

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/TRP. (The SLL/TRP 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 annex 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/TRP-STP style sect more or less