

Gay liberation and the WSL

1. Discussion document

2. Conference resolution Gay commission

Discussion article:

'The political problems are as yet unresolved': S.Layton

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Gay liberation and the WSL

Discussion document from the WSL Gay Commission

History

The history of the revolutionary socialist movement on the question of gay liberation is not a proud one.

A number of isolated socialists in Europe and the USA raised the need for gay liberation as they then conceived it from the 1880s onwards. The overall ideological climate was, of course, appalling, with homosexuality regarded as at worst a crime against nature and at best a disease or deformity of the mind. Socialists on the whole remained dominated by these views. Most of them were silent; Those who spoke, like Engels, simply expressed the reactionary prejudices of their time.

One or two visionaries, like Edward Carpenter, had some influence and were respected and the new psychology (especially Freud) began to produce a more liberal and enlightened view within the intelligentsia.

But the only really political campaign was in Germany. With some limitations, the German SPD took up the issue and campaigned for the abolition of the law which outlawed homosexual behaviour. The renowned German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, who was gay, was an SPD member.

It was from the SPD rather than directly that the Bolsheviks adopted the liberal sexual policies which followed the revolution in Russia. For a brief period of a decade or more a more liberal attitude prevailed in Russia though there were no statements on the question, so far as we are aware, by Bolshevik leaders and those of them who were gay stayed firmly in the closet.

The dark reaction was simultaneous in Germany and Russia. The Nazis abolished Hirschfeld's institute and burned his effigy and outlawed homosexuality; later they were to consign many thousands of gays to the concentration camps and gas chambers. In the USSR Stalin's 1934 law outlawed homosexuality again. He too sent many gays to lifelong imprisonment and death.

From this moment on we have been unable to find any statement by a socialist condemning this persecution. Trotsky, for instance, does not mention it in "Revolution Betrayed".

From 1938 to 1969, as far as we can ascertain, the position of Trotskyist organisations on the question of homosexuality was indistinguishable from that of the Stalinists.

This is a shameful aspect of the history of our movement which we must unequivocally criticise and try to reverse.

In 1969 the gay resistance and liberation movement began and from that date a number of Trotskyist organisations have followed embarrassedly at varying distances behind it.

In 1973 leading USFI members were still saying that homosexuality would go away after the socialist revolution. Many organisations had closet rules (gay members could not "come out" in public, it might give a bad impression to the working class!).

But by the end of the 70s nearly all revolutionary socialist organisations had adopted at least some of the demands of the gay movement and the number of out gay members had increased. A few exceptions like the WRP remained.

But hardly any revolutionary socialist organisations took any initiative on the question and their commitment tended to fluctuate in an opportunistic way.

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The history of the American SWP is an object lesson in this. Their latest "turn to industry" introduced a new anti-gay phase.

Gay people have not surprisingly concluded that revolutionary socialist (including Trotskyist) organisations cannot be relied upon to struggle militantly and consistently for gay liberation. Gay militants and socialists have by and large, quite rightly in our view, stressed the need to maintain and strengthen an autonomous gay movement consisting of social, community and political organisations.

Regrettably, but understandably, the gay presence in revolutionary socialist organisations, including our own, has been declining in recent years. This is the present problem which needs to be tackled.

The pre-fusion WSL and the gay question*

The leadership of the old WSL from its formation established a principled position of support for gay rights - all the more remarkable in view of the ghastly traditions of the WRP.

But the growth of activity on the question was very slow. The WSL provided an atmosphere in which a few gay comrades were able to come out. But the number of openly gay comrades was very small (much less than the proportion of gays in the population as a whole) and low priority was given to activities in the gay movement. The question of priorities seldom came up explicitly since gay comrades did not push very hard for some time.

Discussions opened up, but didn't develop far, about the relationship between gay rights (democratic demands) and sexuality and sexual liberation, on the age of consent and on the need for an autonomous gay movement.

A sexuality commission was established but its work was constantly swamped by other priorities so it didn't get very far.

Gay comrades (and others) had to endure the primitive and frightening sexism of the Greek CIL. When they eventually brought their positions on homosexuality into the open in 1979 the WSL was virtually unanimous in offering them no concessions to present their vile opinions within the WSL summer school and they walked out leaving gay comrades in particular feeling a bit battered but glad of the support implicit in the WSL position.

