

Letter to the RWL-USA ..... Cunliffe/Smith

The 'RWL Tendency' and our response  
to it ..... Carolan

The Sectarian Offensive ..... Carolan/Hill/  
Kinnell

Amendments to Industrial  
Perspectives ..... Levy

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Comrades should also have received the following:

IB 36 ... Cunliffe and Jones on the LP

IB 31 ... Cunliffe/Kinnell on imperialism, Dupont on the police,  
PTT( ex-RWL minority) statement, Dupont on S. Africa,  
Ellis on the LP (this last document has since been  
withdrawn)

IB 30 ... Kendall reply to Evington, Collins on women, Parsons  
amendment, material on IMG/SL, Kinnell on Ballykelly

IB 29 ... Hunt on youth

IB 28 ... Joplin/Fraser on youth, Joplin on students

IB 27 ... Gay commission document, Layton discussion article

IB 26 ... Democratic centralism in TILC (Jan.1983 NC), information  
on TILC

IB 25 part two ... Amendments to Cunliffe Perspectives, Carolan 2nd  
1st resolution on LP (reproduced from IB 21), Industrial  
Perspectives (Levy), Oliver on Wiganisation, NC resolutions  
on Ireland and EEC

IB 25 ... Cunliffe on British Perspectives

IB 24 ... International situation (OC), Kinnell on the economic  
situation

IB 22+ ... Carolan 2nd resolution on the LP, Parkinson/Fraser on women

IB 22 ... Crisis of FI & our tasks (OC), Glasgow WSL on Ballykelly

IB 21 ... Carolan, Kendall, Kinnell, Cunliffe resolutions on LP

The Crisis in the British Section - Evington

\* Towards an International Tendency - problems and tasks (Morrow)

\* Platform of the WSL Internationalist Tendency

Women's oppression and socialist revolution (Cunliffe)

(\*: produced outside the centre, in short supply: more copies being  
done).

Out soon should be:

IB 32 ... to be produced in Coventry by ed Parsons

IB 33 ... to be produced by some women eds in Oxford

IB 34 ... a document by 3 members of the Internationalist Tendency,  
already in limited circulation.

CONFERENCE IS FEBRUARY 18-19-20. PLEASE MAKE THE NECESSARY ARRANGE-  
MENTS TO BE ABLE TO ARRIVE FRIDAY EVENING

LETTER TO THE RWL-USA

13.1.83

Cunliffe and Smith

Since we were very disturbed by the position and conduct of the RWL at the December TILC conference we are writing to ensure that you know our account and view of the conference.

Comrade Leland came to the conference, as did the LOR delegation, to promote a set of organisational measures. First they wanted democratic centralism to be established forthwith (or alternatively a definitive, irreversible date to be fixed some time this year) quite irrespective of whether this would be politically principled or organisationally feasible. If this was not achieved, it was the intention of both RWL and LOR to declare a number of administrative measures. Firstly, to declare an international tendency to 'fight for a democratic centralist TILC'; this tendency would become a faction if the transformation of TILC were not achieved this year. Secondly, to call on those comrades who may agree with this perspective inside those TILC sections which do not, to declare tendencies in solidarity with the new international tendency. It appears that in all this a political basis for such a tendency is regarded as secondary: for while the declarations have been made, we are still waiting to see a political platform document setting out the tendency's positions.

Smith went to Milan in November to attempt to persuade the LOR comrades not to proceed with precisely this course of action; and he spoke to Leland on the phone as soon as he arrived in Britain with the same end in view. In both cases he was entirely unsuccessful.

