important matters that can make the difference between ruining and developing our work, but for us they are technical questions of good and bad journalism, not questions of TU vs. LP orientation. They can only be discussed meaningfully and without mystification if technical questions are not confused with questions of differing political concepts, perspectives, and orientation.

- 4 -

We consider central to our work the task of organising the LP and TU left and the militants for the struggle and for class-struggle issues and politics in the LP and in the LM generally. (Concretely now, when it is extremely probable that the left offensive in the LP will be resumed after the election, whatever its outcome, to abandon that work would be political suicide for the Marxists).

Such organising is our technique both for forwarding the interests of the broad movement and simultaneously for building a revolutionary party inside that movement.

We reject a propagandist 'learn socialism from the blackboard' approach to the existing mass-labour movement, and the fetishisation of the 'party' label and the 'party press' that goes with it, as a species of voluntarily-chosen self-isolation and self-removal from the necessary political processes through which the movement must go if a real prospect of the socialist revolution is to be opened up.

We stand against political confusion and class collaboration in the movement, both on the level of ideas and of practice, and whether with its right face or left mask. We counterpose to them our own programme, ideas, and proposals for action. But we do not seek artificially to differentiate ourselves, propagandistically, on the level of point-scoring or arbitrarily anticipating possible or certain future differences: that, essentially, is the method of propaganda and sectarian self-isolation, and of counterposing the revolutionary party to the processes of the mass labour movement.

Our model is not that of the blackboard and a pupil-teacher relationship of the revolutionaries to the working class, as favoured by sectarian propagandists. Our model is the class struggle; our belief, that workers learn in struggle as well as by propaganda, and that the masses of workers in the broad labour movement will only learn in struggle - TU, LP, and other struggles. Our work with the left in the LP and unions is to organise it and draw it into struggle for goals we have in common with it, and on that basis of experience in struggle, to seek to develop groups and individuals with our propaganda. The propaganda on which we recruit new WSLers will necessarily include explanation of our view of the necessary development of the existing labour movement and of the WSL's own place and role within that.

We see the necessary and irreplaceable political and ideological

struggle for Marxism with the reformist left and with the centrists and semi-centrists as situated within the common struggle on limited goals, for so long as the broader left engages in struggle, and for so long as we can hope to draw it into struggle.

Therefore we will apportion our resources accordingly. We reject the notion that our first priority must be a 'party press' as implying, in the situation we are in now, a fundamentally propagandist approach and a sectarian trajectory for us away from the LP. Considering the extremely open political character of the press we in fact have, the extreme concern for a 'party press' is either blind a-political fetishism, or else a means of expressing and advocating different political perspectives, methods and orientation from those we are now working on.

In practice there has been not one issue of the class struggle over more than 4 years now on which our broad paper approach has stopped us giving out our full programme. (Comrades should not attribute to the character of our main press what are in fact differences of political position or emphasis among us).

Political conditions being favourable to it, we must continue to have as our main publication a broad paper like the present one or a replacement, supplemented with a less frequent propaganda-theoretical SL publication.

- 5 -

The party press exists to serve the party, not the party to serve the press. As Marxists we reject all mystification and fetishisation, especially the fetishisation of forms, and not least the fetishisation of the forms of our press. The press is a tool and must be designed to do a job in a given situation. It must be redesigned and modified when our work - building the revolutionary party within the existing movement - demands it. To reshape our entire work, or to deliver ourselves and our future into the hands of the agents of the class enemy in the labour movement, because of an inflexible commitment to the name, style, balance, frequency or imprimatur of a publication would be absurd formalism.

Therefore we will not, except as a transitional measure for a short time not exceeding a few months, opt for an illegal press (in LP terms). This would imply, for us as it did for the SLL in the early '60s, abandoning a focus on organising the left. It would saddle us with a publication that could not be sold in the LP except to close contacts - and could not be sold openly in the TUs either, for fear that militants would be reported to the LP. The paper would be largely unviable. In a short while the contradiction would force us to choose between the paper and LP work.

Our paper would be a millstone round our necks, while at the same time we would have no publication that could be freely and openly used in the work in the LP - or in the TUs!

The perspective of an 'illegal' paper for an indefinite period is therefore either a proposal for an utterly sterile and tokenistic use of our resources, with much of our substance sacrificed on the altar of the 'party press' to the detriment of our actual work in the movement - or, a half-developed perspective of doing something else than the work in the labour movement with the illegal paper, and therefore with the organisation much of whose resources would go to



producing and circulating it. Those who have not yet learned from the bitter experience of the SLL in the early and mid '60s are here faced with the choice of gropingly moving towards a repeat of that experience, or of learning from it now.