The League since fusion - less than tokenism

Since fusion it seems that the WSL has for the most part not even bothered with the token "gays and other minorities" references. At the fusion rally there was a film (which we weren't allowed to see in full and were unable to discuss). The document presented to the trade union democracy conference contained no reference to gay rights, despite the fact that there have been several cases of discrimination against gay workers recently - including a victimisation by a Labour-controlled council. The only reference to gay rights during the whole conference was by a non-League member. At last year's summer school again gay rights was only mentioned in the plenaries by non-WSL members - generally members of the RWL and the Freedom Socialist Party.

There has been some work done by WSL members in the NUT over resolutions on gay rights, but this seems to be the exception to the general lack of activity on the issue.

Coverage of gay rights in the paper has increased recently, but is still far too little.

* A section on the I-CL and the gay question was commissioned, but was not written in time to be included in this document.

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Gay liberation and the YM

One of the main points of the YM's attack on the J leadership is its lack of action on gay rights. But M could easily reply by pointing to the YM's own lack of action. The YM's work on gay rights, apart from its attacks on M, is virtually nonexistent.

The meetings on gay rights that are organised at J events seem more part of our attack on M than an attempt to get things done. This view was strengthened by the events of the recent YM conference. The resolutions presented to the conference by the workshop on gay rights were taken with no discussion. If this had happened at a J conference YM members would have rightly caused uproar.

The age of consent

Sex and sexuality are an overriding concern for the vast majority of young people. By the imposition of an arbitrary age of consent the state tries to deny freely chosen sexual relations to young people whilst at the same time a blind eye is turned to incest and other forms of sexual exploitation of the young. The age of consent is a particularly burning issue for young gay men who are expected to contain their affections five years longer than everyone else.

We recognise that the ideology of the ruling group in any society permeates and shapes the aspirations of the oppressed classes in that society and that we have to fight to break the hold of this ideology. This fight must include an attack on the oppressive sexual "morality" of capitalist (and Stalinist) society.

The YM and the WSL have no position on the age of consent. It was agreed at the 1981 YM conference not to take a position until there had been a discussion. We need to have that discussion, both in the WSL and the YM, and take a position.

The position of the WSL Gay Commission is that we should support and argue for the complete abolition of the age of consent, along with all other laws which limit consensual sexual relations. In the interim we support all moves towards this end, in particular a reduction of the age of consent for gay men to 16.

It may be argued that to oppose the age of consent may alienate contacts (or even members). But, as we argue against M on gay rights, a revolutionary organisation should not avoid taking correct positions for fear of losing potential recruits. We must educate our contacts and explain why it is necessary to oppose the age of consent.

Gay rights and the Labour Party

An important part of the struggle for gay liberation is the fight for gay rights, which includes a fight for formal legal equality of gay people with nongay people. The Liberal Party is generally recognised as having the best record of commitment to legal equality for gay people of the main political parties. However the Liberals see gay rights as an end in themselves, rather than as part of the wider struggle for gay liberation.

The Labour Party's record on gay rights is generally appalling. During its years in Government it has done little about laws which discriminate against gay people. Labour-controlled local authorities have victimised gay workers in supposedly "sensitive" areas, eg social work, teaching.

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Even the relatively minor law reform proposed in the NEC discussion document "The Rights of Gay Men and Women" - based on the principle of legal equality - proved too much. "Labour's Programme 1982" proposes an age of consent for gay men of 18 and says nothing about the law relating to privacy (to have sex legally gay men must not only be 21/^{or over} but they must have their sex in a locked room with the curtains drawn and only two of them present) nor about the law outlawing gay sex in the Armed Forces and Merchant Navy.

Recently the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights has undergone an important and encouraging change. From a position a few years ago when it was on the verge of collapse, it is now a growing and active campaign. The growth has come from a change in political direction. LCGR used to be a Labourite version of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, but an influx of activists from the wider gay political movement have made it now an organisation with some grasp of the relationship between gay liberation and class politics. The "Gay 16 OK" zap on Labour Party conference last year was symbolic of this change in political direction - relying on mobilising grass roots support rather than discreet lobbying of the leadership to secure change.