When the TILC conference opened on December 27, both Leland and the LOR attempted to preempt the debate on democratic centralism by challenging the status of the conference - calling for it to be declared an international 'pre-conference' preparatory to a conference which would establish a democratic centralist TILC this summer. During the debate on this, Leland said that democratic centralism was essential because the secretariat (ourselves plus Carolan) was 'bankrupt', and working to 'sabotage' the work of TILC. The WSL, he argued, had fallen under the control of a 'revisionist' majority of old I-CL leaders, and the leaders of the old WSL were refusing to fight against them. (Yet unaccountably, od Franco, one of the most vocal critics of the WSL, pointed out during the discussion that the International Situation document submitted to the meeting by the unanimous vote of the WSL Executive was "90% of what we need for a democratic centralist tendency").

Indeed on the part of the LOR there has been a complete reversal of the position on democratic centralism agreed since the TILC was formed. We had agreed that democratic centralism could not be proclaimed but had to be politically established. In other words TILC had to develop politically into a common international tendency before democratic centralism could be established. This, it was always agreed, involved firstly the achievement of the necessary level of political homogeneity, and secondly (and very much subordinate to that) the organisational capability necessary to establish an international centre which could effectively administer and politically develop a democratic centralist international tendency.

Suddenly both the LOR and RWL announce that none of this is necessary. In fact that the reverse is true. Since there is now less homogeneity in TILC than at the time of its formation, we are now told that it is necessary to establish democratic centralism as a prerequisite for establishing political agreement!

We cannot accept that this is an honest position. The LOR in particular have always been the harshest critics of fusions on an inadequate or unprincipled basis: indeed it is this very question on which the current WSL stands accused by the LOR and RWL. Yet democratic centralism is essentially a fusion - and the RWL and LOR are demanding immediate fusion with a 'bankrupt', 'revisionist' leadership!

letter/2

The political reality is important in approaching the problems of democratic centralism in TILC. During 1981 the TILC doubled in size with the fusions of WSL/I-CL and the RWL/SL-DC. These very important steps naturally posed political problems in the moves to an international democratic centralist structure - as would any significant growth. Sharp problems have arisen in both of these fusions over the last year. In the WSL, sharp differences erupted around the Malvinas war and now exist on other issues in the run-up to our conference in mid-February. In the USA the fusion has ended in a split under conditions where even the LOR comrades agreed at the December conference that serious questions remained unanswered.

Yet now, under these conditions, we are told that, though everyone agreed we do not have the political conditions for democratic centralism in 1979 when we formed the TILC on the basis of the Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle, now, in 1983, with serious differences dividing us, we do have the basis for it!

We strongly supported the WSL resolution which started from the importance of moving to democratic centralism, and set October 1983 as a tentative target date by which we could seek to create the political conditions for it. In retrospect there are some obvious weaknesses in the resolution; it overstates the organisational questions involved in d/centralism and thus overstates the role played in the delay in establishing d/c by the organisational failings of other TILC sections. And it does not dwell sufficiently upon the problems that have arisen from the British fusion. But in general its line is a sound, political approach to the political problem of establishing international d/centralism.

In our view the real reasons why the TWL and LOR are so insistent upon immediate moves to d/centralism have not been honestly stated. It arises in our opinion not from assessing the development of TILC - which could only be damaged by ill-considered and premature organisational transformation to d/c - but from the desire of both RWL and LOR leaderships to create the best conditions to intervene in the WSL. It is an attempt to find the organisational and external solutions to the political problems that obviously exist in the WSL.

We have made our views clear on this. We think that the TILC sections have every right - indeed a duty if they see things as seriously wrong - to intervene politically in the WSL. But such an intervention must be a political one - through documents and statements - not an organisational attempt to conduct and lead organisationally the struggles in the WSL. Such an intervention could only distort and disrupt the political development of the struggle and of the comrades involved in that struggle.

Worse, however, we believe that cde. Leland's perspective for the WSL is to split it. He spoke on several occasions in the December conference of the "Stalinist" methods he believes exist in the WSL, and declared his determination at all costs to "end the compromise" on which he argues the fusion is based. Indeed, if he holds the view that the WSL leadership is "bankrupt" and "revisionist" (since the WSL leadership is identical to the TILC secretariat), then that is not surprising. And in seeking to split the WSL, cde. Leland does not seem too concerned which cdes or how many of them are drawn towards his banner.

