

INTERNAL BULLETIN NO.30

JANUARY 1983

Discussion article

A Reply to comrade Evington Kendall

Conference document

Women's document part 1 Collins

(this is to be read together with parts 2 and 3,
by Parkinson and Fraser, in IB 22+)

Conference document

Amendment to 'Aspects of the International
Situation' Parsons

Amendments to British Perspectives draft: Parsons

For information

Resolutions on the IMG/SL, and letter from IMG/SL.

Comrades are asked to contribute
20p per bulletin if possible
towards the cost of duplicating
and mailing the Internal Bulletins.

Discussion articles, resolutions and amendments should be
sent, typed A4 on Roneo stencils if possible, to the centre.

It is quite clear that Evington's document is trying to convey, not a tactical disagreement on this or that aspect of our MG work, but the desire for a fundamental retreat from our present stand. We are told the WSL has already capitulated to Labourism or is on the verge of doing so. Kinnell's resolution on tactics is cited as proof of this, while quotes from the ICL are used to show how the leadership of the former ICL and, it seems, some at least of the old WSL leadership, have gone down the road of capitulation.

Unfortunately, much of what he states remains at the level of implied criticism. For this reason his very confused and incoherent document begs more questions than it answers. What is the nature of our capitulation? Is it impossible to carry out such an extensive tactic without falling into the grasp of Labourism? Is our analysis of the labour movement incorrect? He does not begin to answer these points. Nor is it put on record, for those who don't know, that Ed Evington is one of a number who have been wanting a different orientation, in reality a sectarian retreat from, MG work for some time. Instead we are treated to a rather coy statement that the debate over the Falklands war formulated other questions. For anyone who has been in the organisation for any length of time these questions pre-date that discussion and for Ed Evington at least since the 1980 ICL Conference.

One thing is very clear from his document and this is that not understood the nature of the labour movement in Britain, or the relationship we are attempting to build with it. This point needs to be tackled before we can look at our alleged deviation.

Evington enjoys quoting Kinnell and Macaulay, attempting to show a change in line; what he doesn't do is to try to put these quotes into our overall perspective of the labour movement (certainly this is no secret - read the ICL manifesto) which would show that there is no real change in line between 1980 and 83. In fact his claim that there was ever an ICL commitment to convergence in the way he states is sheer invention. It is seen as an open-ended process and no-one would have been so stupid as to have put a precise time limit on it. The starting point of our orientation to the labour movement as a whole - and it seems to be a precondition that we should get this right before we can do any serious work in other areas, as opposed to posturising and dabbling - is found most succinctly in the following quote/analysis by Trotsky:

'In England, more than anywhere else, the state rests upon the back of the working class which constitutes the vast majority of the population of the country. The mechanism is such that the bureaucracy is based directly on the workers and the state indirectly through the intermediary of the TU bureaucracy...'

The re is of-course no disagreement with the above. In fact this relationship has been massively extended in the 40 or so years since that was written; trade unions reach a far wider section of the class. The TU bureaucracy's relationship with the state, since 1940, has developed, though not without interruption, on a scale to where it now exists at every level of the state structure, yet the TUs remain the sole mediators between the class, industry and the state, at least for the present. While the attempt to find an accommodation to the state is a general phenomenon common to all reformist bureaucracies, the specific relationship in Britain is unique.

Superficially it would seem that this class/TU/state relationship is virtually independent of the MG, especially if you look at the struggles waged by the class in the 60s and early 70s, which also took place semi-independently of the TU bureaucracy. From this viewpoint the MG's importance and relevance as an integral part of the labour movement is only glimpsed at best: at election times, for example, when it's seen as the political alternative to the Tories, or at times of the bloc vote which can and does decide MG policy.

In one form or another revolutionaries have in fact based their work on the above analyses, not least because the relationship is there and our task is relatively straight-forward - betrayal by the leadership, need for shop floor organisation etc. While such things are an absolutely central element to our struggle it is impossible to explain the hegemony of labourism from such a one sided analysis of the labour movement, the routine it imposes on the class, the political and ideological parameters in which the movement functions and,

in a broader sense, in which the class exists, even if for many this is an outright rejection of them and of the labour movement. By not fully explaining the nature of the movement it also fails to provide a starting point for what we as revolutionaries should be doing. The quote continues:

'Up to now we have not mentioned the ^{which} MO in England, ^{which} the classic country of trade unions, is only a political transposition of the same trade union bureaucracy. The same leaders guide the trade unions, betray the general strike, lead the electoral campaign and later on sit in ministries. The MO and the trade unions - these are not two principles, they are only a technical division of labour. Together they are the fundamental support of the domination of the English bourgeoisie. The latter cannot be overthrown without overthrowing the Labourite bureaucracy. And that cannot be attained by opposing the trade union as such to the state as such, but by the active opposition of the CP to the Labourite bureaucracy in all fields of social life' (Marxism and TU, The errors in principle of syndicalism p59 This quote is partially reproduced in the ICL manifesto of 77)

From this rounded position of the movement the independence of the class/state/union relationship disappears. The 'technical division of labour' has in reality created a total interdependence, which permeates downward to every aspect of the labour movement's existence, organisationally, politically and ideologically. This not only provides the 'fundamental support for the domination of the bourgeoisie' but through the leadership of the movement, and its NCOs, the major transmission belt for bourgeois conceptions and norms. This is This function is most directly performed by the TUs whose officials and stewards play a parallel role of being, in Gramsci's terminology, the 'organic intellectuals of our class!'