The gay movement

The following is a guide to the main sections of the gay movement. Its coverage of specifically lesbian organisations is sketchy and probably incomplete.

1 Political groups

Campaign for Homosexual Equality - The main and best known gay rights organisation. Has a reformist, parliamentary perspective on the struggle for gay rights and has close links with the Liberal Party (many leading members are Liberals). Also has links with Gay News. Produces useful literature, such as its report on antigay violence.

Labour Campaign for Gay Rights - See above in section on the Labour Party. One of the healthier parts of the gay movement.

Revolutionary Gay Men's Caucus - Largely the personal property of Don Milligan (exmember of various left groups and author of "The Politics of Homosexuality"). Generally ultraleft and ultimacist it has adopted positions close to and worked closely with the Revolutionary Communist Party and apparently dissolved itself into the RCP on 31 December 1982.

London Gay Workshops - Set up by various left-leaning gay activists who found existing left groups lacking in commitment to gay liberation. Sees its main purpose as building the "gay community" and consequently spends a lot of its time trying to organise a noncommercial gay social scene.

Several left groups have gay groups, such as the CP, SWP, Workers' Power. None of these is particularly active in the gay movement.

The Gay Youth Movement and the Gay Teenagers Group take the problems of young gays.

2 Trade Union groups

Gay caucuses exist with NUPE, NALGO, NUT, NATFHE, UCW. They are largely confined to white-collar unions. It is notable that formally "left" unions such as the NUM and large unions like the TGWU and AUEW have no gay caucuses in them.

Gay rights policies have been won in NALGO, NUPE, NATFHE, largely as a result

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of gay caucuses in those unions. The NUT has no policy on gay rights - which is particularly important as gay teachers have been sacked because of their close involvement with children (for whom, apparently, all gay people have an insatiable sexual appetite).

Gay Rights at Work takes up campaigns around victimisations of individual gay workers. Apart from these campaigns and occasional conferences it has no life. It doesn't perform any coordinating function between the various gay caucuses on a permanent basis, which would obviously strengthen the movement within the unions.

3 Social/support groups

Various advice and support groups, such as Gay Switchboards, Friend, Icebreakers, Lesbian Line, GLAD (Gay Legal Advice), serve an extremely important and necessary function. They provide somewhere isolated gays can go for advice and try to break down the isolation. Some of them have a social side where they try to integrate gays who come to them into the gay social scene that already exists.

Several places are currently setting up or have already set up gay centres. There's one in Manchester and ones are planned for Islington, Greenwich and an all-London one funded by the GLC. We should support these centres which aim to provide a place where gay people can meet and organise outside of the commercial gay scene and support council funding for them.

There are several gay newspapers published in this country. Gay News is the best known, but is fairly apolitical. There are local gay papers, such as Mancunian Gay, Gay Scotland and Capital Gay (London). The LCGR publish Gay Socialist. Magazines for lesbians, such as Sappho and Sequel organise (at least they do in London) social events and meetings for their readers.

Appendix

The following is part of a document prepared by Traven and DW (who has since left the WSL) for national aggregate of the WSL on the family held in June 1979.

The WSL has never voted on any explicit analysis of gay oppression, nor on any programmatic orientation towards the gay movement and for the ending of that oppression. But the isolated statements contained in perspectives documents contain an implicit position which has been expanded in SP.

The position argues that the oppression of gays in contemporary capitalist societies operates at many different levels, and is organised through the apparatus of institutions which support and serve the bourgeois state; that this oppression stems from the suppression of homosexuality which is crucial for maintaining the norm of heterosexual monogamy and preserving the bourgeois family; and that the oppression of gays can end only with the abolition of the bourgeois family.

From this position we have analysed attacks on the organisations of gays as part of the wider moves by the bourgeois state to increase its powers of repression - moves designed to prepare for major confrontations with the working class. This analysis has obvious strengths, but it fails to come to terms with some fundamental problems. It flows from our emphasis on the essentially democratic aspect of the demands raised by the gay movement, and this points to the central weakness of our existing position.

Rudimentary as it is, the position has a reassuring appearance of orthodoxy. But if we simply develop our position by extending it in a straight line, we

should end up operating with a "minimum" and a "maximum" programme for the ending of gay oppression: here and now, a fight for "equal rights"; and at some point in the future after the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the abolition of the bourgeois family and so the creation of the conditions for the final overthrow of sexual oppression. Such a "two stage" theory would have little in common with the method of the Transitional Programme.