It is not "national Trotskyism" - of which we are now suddenly accused - to object to such manoeuvres, which can only damage, if not destroy the cadre we have fought to develop in many years of patient struggle. It is not "national Trotskyism" to expect international comrades with whom we have been working to build an international tendency to act in an honest political fashion, to have some regard for the process of political development in the largest section of TILC, and not to argue that they want d/centralism for political reasons when in fact they want it only in order to make an organisational manoeuvre.

Letter to RWL-USA/3

We have not reached our views on cde. Leland's behaviour lightly; but they were inescapable having seen his conduct at the December conference. He called upon the "left" in the WSL to organise. He called in effect for the membership to rise up against the leadership. Since the TILC conference he has remained in London in the flat of the only two London cdes. that we know of who support the formation of a tendency. He is constantly phoning WSL members and meeting them in order to encourage a struggle against the leadership - both the old WSL and the old ICL. And we drew equally negative conclusions from cde. Leland's general attitude at the TILC conference. He actually did not make a single political intervention or contribution throughout the entire 5 days. Every one of his contributions was on an organisational level - mostly plainly factional in content. Even when he was specifically asked to make a political contribution - on the draft International document's section on the USA, and on women's oppression (the Australian cde. had presented a document and voiced disagreements with aspects of the RWL text) - he would not do so. On women's oppression he promised an eventual written response; yet the debate is an important development for TILC, and the SF cde. had seen it as the most important contribution Socialist Fight could make to the fight for an international tendency, travelling all the way from Australia to present it. Leland is now telling WSL cdes critical of his silence that he had to "avoid provocation". Yet on an organisational level there was no provocation Leland was not prepared to promote, while on the political front the LOR cdes made serious contributions on every topic, including the debate on women.

The worst aspect of Leland's a-political positions, however, was over Steve Z and the SLDC. He dismissed Steve as "a shyster", "a petty crook" and a "compulsive liar". He went on to say that he had held this view of Steve since before the fusion. This kind of thing raises a number of problems. It also raises the questions as to what was the motive behind the RWL's fusion with a group led by such a person. With such an attitude it was plainly impossible to create a constructive or conciliatory framework for fusion, as Leland claims was the case.

This type of denigration, character assassination, also raises other problems, since the only people we know in the Trotskyist movement who use such extreme and damaging characterisations of those with whom they disagree are Healy and Robertson. We say this as cdes who have constantly defended - and will continue to defend - the general direction of the RWL as one towards the working class and away from cult politics, and not in a Spart direction. But Leland's deliberate statements cannot be ignored, and must be seen as linked to an aspect of the RWL's current practice.

There is to be a TILC inquiry into the breakdown of the US fusion; but this kind of comment does not inspire confidence in us that Leland's motive was ever to make fusion work.

In the July TILC meeting, Leland embarrassed Smith by presenting a rather obvious point he had made at an earlier meeting as if it was a profound statement and a great contribution to the development of Marxism. It was in fact a part of Leland's diplomatic, public-relations style of approach to the building of a movement, an approach which rests upon the cultivation of personal ties and loyalties in place of what should be political understanding, political confidence and respect.

This attitude has now been put sharply into reverse in Smith's case; he is now branded as a "capitulator to revisionism" and a demon of "national Trotskyism". But it is a pointer to some of the politics we have felt for some time are problems in the RWL. The clearest example of this in our opinion was the document on the Organisational Crisis presented to the RWL 1982 conference.