- 6 -

We do not preach passivity to the specially oppressed, nor that they must wait until the mass of workers are with them. We support and advocate militant women, blacks, and gays acting against their oppression. We recognise that many aspects of oppression can be changed and lessened by militant activity.

We work in autonomous groups of women, youth, blacks and other oppressed. Sometimes we initiate these autonomous movements. We in no circumstances subordinate the struggle to the mere form of the existing labour movement, or to its backwardness.

Nonetheless, the idea that the working class is central to our perspective of socialism implies that we must ultimately relate these movements of the oppressed to the working class and to general working class politics, therefore to the existing trade union and labour movement. Among other things, this means to relate them to, and actively draw them into, the struggle to transform that movement into a movement for the emancipation of the working class and of all the oppressed.

The women's, youth, black and other movements are not sufficient to themselves: they cannot secure their own liberation except as part of and in alliance with the working class and its labour movement. Therefore, as well as direct, usually sectional struggle, on issues of special oppression, they must be won to the fight against backwardness and oppressiveness within that movement.

Winning the specially oppressed to that fight is also vital for the movement as a whole. The hold of reformism depends seriously on relegating the most oppressed to passivity, or on isolating them from the class. Mobilising the specially oppressed for the fight within the movement is vital for the revolutionary transformation of that movement.

The role of the WSL is to be the organisation that can integrate disparate forces into a coherent working class based strategy for the overthrow of capitalism and of all the manifold oppression of class society in general.

Thus to counterpose work among the specially oppressed to LP work is as senseless as counterposing TU work to LP work. It is doubly so in the present situation of the Marxist organisation, where its women's, youth, gay, even black work is heavily intertwined with LP work.

- 7 -

A test, by comparison, for our conception, is the policy developed by Trotsky and his American co-thinkers for the industrial unions that came into existence in the USA in the mid-'30s. They advocated that the new US trade unions, some of which were using semi-revolutionary tactics like the sit-down strike, should go on to organise a Labour Party structurally modelled on the British



Labour Party, with an open valve and free flow of membership between the TUs and party. The Trotskyists organised caucuses throughout the unions for the Labour Party - while, of course, developing and building their own organisation, making propaganda, and doing-what they could to ensure that the movement for the American workers' party would be possessed of class-struggle and revolutionary politics.

The broad general policy would allow the mass US labour movement to develop. Within the struggle for it the Trotskyists could build the revolutionary nucleus. A revolutionary party could be built not in sectarian counterposition to the necessary development of the real labour movement, but within it.

The US comrades were absolutely right and in the direct line of method and approach from the Communist Manifesto and Frederick Engels' attitude to the development of a broad labour party (the ILP) in the UK in the 1890s.

If the Labour Party did not exist in Britain now, then we would have to advocate that the unions create one. We could not (like the SLL in 1967, proposing that the NUM should affiliate to the SLL because the Labour government was closing pits) propose that the unions affiliate to the WSL, or, like the SDF in 1900-01 when the LP was taking shape, ultimatically demand that the union masses move from bourgeois politics or political indifference to our full politics. We would of course try to convince everyone we could to accept our full politics and to fight for them by joining the WSL.

The fight now to turn the militants and the broader layers of trade unionists we reach towards the concerns of the political wing of the trade unions, towards the fight to make the LP an instrument of the working class, is the equivalent of the fight for the LP in the US trade unions of the '30s and later. We build the WSL not as a sect, battenning on its points of difference with the working class, but as a real vanguard, posing perspectives to our class for its own development and building our organisation inside the struggle for those perspectives.

What sense then would it make to use 'banner', 'flag' and 'build the revolutionary party' proclamation techniques to recruit factory workers to the WSL? I doubt that we could do it. But if we did, then we would find that like the WRP and SWP we would not hold them for long, because we would not be able to give them a perspective for struggle in the real movement in which as trade unionists they live, and by whose development or lack of it they stand or fall in their most basic concerns. Anyway, no sooner would we have them than we would have to start the struggle to re-educate them.

This absurd scenario is implied in the idea that we recruit trade unionists by direct and fully labelled Trotskyist propaganda, and not by the same broad labour movement approach we use in the LP.

- 8 -

What then is the role and function of the WSL? We carry the programme and the overview of the necessary development of the labour movement, and the political perspectives derived from them. Flexible and 'diplomatic' on questions of organisation and tactics in relation to the labour movement and oppressed groups, at the same time we make no concessions on questions of principle, definition, program, or political analysis, to them or to pseudo-Marxists and kitsch Trotskyists.

We try to put ourselves in the pivotal position (which in fact the broad groups can give us) to link the different fronts of the class struggle and the movements of the oppressed into a working class strategy. Failure to do this would be not revolutionary intransigence but a form of capitulation to the existing reformist leaderships.