This document is trying to locate a problem, not to resolve it. But some basic points still need to be made at this stage.

The tradition of the communist movement has been to regard the ending of gay oppression as essentially a democratic task. So, in December 1917, the Bolsheviks abolished all laws which distinguished homosexual acts from any other form of sexual activity. They declared, in the words of Gregorii Batkis, Director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene, the "absolute non-interference of the state and society into sexual matters, so long as nobody is injured, and noone's interests are encroached upon". We know nothing further of how the Bolsheviks acted in this field, beyond clearing the statute book of repressive legislation.

In itself this was of course and entirely correct and absolutely necessary step. But at the same time this was still going no further than actually executing the programme of bourgeois democracy, which had made similar, if temporary, rulings, as in the Code Napoleon.

In this area, the Bolsheviks seemed to adopt a concept of bourgeois ideology: that sexual acts were private, the "property" of private individuals - unless they violated the personal liberty of an individual by violence or coercion, or unless they erupted into social existence by creating disruption in the lives of other individuals.

A recognition of the strength of their actions must not blind us to the limitations of the theoretical positions on which they seem to have been based. As historical materialists we must recognise that the formal liberty of legal equality can actually mystify the reality of oppression. The situation of lesbians provides an obvious example. In Britain homosexual acts between women are not and have not been punishable by law. Yet there is no doubt that lesbians are an oppressed layer of society, in many ways more sharply oppressed than gay men.

It is their sexuality, or their sexual identity, which leads to their oppression. Recognising this simple fact means realising the importance of sexuality or sexual identity, which cannot be reduced to meaning no more than sexual behaviour.

While it is correct to emphasise for agitational purposes the democratic demands which counter aspects of gay oppression, it is thoroughly inadequate to reduce the struggle against gay oppression to a question of legal reforms.

But to move beyond this point of inadequacy, we need to undertake a systematic analysis of sexuality and its social creation. We believe that the direction which such an analysis must take involves a rejection of the simple ideas that sexuality is determined by biology, selected as an act of individual freewill, or caused by purely psychological factors. All these elements no doubt play a part in a far more intricate process, based in a person's individual and class relationship with society, with its institutions and especially with its ideology.

Resolution on the struggle for gay liberation

Submitted by the WSL Gay Commission

The WSL recognises that lesbians and gay men are oppressed in many ways in contemporary society - first of all sexually oppressed as a result of the denial of the validity of their sexual desires and actions; but also in many instances legally oppressed and socially and economically disadvantaged.

It supports the full liberation of lesbians and gay men and recognises that this consists not merely of the establishment of legal and social equality with heterosexuals but also in a revolutionary change in conceptions of human sexuality as a whole. The fight for gay liberation is part of a fight for the sexual liberation of everyone.

It believes that sexual oppression in general, and the legal and social discrimination against gays and lesbians in particular, is required by capitalist society as an ideological and sometimes material support to exploitation. It also recognises that the degree of sexual oppression tends to rise in periods of crisis and difficulty for the capitalist system or during the intensification of bureaucratic rule (for example, the spread of anti-gay reaction in Germany and the Soviet Union in the 1930s; the Thatcherite and Reaganite cult of the family). As a result the WSL believes that the fight for the rights and liberation of gays and lesbians is a particularly urgent one at this time.

The WSL recognises that with very few exceptions the history of the socialist movement on the question of lesbian and gay liberation is one of shameful silence and inaction at best; and at worst the participation in anti-gay bigotry and oppression. The Trotskyist movement is no exception to this. We must acknowledge plainly that the Transitional Programme contains not a word on the question even though it was written at a time when gays were being physically exterminated in thousands in both Germany and the USSR. Since then Trotskyist organisations have on many occasions forbidden members to be openly gay or in other ways participated in the oppression of lesbians and gays. This history has quite rightly created deep suspicion among gay people about the genuine commitment of socialists, including Trotskyists, to the cause of their liberation from oppression. Since the suppression of the German SPD and the German sexual liberation movement by Hitler socialist organisations have not been in the forefront of the struggle for gay rights.