That there was a crisis is clear; whether it was organisational in its roots is less so. But certainly the worst way of tackling that crisis was to hold a conference so largely devoid of political discussion on the situation in the USA, and centred instead around that type of document. At a time when the RWL

Letter to RWL-USA/4

needed to turn outwards, it turned inwards to a monumental session of self-examination. The document goes into detail about the relationship between the leadership and the membership. It even, for example, takes decisions of the whole movement on the kind of approach and kind of letter Leland should write to individuals who have left the RWL - with Leland assigned the first half of July (!!) to prepare one such letter.

Building and holding together a movement by such methods we feel is unhealthy. Of course the leadership must lead and hold the movement together, but such a disproportionate weight of reliance upon personal intervention between individual leadership cdes and individual members is in our view wrong. In any event it is a regime that cannot be sustained in a larger organisation. The leadership must lead through its political contribution to the direction of the movement; and it must at the same time allow the movement - and the individual cdes at local level - to develop independent political initiative and analytical skills. The conclusion of the document was quite the reverse; it called for more discipline and "iron centralism" as the way forward.

Nor can such over-centralisation only affect the internal politics of the movement. It must also affect the approach of the RWL to the working class.

It is for example an unresolved mystery in the conflicts which led to the breakdown of the US fusion as to how cde Bob M., a PC member of long standing, leading a Local in one of the most cosmopolitan cities of the USA, could have had so much as a moment's doubt over the correct policy in relation to the "Open Borders" slogan.

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"Open Borders" is no new issue; it has a long history/demand in the US labour movement and was the standing policy of the hotel union caucus. It was the centre of a particularly heated debate between various tendencies and the Sparts who took a racist line of opposition to the slogan. It is hard to see how cde Bob could either have been unaware of this or have functioned for so long in the leadership of labour movement work in the Bay Area without encountering it and raising any doubts he may have had.

It is even more surprising that in an organisation which legitimately prides itself upon its serious turn to work amongst the most oppressed racial, national and sexual groups in the USA, a cde could have any room for doubt as to the correctness of the Open Borders demand - let alone a doubt so deep-rooted as to merit phone calls to Detroit, the holding up and eventual interference in a crucial trade union caucus leaflet, and eventually requiring a 15-page explanation as to why the demand is acceptable!

This extremely laboured approach to what should be a straightforward issue of principle - opposing racist immigration controls - is also echoed in the tendency of the RWL towards electoral abstentionism - broken only by painstaking and soul-searching debates on whether critical support can be extended to particular candidates from other labour movement organisations.

That this process of deliberation finally secured a decision to give critical support to an SWP candidate in St. Louis should perhaps be taken as an encouraging sign. But the narrow basis on which the matter has been approached - along the lines of "is there anything, anywhere, in any of the policies of the SWP which we might, conceivably, ever-so-critically, regard as a partial step forward for the working class? - appears to us to be sectarian and wrongheaded.

In extending critical support to Labour candidates in Britain we do so not because of, but despite their programme - however "left" their pronouncements. We support them as candidates of a party through whose election the working class can at least express its political rejection of the overt parties of the bourgeoisie, and hopefully take a step further forward, putting demands which will test out and expose these candidates, learning the need to go beyond Labourite politics to build a revolutionary leadership.

Letter to RWL-USA/5

In the USA, where the "choice" before most voters is between the twin parties of the capitalist state, the educational value of a candidate who plainly stands apart from these parties and claims to represent the oppressed and exploited is that it can set workers thinking politically. In identifying ourselves with the campaign to get such candidates elected, while arguing of course our own distinctive politics, we can reach those sections of workers and middle class people influenced by the candidacy, and hopefully convince them that our politics and methods are superior. We carry no responsibility for the programme of a candidate to whom we extend critical support; we carry no obligation to mount mass campaigns; our numbers and influence are unfortunately not sufficiently large to create a vastly inflated vote for the critically-supported candidate - but even if we were able to do so, we could recoup proportional credit.