Our method is that outlined by Trotsky on the trade union question, and linked by him to the general approach to the existing labour movement:

"It is necessary to establish this firm rule: self-isolation of the capitulationist variety from mass trade unions, which is tantamount to a betrayal of the revolution, is incompatible with membership in the Fourth International....

"Under the influence of the betrayal by the historic organisations of the proletariat, certain sectarian moods and groupings of various kinds arise or are regenerated at the periphery of the Fourth International. At their base lies a refusal to struggle for partial and transitional demands, i.e. for the elementary interests and needs of the working masses, as they are today. Preparing for the revolution means to the sectarians, convincing themselves of the superiority of socialism. They propose turning their backs on the 'old' trade unions, i.e. to tens of millions of organised workers - as if the masses could somehow live outside of the conditions of the actual class struggle! They remain indifferent to the inner struggle within reformist organisations - as if one could win the masses without intervening in their daily strife! ...

"The cleansing of the ranks of the Fourth International of sectarianism and incurable sectarians is a primary condition for revolutionary success".

PART OF A DRAFT DOCUMENT ON WOMEN - The first part of this document has not been produced yet due to illness afflicting Comrade Collins - but it will follow soon!

The modern women's movement was born in the radical ferment of the late sixties. It emerged in the first place in the USA amongst the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement. The movement in Britain was influenced both by the US movement and the increased expectations of women workers becoming a greater part of the workforce because of the boom. As women workers went on strike at Fords for equal pay, the increasing numbers of educated women, frustrated in their search for professional jobs and politicised by the radical atmosphere of the universities, was another influence.

The movement consisted mainly of two elements; the radical feminists, who had the perspective of waging a sex war and socialist women who still identified with the class struggle, but were disillusioned by the sexism of the left, as well as its complete and utter failure to take up the fight against women's oppression at all. The radical feminists, originating in the USA, distinguished themselves from reformist feminists, but were completely antagonistic to the male left - their critique developed into an anti-left stance. Their theory rests on the idea that women are an oppressed sex-class. Women's biology and the natural division of labour led to male domination over women and this has since formed the basis of all class oppression. They are anti-capitalist only insofar as they see the evils of capitalism as stemming from males.

The modern women's movement differed from earlier movements in that it originated from a radical, implicitly anti-capitalist, current. The early feminism of the 17th and 18th centuries denoted the demand that women share in the inalienable rights that were supposed to be the fruits of the bourgeois revolution, ie that women be accorded the status of human being. As such, then, feminism was a limited but progressive bourgeois democratic movement. As the working class movement developed and began articulating its own demands, a class polarisation arose within the women's movement. This was clearly expressed in the Russian and German women's movement as well as the suffragette movement in Britain. These movements actually involved bourgeois women, who demanded their rights as human beings, but were not prepared to see these extended to working class women when it threatened their privileges as members of the ruling class. In all the European women's movements a split occurred with proletarian women organising their own separate movement which went beyond the demand for female suffrage and took up issues relating to their position as workers; issues such as equal pay and maternity leave.

Although in the USA a bourgeois wing of the women's movement did develop - NOW (National Organisation of Women), and indeed came to have an important influence, such a phenomenon did not occur in Britain. The EOC and such like, government attempts to derail the equal pay and equal opportunities campaigns, have not become part of the women's movement. They have given some cover to trade union bureaucrats, but have not been able to halt the influence of the ideas of the women's movement on the Labour movement.

Interesting glimpses of the debates that went on in the German and Russian Social Democratic Women's organisations are given in the Comintern These on Women, where there had clearly been some discussion on how best to organise women and there was a recognition of the need for special methods. Clara Zetkin, in recollections of a conversation with Lenin, refers to discussion groups of women, which would seem to bear some resemblance to consciousness raising groups in the women's movement today, discussing issues like sex and marriage relations. Lenin did not approve, rightly if that was all they were doing, but clearly the women's organisations were doing a lot more than that. So, while there was a clear division between the bourgeois and the proletarian women's movements discussion by no means stopped there.

Another important feature of the re-birth of the current women's movement was the leap in understanding about the nature of women's oppression. While continuing the fight on equal pay, child-care facilities etc, the movement began to explore a previously relatively untouched area - the issue of sexuality. The early women's movement had seen the questions of a bortion and contraception in a rather Malthusian manner, in terms of population control. The emphasis now has shifted to the right of women to have control over their own bodies - that is one of the 7 demands of the current women's movement. This political exploration of the 'personal' side of women's lives encapsulated in the slogan 'the personal is political' was both a strength and a weakness of the WLM. The CR groups that sprang up everywhere brought women to understand that their so-called personal problems had a material basis. Disatisfaction with sexual relationships, violent husbands, childcare, dependence, lack of confidence in political meetings - those were common to all women, but having set the battle ground for combatting this ideology, sections of the WLM retreated into 'life-style' politics seeing change coming simply through living a different life-style and hoping to change attitudes that way.