Lesbians and gay men can easily observe that any benefits which have been gained in the last 13 years are not as result of campaigns by socialist organisations but have come as a result of the growth of a large international gay movement for the first time in history, beginning with the Stonewall riots in New York in June 1969. Up to now those socialist, including Trotskyist, organisations which have come to support gay rights and liberation have done so in the wake of and under pressure from that autonomous movement.

Because of the failure of socialists on this question, the WSL believes that revolutionary socialists should make it very clear that they unconditionally recognise the necessity for that autonomous movement and support it. Revolutionary socialists will acquire the right to criticise that movement only to the extent that they show themselves willing to engage in a genuine fight for the rights and liberation of gays and lesbians. They do not acquire that right through either silence, bigotry or even token support for gay and lesbian demands. We believe that no human liberation can be permanently won without the abolition of class society. We cannot expect lesbians and gay men who fight for their own rights today to see that unless we give them positive proof that our commitment to their struggle is genuine and that our faith in socialism is not a sectarian ultimatum. We cannot expect militant gays and lesbians to be won to revolutionary socialism in large numbers unless revolutionary socialists acknowledge that they have a good deal to learn from the gay and lesbian movement.

For the WSL to play the part which it should in the fight for gay rights and liberation will require significant changes in the organisation's practice. First we need to make good our commitment in the fusion resolution to create an organisation habitable for lesbian and gay comrades. We should ask ourselves why we have lost a considerable number of gay comrades from the organisation. All comrades should consider ways in which personally and socially the organisation can make lesbian and gay comrades feel more accepted. But the main way towards this is for the organisation as a whole to take up a more active position in the fight for gay rights.

This means first that gay comrades should be given more encouragement to participate in the gay movement. And, second, straight comrades must take up questions of gay oppression in their work in the labour movement and elsewhere. In some cases this requires considerable courage. In many labour movement organisations anyone who takes up a gay rights issue (as long as they do not adopt the cop-out technique of saying, "of course I'm not gay, but...") immediately runs the risk of being considered gay and of suffering the kind of social discrimination which gay people suffer. But straight comrades should ask themselves what in practice they have ever done to fight practically for gay rights. A request at the WSL summer school that action be taken by all branches about the Judith Williams victimisation and that reports be made to the gay caucus has so far produced no reports.

The gay and lesbian caucus of the WSL should be recognised as an important element in the development of this work. It should make suggestions to branches as to the work they should be doing on gay rights and be prepared to help all comrades to fight for our policies on the question.

"Coming out" is an enormous step for most gay people to take. It means admitting a "deviant" sexuality to yourself and to other people. The WSL supports the democratic right of gay people affirm their sexuality. We also recognise the importance of coming out for members of the WSL and must offer support to any comrades who decide to come out.

Gay comrades should be encouraged to participate fully in the activities of appropriate gay and lesbian organisations, especially those which are oriented towards or are within the labour movement. In particular, this means working in the O gay rights campaign and the various trade union gay caucuses which now exist. Straight comrades in left caucuses in the trade unions should consider proposing joint action on gay rights with gay caucuses, as the WSL teachers' fraction has encouraged through the STA and the Gay Teachers Group.

Examples of victimisation of gay and lesbian workers should be taken up throughout the organisation, resolutions introduced in all TU and O branches and so on.

Campaigns should be taken up and supported in all trade unions by all comrades to include an equal rights policy with regard to lesbians and gays in the policies of unions (the TUC recently decided to omit reference to gays from its model antidiscrimination clause). When these policies are won we must fight for their implementation.

All comrades should fight for the inclusion of antidiscrimination clauses in local election manifestos or in the policies of labour groups on councils already elected without such a policy. Where labour councils are in office comrades should demand that they introduce nondiscrimination in practice, and that they establish facilities for gays and lesbians such as the gay centres which are being set up in London and elsewhere. We should demand council funding for gay support groups (switchboards etc).

In the health service we should fight for equal treatment for gay and straight patients and against the bigotry which often dissuades gays from using needed

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medical facilities.

In the education system we should demand, especially through the O and through education trade unions, that sex education should include a positive attitude to homosexuality and that such an attitude should prevail through all aspects of education.