The apparently morbid fear of being tainted with the politics of - or building mass support for - the SWP and other left organisations means that the RWL stands unnecessarily remote from elections and thus from the daily reality of political life as it is seen by the majority of the American population. With no parties to whom we advocate even critical support, and no concrete organisational steps towards even the nuclei of local Labor Party organisations, our propaganda for a workers' government in the USA emerges as more abstract than it need do - and thus more remote from the existing levels of consciousness and activity of the US workers, to whom we must address ourselves.

The abstract nature of this approach is summed up in the front page article on the autumn 1982 elections in the Oct-Nov Workers Struggle. Beneath the "Build a Workers' Party" headline comes a fleeting reference early in the article to the level of UAW financial support for the bosses' parties. But this point is not expanded, and though everything in the remainder of the text is correct, it lacks any agitational edge to mobilise worker contacts in a struggle for a political party of the US trade unions.

An agitational article, aimed at building within the election campaign a fight for a real Labor Party would have focussed on the level of general trade union financial backing to the Democrats and GOP, and from that directed towards demands and policies through which workers can begin now to fight in each town and city in their union locals to break this link and organise a Labor Party.

Background articles could have examined Trotsky's discussions on a US Labor Party, possibly examined the current struggles in the British Labour Party - even some of the reforms (National Health Service, etc.) which have been secured by even reactionary Labour governments; and could also have weighed up the weaknesses and strengths of the election campaigns run by the left groups, explaining exactly why we extend critical support to this or that group of candidates.

While the decisive factor of course remains the building of a Marxist cadre Party, it is our view that as the most active fighters for a serious mass party of the US working class, and the advocates of that party adopting a serious programme of transitional and democratic demands, the RWL could make far more impact amongst worker militants than simply by proclaiming in general the need for a "workers' party" and leaving it open for the reader to assume that this is a pseudonym for simply joining the RWL.

This was simply a single article in one issue - albeit an important issue - of Workers Struggle. But we feel it is symptomatic of the orientation of the RWL, which does not project itself to us as the organisation campaigning for a Labor Party, and has reported to us no work in its main (Detroit) local aimed specifically at agitating for a Labor Party.

It is appropriate for these questions to be discussed now, both in the context of the crisis and failed fusion in the USA, and in the context of the criticisms raised by the RWL of the work of the WSL in the British Labour Movement.

Letter to RWL-USA/6

It was disappointing to hear no response from Leland on the outline section on the USA in the International document tabled at the TILC. We hope that there will be serious political discussion on these issues, and on what differences the RWL would raise with the WSL. This discussion must begin at once if TILC is to survive.

In our view it is political debate and clarification which is central to the development of TILC, and which alone can lay the basis for democratic centralism. It is thus particularly regrettable that in place of political discussion what has been proposed by the LOR platform and RWL in the formation of a tendency - with as yet no political platform - is an organisational solution to a political problem - one which can help neither clarification in TILC nor the discussions currently underway in the WSL.

We urge the RWL to reconsider this line of action, and to withdraw from the international tendency, the logic of which is towards ever greater organisational divisions and political confusion in TILC, and which can do nothing in concrete terms to advance towards the objectives it claims to be pursuing.

For our part we remain as committed as ever to the building of TILC, to its establishment on a democratic centralist basis, and to the active participation of the WSL in that work. As it is, despite claims that the Secretariat is "bankrupt" and "sabotaging" the work, we have loyally implemented the main decisions of the July meeting, and duly prepared new political documents which we presented to December's largely non-political meeting. We need no external encouragement, nor do we need lessons in internationalism, in order to carry on the work which we began with the drafting of the founding programmatic document of TILC, and which we have pursued consistently since then. Indeed our work in fighting for the political development of TILC could be greatly assisted by a more serious and political approach from comrades to the very real problems that exist and must be resolved if TILC is in fact to be transformed into a democratic centralist international tendency, rather than transformed into an a-political factional battlefield.

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## THE "RWL TENDENCY" AND OUR RESPONSE TO IT

Carolán

TILC is, barring some unlikely miracle, already effectively split.