### Different currents in the WLM

The early WLM organised around six (now 7) demands, did not easily contain the two diverse currents - and, after the initial founding conference, the socialist women began to organise a separate conference from the radical feminists. Although these conferences did not continue for long, this particular current has continued throughout. The Working Women's Charter Campaign, and later the Socialist Feminist current round Scarlet Woman came from this origin.

Life-stylism/cultural feminism: Having set the battleground for combatting ideology, the slogan the 'personal is political' was turned on its head to depoliticise the fight, counterposing changing life-styles, attitudes and personal relations to the struggle to change society and for material improvement of the lot of all women. We have, rightly, characterised this as reactionary, utopian and elitist, offering no way forward for the mass of women. Under the pressure of the present crisis this position becomes even more untenable and many feminists have understood this and have moved to a class orientation and activist politics.

Socialist feminism: This current which formed itself coherently in 1976, set out to devise a political theory which went beyond the clear inadequacies of radical feminism and the shortcomings of socialist theory on women's oppression. This search for a 'third force' led to a sterile emphasis on developing theory outside of practise in the class struggle, or for that matter, in the women's movement where there was an implicit acceptance of the radical feminists and a fear of doing anything that would split the women's movement, or hi-jack it. The SF however did useful work in raising socialist ideas, especially on anti-imperialism.

An organised SF current disappeared just prior to the election of a Tory government and there has been a general move in to the Labour Party along with the 'fragments' of the revolutionary left.. As with other currents in the women's movement, the stark reality of the Tory attacks on women faced many women with the fact that developing theory was impossible outside of political practice. However, while recognising the importance of the class struggle and the necessity to relate to the labour movement, most have not abandoned their ideas, and, indeed, it is many of these women who have been central to the development and regeneration of the women's organisation in the Labour Party.

Revolutionary feminism/separatism: As mentioned above, this current now forms the core of the 'old' WLM, although it does not definitively shape it. Spare Rib and Outwrite are clearly influenced by radical feminism (a 'softer' version of revolutionary feminism. Spare Rib claims to speak for the women's movement and other influences have been brought to bear on them, notably the socialist

feminists, eg the current conflict between Palestinian women and Jewish feminists had forced them to confront some of the tenets of radical feminism. Women's Fightback has contributed to this debate with articles on Palestinian and Iranian women. This is important not only for international solidarity, but also to intervene in the heated discussions going on in the women's movement now.

### The Left and the Women's Movement

The failure of the left to take up the political issues raised by the women's movement, accepting the bourgeois ascription of them as personal concerns outside the political sphere, left the field free for our ideological competitors and has resulted in a situation today where the left is in a position of tail-ending the women's movement in a whole number of areas other than the economic eg domestic violence, rape, campaigns against sexism. We criticised the IMG for immersing itself in an opportunist fashion in the women's movement but we ourselves did not 'discover' the women's movement until it was already beginning to fragment and sections were orientating towards the labour movement.

In a practical way the development of Women's Fightback was an attempt to relate to this phenomenon, to give leadership with the campaign to reorientate the labour movement, and, in a real sense, to link the struggles of the women's movement to the struggles of women workers in an attempt to forge a new women's movement based on the working class. But this move is still in its early stages. The general disorientation of the revolutionary movement, the loss of the Leninist understanding of the need to take up the struggle not only on the economic front, but also politically and ideologically, affected not only the question of women but all political practice. Genuine difficulties in formulating class demands and action around questions that were primarily social and ideological ones and seemed to cut across class divisions, the difficulty of disentangling vested interests in male privilege etc, in a situation which implied an attack on all men as men, has meant that we have lost a lot of ground to the radical feminists. Many analyses have not been made on class lines. We are now faced with a situation which makes it more difficult to intervene as revolutionaries, and in explaining our positions we have to spend a lot of energy distinguishing ourselves from the assumptions in the women's movement that now accompany fighting around these issues.