We recognise that young gay people suffer particular problems in present day society. In part, for young gay men, this springs from the fact that in Britain at present all sex between men under 21 is illegal. We should take up the issue of the age of consent particularly strongly in the O since it has recently voted to maintain a policy of discrimination against gays by proposing a reduction of the age of consent for gay men to 18. The WSL supports the complete abolition of the age of consent for everyone. But in the interim, where the issue arises separately, we support the establishment of equality between gays and straights, ie a reduction of the age of consent for gay men to 16.

There is a large number of immediate practical tasks in the above list which both gay and straight comrades should be active in implementing.

In addition, however, we must give more priority to the development of theoretical work on the question of gay liberation. This will be pioneering work as very few socialists have applied themselves to studying the origins of sexuality, the relationship of sex, the family and capitalism or the causes of the exceptional degree of bigotry and revulsion in society against homosexuality.

'THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS ARE AS YET UNRESOLVED'

As the initial euphoria of the now dissolved tendency begins to subside, it is pertinent in the wake of the special aggregate meeting to analyse the real meaning of the decision that has been taken. Being a member of the erstwhile minority, I was pleased that the special aggregate formally reversed the appalling anti-marxist line of the WSL. It is with regret however that after considerable deliberation on the entire episode, I can only reach the conclusion that the political problems facing our party are still as yet unresolved.

My purpose in writing this contribution is to refute the accusations made by Cde Kinnell in IB14 where he argues that the method of the tendency has been unprincipled and held together by the desire to retain the prestige of the tendency leaders. While the tendency position did go through a series of confusions, which it is in nobody's interest to pretend that they were anything other than confusions, the tendency did establish and insist upon the major positive feature of the debate; namely that there is a fundamental difference between an imperialist and non-imperialist nation.

That is why, although I did not make a verbal contribution to the special aggregate, I voted for both the Cde Erswell amendment and later the tendency position. Both had in common this view of the difference between an imperialist country and a semi-colony. That is why my actions were not unprincipled. Regretably the minority amendment was not supported by some who agreed with it. I will not here go into the arguments about why Argentina is a semi-colony. I think the best contributions have come from Cde Morrow (IB17) and Cde Evington (IB16).

Here a point should be made to all those at the special aggregate who urged us to constantly 'revise' (see Harrison IB19) the tenets of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. Whilst recognising the serious need to develop Marxism in the class struggle and build upon our existing body of knowledge, it is politically crucial that we reject all frivolous suggestions to junk any of our past theoretical conquests. The term 'sub-imperialism' has been bandied around to describe Argentina but even comrade Kinnell a leading advocate of this position admits that 'my knowledge of this literature is very small indeed' (IB14). No theoretical contribution has been made, only a certain emphasis on certain facts which are not in dispute. At best we have had a series of impressions and at worse we have Cde Traven, who does not think it matters what Argentina is because Galtieri's motives were not socialist.

At the aggregate speaker after speaker for the old M.C. majority constantly referred to the 'nature of the Argentine juntas', the 'motives of Galtieri', etc. Such petit-bourgeois moralising is the complete antithesis of Marxism, which only ever recognises the objective reality of a given situation as its point of reference.

One more view on this. It is surely the Marxist practice to 'instinctively' turn to the 'old' positions as a first reaction, even if these need more careful thought later. There is nothing 'Lealeite' or dogmatic about this. But I ask the former majority. How come you suddenly discovered all these problems in the middle of a conflict? Did the comrades not think this was an important matter to discuss at the time of the fusion?

Although as I stated earlier, I voted for the tendency position, there are a number of points that I view as incorrect.

Cde Evington has shown one real confusion in the tendency's position, in the concluding paragraph of his contribution (see IB16).

"The Falkland Islands, while they remain part of the British Empire, are by their very presence oppressive. It does not however make Galtieri a great national liberator, as was spelt out above, nor does it negate the reactionary reasons behind the invasion, and the fact that the invasion was reactionary, but it still had a progressive dynamic to it, and after the sending of the British Task Force and the related altering of the nature of the struggle, it was and is the duty of all Internationalists to support the anti-imperialist dynamic of the struggle, that means defending Argentina."