The differences in goals and methods are already vast between the two wings - the WSL on one side, and RWL (and, less so perhaps, the LOR) on the other. What makes the situation irreconcilable is not the formal differences but the fact that the sectarians of the RWL and LOR have plainly, and more or less openly, taken it as their goal to remodel the TILC after themselves, and to hive off unassimilable parts. All proportions guarded, the work of the RWL in TILC is like that of the Bakuninist Alliance for Social Democracy within the First International. There is no reconciling this expansionist cult.

TILC has been a series of frequent (and badly prepared) international conferences with a sharply varying attendance, albeit with a core, and an extremely flimsy organisational structure between conferences. There has not been homogeneity in political line, nor much real knowledge, section by section, of each other's work (except between the US and British, and Australian and British, sections).

The core elements of TILC have related to each other as a loose federation, not a political tendency.

TILC has for the last 18 months consisted of the following relatively stable elements.

a) On the sectarian side, the RWL-USA, an organisation consciously modelled on a modified variant of the Spartacists, and in many ways politically underdeveloped. It selects and organises individuals by way of a network of intensive personal relationships (at the centre of which is the duo of Leland S. and Peter S.). In this specific politics are plainly secondary.

Many of their political positions are derived from or are a diluted version of the Spartacists' politics. They have - from what I've seen and have been told by the comrades who have visited the USA - the organisational character of a cult. Their 'towards the class' concerns make them worth talking to, but I do not share ed Smith's evaluation of them. Their labour movement work is itself sectarian, devoid of political perspective, concerned with drawing people into the organisation on the basis of intense personal relations, with politics very much secondary. (The dispute in San Francisco about the RWL position on 'open borders' - where the RWL first opposed, then conceded, the call to scrap immigration controls - shows this, I think).

On the same sectarian side of TILC there is the LOR, a far more normal type of organisation - plainly, I think, of the sectarian propagandist sort, concerned with comparisons of 'line' and so on. I don't know enough about their work to be sure, but I would be astounded if that concern did not to some extent de-focus them from organising in the class. The incredibly light-minded way they proposed to go for a split in the WSL - more or less openly proclaiming last August - is in itself almost proof of this.

The LOR is altogether politically superior to the RWL, and different also in being political and honest, where the RWL shifts and changes its supposed politics opportunistically.

However, if either LOR or RWL existed in Britain, they would be among our most sectarian critics, and the RWL among our most envenomed and dishonest critics.

b) On the other side of TILC there is the WSL and three small groups previously associated with its old WSL and I-CL components - TAF, the PTT (former RWL minority), and Socialist Fight. In so far as an actual political tendency could be said to exist in TILC, this is it - though of course there would be no point trying to pretend that there aren't serious differences within this nucleus.

It needs to be added that the TAF, who seem to me to be very serious and honest people, would be very much on the sectarian side of the old WSL part of the new WSL, were they in Britain.



The Hackney group has not existed for some time, and half of the old group (two comrades) now support the tendency.

Now the sectarian wing of TILC has set up an international tendency and called for a parallel tendency within the WSL. They say the international tendency will become a faction in September 1983 unless TILC is declared democratic centralist. The distinction is rather meaningless: at the WSL summer school they functioned, or at least the RWL did, under hard factional discipline (for example, the threat of expulsion from the RWL was held over anyone refusing to walk out at our Falklands debate). Unless the new WSL complies with the RWL/LOR's a-political ultimatum by September this year, they will become a public faction - if their declaration does not mean that, it is difficult to see what it does mean.

The differences in TILC are far wider than the question of whether to commit ourselves to a democratic centralist framework by a given date. Thus the ultimatum is really to adopt the full range of sectarian politics of the RWL and LOR. Whatever is decided about a democratic centralist TILC, the tendency/faction organised on this range of politics will not dissolve: the cry will be for the RWL-isation of TILC.