In the past two years this has consumed a lot of the energy in the WSL women's commission. We are still having the arguments within the WSL and this conflict has had an important effect on setting back our work and the development of our analysis of the so-called 'feminist' issues. It has resulted in an inadequate response to campaigns which have made a considerable impact over the last two years - the question of rape and domestic violence as taken up by Women Against Violence Against Women and Greenham Common and the women's peace movement. Greenham Common has managed to mobilise 35,000 women in the fight against nuclear disarmament, many of these mobilised from the labour movement - witness the number of coaches organised by Labour Party women's sections and TU branches. That managed to cause a major debate in Parliament, yet we find ourselves incapable of recognising and congratulating this fact and can only reply to this mass movement born out of the actions of a handful of women, by saying you can't do it without the trade unions. We should not blame the women for the lack of sufficient labour movement support, we should be the best fighters for that support in the labour movement. We would not say to (we do not in fact) unemployed organisations, hang on all this is a waste of time unless you get real support from the labour movement. We don't say to the IWU disband, you're a diversion! Greenham Common has given a real sense of power to women who normally would feel impotent politically, yet we seem incapable of recognising the inspiration and vitality that the Greenham Common Camp has aroused in thousands of women. The National Abortion Campaign started out in a similar sort of way - from a small group of women in the women's movement, managed to grow to a mass campaign having such an effect on the labour movement that the TUC was eventually forced to call a national demonstration against the Corrie Bill. That was

and still is, a unique event, and will remain so as long as we continue to sneer at similar movements.

This whole set of feminist issues is important for revolutionaries to take up - huge numbers of women have begun to question the way society is organised through being confronted in their lives with apparently insoluble contradictions. The argument that these questions are ultimately only soluble in the frame work of a socialist society is no justification for not fighting around them now as a way of drawing into struggle those who are slaving under an intolerable burden, not just in their public life but also in their personal life. The difficulties in finding a way of organising women round these issues in line with a proletarian class orientation is no excuse. Especially as the deepening crisis places a hideous burden on working class women as increased economic dependence leads to greater pressure both in terms of domestic workload and increased vulnerability to male violence and abuse. As Cunliffe points out quite rightly in his document:

"... Indded with many woking class women with whom we make contact, part of our political task is to make them aware of the ways in which they are oppressed as women, explaining to them why this is the case, and persuading them of the need to fight such oppression." p12.

The communist programme must be able to provide a complete alternative proletarian view, must be able to offer the most oppressed sand downtrodden of our class a way out of their subjection, or it provides no alternative to the bureaucratic elitism that so often masquerades as socialism on the left.

#### Mass working class based women's movement or mass communist women's movement?

Abstract talk of a communist women's movement now either imagines a mass growth of communism among women only, or else a mass communist movement in existence of men and women. It proclaims communism without being able to expalin it concretely. The slogan for a mass communist women's movement, therefore, becomes disorientating and meaningless. To use such a slogan would be to limit the work we can do now. A mass working class based women's movement sums up our proletarian orientation, methods of struggle and what forces we want to organise. Such a movement though could only achieve its ends, as with other working class movements we try to build, if led by communist politics, but that is pointed out in the course of struggle for immediate and transitional demands, not counterposed to immediate struggle.

#### The Present Crisis and the Fightback.

Our position of building a mass working class women's movement is now even more correct. The deepening capitalist crisis and the election of a Tory government consciously pushing a backlash in attitudes to women as an aid to its industrial strategy of dismantling large areas of the public sector has seen working class women at the forefron of the fight to defend jobsand services. Women are better unionised than ever before and less prepared to be pushed around. This arises both from the independence gained from being part of the workforce and also from the general ideas of the WLM which has affected the thinking of women far beyond the numbers actually involved in the WLM. However the position of women in the unions dees not reflect their increased membership. The turn to the class of women's movement activists plus the upheavals within within the Labour Party

means that feminist concerns are playing an ever important role both in the reorient ation of the Labour movement and the fightback against the Tories. A fightback which is not merely one of defence of jobs and services, but . . .

. . . an offensive on a whole range of issues eg the nature of the Health Service and its care of women's health, childbirth, demands for women's health centres, defence of Council housing, improved provision for battered women and single parents. The fightback of working class women in Lee Jeans, St Mary's the Liverpool, typists, Plessey, Rulecan show the potential, as does the

fragmentation of the ULM and reorientation of sections of it to the working class. The crisis in the Labour Party and trade unions, the moves to democratise them provide tremendous possibilities for realising the slogan of a mass working class women's movement.

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#### AN ATTEMPT AT AN ASSESSMENT OF 3YEARS OF WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

The Labour Movement Fightback for Women's Rights, Women's Fightback's official title, was set up at a conference in March 1980. The first conference was attended by almost 500 women (and 20 men). 270 were delegates from their organisations; 35 from trade union branches, 9 from trades councils, 45 from Labour Party branches, 13 from Labour Party women's sections, 9 from LPYS branches and 3 Labour Club delegates. The London Co-op Political Party, NOLS, CLPD and the then Labour Women's Advisory Committee sent representatives. There were many active trade unionists with especially big contingents from NALGO, NUT, CPSA and TGWU Actts. ASTMS and the NUJ sent representatives from their women's rights/equality committees. 32 women's groups and 8 Women's Voice groups sent contingents.