Cde Evington admits the Malvinas are an outpost of the British Empire. By possessing them the British ruling class reserves the right to use the islands as a springboard to preserve or extend its interests in Latin America and the South Atlantic. As he says, this is so 'by their very presence'. I agree that Galtieri is not a 'great national liberator' and I agree that he had reactionary reasons for the invasion. But then Cde Evington wants the impossible - "the invasion was reactionary but it still had a progressive ~~xxxx~~ dynamic to it." Where does this 'progressive dynamic' come from if not from the fact that the invasion was not reactionary in itself as an act (although Galtieri's reasons were) because the invasion removed an outpost of the British Empire.

The second disagreement I have is over slogans. The comrades of the former minority have realised that Argentina is an oppressed nation exploited by imperialism. They say they would defend Argentina against the British navy, but if we look at the slogans they raise in the war nowhere do they recognise that a defeat for Britain, support for Argentina, must mean raising the slogan of "Victory to Argentina" and arguing for it in the working class. The former majority shy away from recognising this logic, which comes from the view that war took place between an imperialist and non-imperialist country.

Why do the comrades in the old tendency allow these confusions to remain?

My own opinion is that the tendency has been afraid to make a clean break with the former majority. For example, Cde Kinnell (IB14) has pointed to the many shifts in the tendency. This is true enough unfortunately. But we have nothing to be ashamed of if we admit that we were wrong from the start (April EC). Cde Evington and Cde Smith try to pretend that the situation changed by the sending of the Task Force only, it seems to me, to try and argue that the original positions taken by the party was right. Secondly, the tendency did not put forward the slogan of 'Victory to Argentina' but instead ended the tendency platform with the slogans:

Down with Thatcher's War!

Withdraw the Fleet!

Black War Supplies!

The Main Enemy is at Home!

This was so that maximum unity with the majority comrades

could be stressed. Surely we could have had unity in action in Britain without sacrificing a principled position of support for Argentina. The result of the narrow victory for the tendency position, means we now have a majority which has ensured an elementary respect for the Marxist view of imperialism and the programme of Permanent Revolution, the applicability of which is under sustained attack and will continue to be, not just in Latin America, but also in Ireland and the Middle East. How therefore do we account for the errors of the past? How do we prevent them from occurring again? given that the comrades responsible are still in the leadership?

After witnessing the confusion of the voting procedure at the aggregate and taking note of the fact that on division the hall split into more or less ~~the~~ old WSL-ICL components, it is unrealistic to deny that the party is seriously divided.

In IB20 comrades Oliver and Parsons exhort us to 'save the fusion'. This could prove to be a forlorn declaration unless we immediately strive to resolve the many differences in the organisation. Though Oliver and Parsons make this point themselves, it must be noted that when an opportunity for resolving the differences over the Malvinas presented itself, the comrades tried to shy away from the situation. They placed a resolution before the special aggregate, stating that the aggregate itself was a 'massive self-indulgence' and further asserted that 'today's discussion and vote will solve nothing'. Harmless debate coupled with non-aggression pacts are not the stuff of a serious Marxist vanguard party fighting to develop a revolutionary programme. With regard to unresolved difference, Oliver and Parsons (IB20) declare "perhaps more importantly each organisation had a distinct method which assumed a particular approach to almost all the issues we have to face." It is this 'method' which is the key to our problems. Any repetition of the events of the recent past, far from 'resolving differences', will only result in continuing political crisis for our party and the possibility of major demoralising splits in the future.

We have got to recognise the fact, that further political debate to the end is absolutely necessary, whilst falling back into false unity is to be guarded against at all times.

My final point alludes once again to the contribution made by Comrade Kinnell (IB14). He said of the tendency that its political method and conclusions, "must have been due to the pressure of the rest of the left."

But surely Cde Kinnell social pressure on revolutionaries that leads to distorted positions comes from greater forces in society than a few dozen assorted sectarians and opportunists? Wouldn't it be fair to say that the former majority position was due not to a desire to make Lenin 'more concrete' but to the pressure of the left in the Labour Party, like Reg Race? Did they not fear too much being isolated from the social-pacifists and construct their position accordingly?

It is the 'political method of the majority' which must come under examination.

Stephen Layton

.(submitted Sep. 1982, held over in line with NC decision on freezing discussion on F/M)