Of course if comrades believe that this relationship has somehow been superseded, is no longer of relevance, then they should say so, however to abandon such an analysis will leave comrades floundering - neither able to adequately explain how the class struggle has developed to date, nor to understand the underlying dynamic of different movements within it, and, most importantly, what to do with them. What is left is trying to place the MO and TU on to some utilitarian scale, a totally unacceptable formula, and a failure in grasping the importance in breaking up and therefore transforming the above relationship. For instance this lies at the root of some comrades inability to understand what it would have meant for Benn to win the deputy leadership battle. Not only would it have given hope to many thousands of workers which would have been reflected in people joining the party. It would also have meant that the relationship between the unions and the party would have been further destabilized as the viability of labour as an alternative capitalist government would have been brought into question. This does not mean that Benn is another Maxton let alone a revolutionary. Our job is not to look simply at the form but at the class content of such a development. Incidentally if he had won Benn would have been put on parade in front of the class, which is worth any number of polemics we care to write consigning him to the dustbin of history.

Renovating the movement... Understanding the above relationship between unions and party tells us in general what our strategic tasks consist of, it cannot tell us what should be the next step for such a tiny organisation as ours. During the latter part of the 60s it would have been sectarian for us to carry out such a general orientation to the MO. However the mass movement which had emerged then was not able to break up the inter-relationship. It was crushed between the growing crisis and the power of a united MO/TU bureaucracy which took the form of the social contract. For the revolutionary left the years, now almost a decade, of failure to reorientate to the movement as a whole have taken their toll on our ability to influence the classes attempt to develop organisations which which can move forward in the present crisis. The threads which bind the movement have been drawn much closer together but they have not yet formed a noose around the neck of the leadership, because revolutionaries who attempt to provide the conscious link between the class and socialism have only built up a minimal and peripheral relationship to the organisations of the working class.

However our conception of renovating the movement doesn't rest on it being a 'good idea' but on a necessarily objective process. The material basis on which the labour movement has been constructed is being destroyed by the present crisis. This does not affect just one section but the whole movement. It is this which provides our starting point in the present period. If the bureaucracy is left to its own devices it will undoubtedly try to find a new accommodation with the state (which is the basis of Tebbit); but these

people do not represent a class but are a caste who, in the final analysis, can be made accountable/replaced by the working class. Because under present conditions such an accommodation is not open to the working class. It is not whether to fight, but how, and against whom. It is this process of renovation in which we attempt to intervene. Undoubtedly such development, rather disparate and limited at the present time, is occurring in the unions. At the moment its sharpest form is found in the ILO. It was precisely the fact that the left of the party was trying to come to grips with the experience of the last labour govt. which allowed them to unite around the democracy issue. Yet some comrades attitudes to this struggle was to see it as a somewhat twee and rather parochial affair for Marxists to bother with. What else should the left have organised around - campaign for the dictatorship of the proletariat? The democracy issue was a very concrete and practical problem, a living struggle which we necessarily had to intervene in. More importantly such an attitude misses the point of how people develop; it is only through such experiences, such struggles that we will be able to reach them.

Are we capitulating to our milieu?... As I understand it the above provides us with an analysis of the movement and our tasks as that movement fragments under the pressure of the crisis. It is from this viewpoint that we have to look at the quotes of Kinnell and Macaulay. It should be self-evident that the spontaneity and the organisation at the point of production is an integral part of the struggle outlined above. The Cd cannot give one example of where we have in practice capitulated to our ILO milieu. If we had would it not have shown in our practice and attitude to industrial disputes? At the time of the threatened mass sackings of BL workers this time last year we were putting our organisation on a war footing ready to turn it upside down not only because of the centrality of our own Cds but because of the importance of the class of the possibilities it opened up for a generalised struggle against the Tories. Over the Health workers' dispute we attempted to mobilise solidarity action when and where possible, attacking the leadership for the way they ran the strike and, strangely, for an organisation which is accommodating to labourism, starting a health workers for the full claim. Again, rather strangely, over the strike at BL trucks we attempted to intervene and attack the ILO for their accommodation to the CP tribune ABS programme put out by the strike leadership. Surely if we are going down the road Cd Evington suggests we would have supported the ILO line. If the Cd wants to say that we haven't taken up these issues as efficiently as we might then perhaps I would agree with him. If he considers we need to do much more work with our TU fractions, to a large extent preparatory work rather than any form of substituting for the class, then I for one would agree. However, that is far from his implication, for him we are abandoning the direct action class struggle. Maybe the WSL practice over the last year and a half has been an aberration, maybe some of us are putting forward and supporting the class struggle out of force of habit. If that is the case then much of our work in the ILO makes very little sense. For a number of years now we have been fighting over the questions of rent, no rate increases. Such a struggle has been waged in very unfavourable conditions precisely because of the lack of any mass action against the Tories. We broke with the Chartists and other lefts over this without qualms because it was a necessary step. Do we do such things for fun or merely to win a few people to a hard position on the issue? It is the only conclusion Cd Evington can draw from this given our rejection of the direct action of the class. The fundamental starting point for the whole argument has been that the only conceivable force to carry out such a policy is the working class, who else? - the labour council, the lefts, the WSL? Our struggle in the party can only take us up to the point which provides the most favourable point of departure for the opening up of the industrial struggle. Without wanting to sound too ultra left such a struggle waged in a determined manner would necessarily go beyond Cd Evington's rather TU routinist conception of the importance of the point of production (p 3 para 6). The very nature of the relationship between local authority workers and the point of production means any determined fight would almost immediately pose questions of workers control - who is to look after old people, do emergency repairs, who decides what council services should be maintained. Necessarily actions of the working class 'outside the movement' e.g. tenants associations would almost immediately be mobilised in the form of a rent strike. Whether the TU leaders were able to sabotage such a dispute before it attained such proportions, or the govt backed down is a matter of speculation, what is not is the logic of the dispute. On the basis on which we have gone in to the debate I would like to know how that is capitulating to labourism or rejecting the direct action struggle.