Of those who filled in the questionnaire, 145 women were active in Labour Party politics, and 120 said that trade union work was their main activity, while 220 were mainly involved in the women's movement. Many, however, were active in both the women's movement and the Labour Party, and even more were both trade union and women's movement activists. There was also a good representation of women from all over the country.

The aim of the conference was to gauge the response to a proposal to set up a campaign for women's rights which would form a bridge between the labour movement and the women's movement. Nothing of this sort had been done for decades. Yet the response surprised everybody. Clearly, a substantial section of the women's movement, broadly speaking, the socialist feminist current, saw the need for a labour movement orientation and responded positively to launching a campaign which would co-ordinate the work of existing groups and establish a link, dialogue and common action between the women's movement and the labour movement.

One of the first things Fightback did as a campaign was to put out a leaflet 'Calling all Women' to mobilise women for the TUC day of action on May 14 of that year. The purpose being to declare that since women were ( and still are) in the front line for attacks from the Tories - we in Fightback must make sure that women are in the front line in the overall fightback against the Tories. Also, for the local and national marches, Fightback put out a leaflet ( the open letter against sexist slogans) criticising the use of sexist slogans by trade unionists against Thatcher. The leaflet explained why, and was part of a campaign pursued ever since by Fightback, to make the labour movement habitable for women.

This leaflet was harshly criticised particularly by trade union bureaucrats (and Arthur Scargill) but also by some sections of the left, on the grounds that these sorts of slogans were simply a bit of fun ( for the men) and genuinely showed how disgusted they were at the Tories. But that argument gave Fightback a good opportunity to show just how discriminatory against women trade unions are, and has resulted in campaigns on union democracy, for positive discrimination, provision of creche facilities at meetings, meetings held in work-time so that women can attend etc.

Women's Fightback was always conceived of as a campaign - a campaign that would be based on local groups, which need not necessarily be Fightback groups; they could be LP women's sections or existing women's groups affiliated to the



national campaign (that meant they would take the paper to sell and have delegates to Fightback bodies). It was conceived of as a broad campaign that did not operate as the women's section of Workers' Action. Though obviously, we hoped to recruit women to the organisation, that was not its only purpose. All WA women were expected to be members of Fightback and to be the driving political force, best organisers and so on, but it was clear from the start that not all members of Fightback would be potential members of a revolutionary organisation. It was considered important to form such a broad-based campaign because there was a genuine need (amply displayed by the response to the first conference) for it in the unions in terms of establishing a women's right to work, and the basic right of women to be included in what was then, and still is, a male dominated political arena. There can be no revolution with half of humanity excluded from the political organisations of the working class, and that doesn't just mean the revolutionary organisations - it means the Labour Party and the trade unions too.

The second Fightback conference was the policy making one, held in June 1980. That was where the policy as printed in the paper was decided. The conference voted for a policy based on direct action, solidarity as women and workers, and for maximum mobilisation for all actions against the capitalist system that exploits and oppresses us. This was adopted in favour of a policy put by WP which consisted of their full programme, effectively putting an ultimatum on the women at the conference to agree with their politics or push off. The Fightback policy was also adopted in favour of a policy put by the IMG which wanted references to capitalism and criticism of TU leaders excluded on the grounds that they might alienate the mass of women. This conference was not as big as the first one consisting of around 200 women, but did reflect a greater commitment to the campaign on the part of the women who were there. That was where the decision for a regular monthly paper was taken and the first Steering Committee elected. (which included the 3 women who are writing this document)

The major focus of the Fightback campaign was agreed as being to defend and fight for a women's right to work - by highlighting the threat to maternity rights in the Employment Bill Prior's), by arguing against any attempts to push women or part-timers out first, and by educating the labour movement as to why women's right to work is central to women being able to function as equals in all areas of social and political life. Motions were also carried pledging to fight all cuts - and rate rises, and a lobby of the TUC was planned and carried out in the autumn. It was also a successful conference in that it brought together forces from the labour movement and the women's movement who would not normally meet and discuss policy.

1980 was also the year that Labour Party Women's Conference started to dramatically increase in size. And Fightback was there. In fact Women's Fightback had started organising for a women's voice to be heard in the LP before the CLPD decided to set up the CLPD Women's Action Committee, a campaign to win constitutional changes in favour of women in the LP. Fightback's role in the recent battles at women's conference and at national LP conference is broadly recognised and has provided us with huge possibilities in the LP of leading the LP women's organisation. Fightback has held two conferences for women in the LP. The first was a huge success, with the organisational background work being laid for resolutions and campaigns to get representation for women in the LP. The conference was also important as the discussion in the workshops at the conference produced 'our' demands, they were formulated on the basis of the experience of the women at the conference. Afterwards Fightback drew up a document outlining our programme of demands and this was circulated to women's sections all over the country, and in many cases acted on.

The second conference, held in November last year was a flop with attendance of only around 40 women. It was hardly built for and poorly advertised and undoubtedly the LP Women's Organisation has received a demoralising setback as it made no headway at all at this year's annual LP conference. A kinder assessment is

that women in the women's sections didn't feel the need for a conference at this stage as they know what needs to be done and are getting on with it. But very few of our comrades were there, indicating that little work had been done by us in building for that conference.

There has been no decline in the numbers of women's sections in the LP, so the demoralisation caused by the annual conference should only be temporary. It should mean that there are more opportunities for Fightback to organise the LP women's sections to turn outwards and become more campaigning type bodies. In many areas this does happen - the US671 campaign is an example.

Another major area of work has been the Campaign for a Woman's Right to Work, now the Women's Campaign for Jobs. Launched from the Women's Festival held in the summer of 1981, there was tremendous pressure from the rank and file of both the unions and the LP for an official labour movement march for a woman's right to work. This pressure was resisted with clear conniving and dishonesty from the leaders of both the unions and the LP and the march had to be organised by the rank and file, with the LP declaring it would have a 'festival' instead. That march was organised and built for the large part by our comrades and Women's Fightback. It was the only march of its kind on the issue of a woman's right to work to be held for decades, and news about it and its aims and the struggles that had been waged with the labour bureaucrats reached far more women than the 5000 that were on it. We made a mistake in not organising a separate platform at the end as we were fairly confident we would get speakers, especially the Kigass speaker on the festival platform. They declared they had run out of time and couldn't take any speakers, yet they Michael Foot rambling on for ages about how he was fighting for women's rights!

A major event last year was the Fightback Trade Union conference. Well-attended, it was a lively conference with many proposals for action ensuing from it. Workshops were organised for all the major unions with a view to setting up women's caucuses and networks within the different unions. The conference also brought together ideas and campaigns from the NUM and struggles of working class women; there speakers from Rulacan and St Mary's hospital and a report from Lee Jean and discussion on a women's right to work benefits and the fight of disabled women. The importance of setting up networks in the unions was subsequently shown at the NUPE conference where there was a nucleus of delegates who were Fightback supporters who worked around the current pay dispute and succeeded in getting the conference to affiliate to Fightback. However even in NUPE itself we have not managed to organise a permanent network of women to co-ordinate a fight in the unions. There was a trade union working group set up from the NUM (Fightback's) to try to pick up this work but this won't be done effectively if NSL members aren't doing the work on the ground. There can be no doubt that the possibilities for organising women in the unions, particularly where we have key people - ASFS, NUPE, NALGO, NUTGW, COMSE, NUT AND GENU are tremendous, but we have yet to realise them.

The main campaign that Fightback is involved in at the moment, its the only organised group in it really, is the Women's Campaign for Jobs. This campaign has huge potential and there have been affiliations from union branches, women's sections and women's group steadily coming in for months. The problem is the active participation of all these groups, or the lack of it. Conferences have been small as have planning meetings. But instead of trying to remedy this, we in the NSL women's commission have been having fairly fruitless arguments about whether there should be a people's march type event organised next year or not. If there is or if there isn't makes no difference to the need for local work and campaigns to be continued or built and that's what seems to be suffering. Of course, that has not been the only argument on the women's commission, but the differences on the women's commission should not mean that we cannot function effectively as an organisation in Fightback - or anywhere else. Yet they have meant that.

We have reaped a sorry harvest. There are a handful (literally) of Fightback groups, and that is a criticism of ourselves - who will build Fightback groups or get women's sections to affiliate if we do not even bother to do it ourselves? (R. Lever will not as she seems to be moving further and further away from an active campaigning orientation for Fightback) Who built the Fightback AGM (there were 40 women there)? We did not - we had an 'intervention' (and even that was badly organised). How many of our members even sell Fightback? Very few S- groups order the paper and a very few copies at that. There has been an increase in orders from S- groups since Xmas due to a push from the Centre, which shows that we can overcome the lethargy.

There seems to be a drift in the organisation away from Fightback, not that this drift is going anywhere else, but seems to be heading in the direction of doing no women's work! Clearly, no-one in the WSL can have that perspective. But if we do not pull ourselves together and tackle this drift away from Fightback, we shall end up in the situation of doing nothing.

We must pledge ourselves to build Fightback groups and get women's sections to affiliate. We must take the Women's Campaign for Jobs seriously, recontacting the groups that existed to build for the June march, making propaganda with them locally, holding meetin jointly with union branches and unemployed groups, using the undoubtedly well-known Fightback name. We must see ourselves as a driving force in the campaign. We are in a position to do this, not just by making an intervention in it, as left groups have done in various campaigns for so long in the past, but as the basis of trying to build a working class women's movement. Fightback has been able to build over the last three years and we have tremendous opportunities, greater than any other group on the entire left.

Fightback's positive successes outlined in this document far outweigh the failures of recent months - eg the lack of sufficient criticism of the NUPE leadership in Fightback since the NUPE conference affiliated to the campaign, a falling off in local campaign work, but these are things that we can put right, but only if we have a sound commitment to Fightback and stop the drift away from it. It is not good enough to criticise the women who have been active in Fightback for 'adapting' to the level of those who coke along when it is clear that the rest of our organisation does very little to build the campaign. And that does not mean that there should simply be more discussions on Fightback on the EC, OC or NC (though that would not go amiss) but that Branch Organisations see themselves as building Fightback and doing work around women's struggles as the whole branches responsibility, investigating the possibilities, not just leaving it to the few isolated women in a branch. There are branches where there are no women, unfortunately, but that does not mean the branch can do nothing. Contacts can be approached and encouraged, that too has been done before, but seems to have fallen by the wayside recently.

### The Paper

There have been 24 issues of Women's Fightback newspaper. It is a famous paper, read by many women who read no other left papers. It is fairly well accepted in the WLM and is very easy to sell to women in the trade unions and the Labour Party. And there can be no doubt that the content of the paper has been largely dominated by one, R Lever. A bad situation (whoever it was) and one that we attempted to remedy at the AGM by electing an editorial team, since we were not in a position, and are even less so now, to be able to challenge her for secretary of the campaign. A situation, however, that we can, and will have to overcome.

However, it is not true to say, as Cunliffe does in his document Aug 1982, that the paper is 'largely devoid of WSL political positions except on the most rudimentary support the NHS workers' level'.

He also says that the paper needs to be made more attractive to working class women, the implication being that very little is now.

Since when have campaigns against deportations and immigration controls, against rent and rate rises, for democracy in the labour movement, for positive discrimination in favour of women, against Toxic Shock Syndrome and tampon-related diseases, against the monopolies that control production of tranquillisers that exclude women from social life, let alone political activity, against discriminatory benefits, for child-care facilities under our control, for abortion and contraception, against hospital closures and cuts against rape and violence against women, for a woman's right to a decent job, against sexual harassment at work and loads more... since when have these campaigns not been in accordance with WSL political positions? And since when have these not been issues that do not concern, or are not attractive to working class women?

It has also been apparent that WSL members have shown a marked reluctance to write articles which would presumably put the political positions Cunliffe declares have been missing. Despite repeated requests for contributions and reports of what's going on in their areas very few have responded, and when they have, have generally managed to miss deadlines. Articles for Fightback do not have to be long, in fact it's better if they're short; reports can be sent in on what your women's sections doing, what cuts are being made and how they're being fought, short interviews with women in local campaigns, what the local council's doing, all sorts of things - the paper would be vastly improved if there was more feedback.

There has not been sufficient emphasis recently on women's economic struggles in the paper, when they're there, they're usually on the back page. And that's something the WSL women who work on the paper consistently fight on (if RL had her way there would be even fewer) but, again, we must have the reports we can't do them all in London.

There has been criticism of Fightback for being too 'feminist'. That would seem to mean that there are too many articles on issues not directly to do with the labour movement. But, consider, the labour movement has a tendency not to discuss or publish material on women's history or culture or sexuality - that's one of the things we're trying to change. But who does discuss these issues? The women's movement. Does that mean therefore that working class women cannot be interested in discussing these issues too? Of course not. In fact, working class women probably have a greater interest in discussing and confronting rape and violence against women than middle class women.

The paper was never meant to reflect the WSL line. If it was, Fightback would never have been set up in the first place - it would not be a broad-based group - it would be, or have been, the pure, sterile shell that WP intended it to be at the first policy-making conference. It is a paper for reports, analysis, discussion, controversy, reviews, international solidarity and carrying the policy of Women's Fightback a lot of which is also ours - a live paper, and we should write for it in that spirit. We don't only raise our politics by writing articles though, we should also do it by struggling alongside women on the ground, raising our demands in the course of struggle.

What the paper lacks, we can correct, but only if we decide to commit ourselves as a whole organisation to the campaign. We can't just insert things, where the paper is being produced at the last minute, it is no solution, and is also the method of RL who is now profoundly hostile to our organisation and who will have to be challenged from a position of strength. We must build that position of strength, by building Fightback, not by running away from it.