The RWL/LOR tendency in the WSL - and that is underiably, it seems to me, what the 'IT' is - already spells this logic out. The necessary development of our tendency will inevitably parallel that of the international tendency/faction, which has effectively split TILC. The only purpose now being served by the pretence that this is not the situation, that TILC is not split, is to give them time and a tolerant atmosphere to organise within the WSL so that it can be split too.

Caution and tolerance are sometimes virtues. But to refuse, in January 1983, to face up to the real situation in TILC and the real prospects, can only help the sectarian wreckers maximise the damage, and the central thing now must be to minimise it.

Some of its members may not know it, but the tendency is formed in response to the call of the LOR and RWL for an international tendency to fight for a democratic centralist TILC. The 'IT' has been prepared, so to speak, over a long time, during which the comrades in it have fantasised that TILC is 'a real international' and a comrade on the EC has played the clown in the organisation with a TILC pullover. TILC, for these comrades, has been a land of make-belief; and for them now, the RWL and LOR are TILC challenging the revision<sup>ists</sup> of the former I-CL and the degenerates of the old WSL.

Any denials that the tendency is a LOR/RWL tendency will simply be lies on the part of the original nucleus - and the lies will be an indication of the real relationship of the 'RWL tendency' to the WSL.

The fact that the tendency has political roots in the old WSL and belatedly tries to present itself as fighting for the 'old WSL tradition' (on the LP, for example) does not seriously change this. This tendency has been shaped and formed by the efforts of the RWL from the 'raw material' of the dissatisfied, the sectarian-inclined, and young and politically uneducated and inexperienced members of the old WSL.

Over the last year, or longer, though a process of 'intervention' at the summer school and a long stay in this country by Leland S during which he has sought out the disgruntled, and in an a-political way cultivated supporters in the WSL, the forces for this tendency have been selected. They have been given a perspective of either changing the WSL to the liking of the RWL/LOR (and themselves), or, if they can't do that, of carving out of it the nucleus for a new organisation. This is the 'third wave of Sparts' - and many comrades should be aware from bitter past experience of what this implies.

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The process of intervention by the RWL into TILC and into the WSL is well known and need only be briefly outlined here. They joined TILC with a scarcely disguised intention simply to displace the existing US section. On the basis of the attitudes

and comments of the RWL leaders about the SL-DC during discussions with the old WSL EC and a representative of the I-CL, the course of the 'fusion' in the USA was predicted 18 months ago - and has developed to schedule.

The RWL leaders had a longer-term schedule for the WSL. They organised an intervention in the summer school last year in which they functioned under discipline, with daily caucus meetings, allocation of assignments, etc. They put their comrades under discipline to walk out of our debate on the Falklands war. They intervened as into a hostile organisation in our discussions, albeit with the blade of their factional knives turned towards the ex I-CL. They thereby revealed a clear perspective of splitting the new WSL, while continuing under a smokescreen of sickening, obsequious flattery towards the old WSL leaders.

What they were up to was revealed plainly by the way they tactically chose issues to fight on - for example, they diplomatically avoided premature clashes on the LP.

They cultivated individuals in an a-political way, shifting and changing aspects of their politics as if adjusting sails to catch wind. For example, their written material on women would not incline them logically towards the Todd group in the women's commission of the WSL: something else did.

At last, August's TILC conference, together with the LOR, they pulled a factional 'coup' with a decision about how the December TILC conference was to be organised which amounted to declaring TILC democratic-centralist then and there (in August) and preparing a democratic centralist conference in December. This was the basis of the bitter dispute on the first day of last December's TILC conference.

Having got a network of contacts in the old WSL, they were able to up the ante artificially around the issue of a democratic centralist TILC. In December they called on their supporters to organise.

A number of those who are now members of the tendency had been assembled (together with comrades such as Todd and Andrea C whom the RWL had also been working on, but who have not joined the tendency) at the TILC conference to listen to Leland S's abusive a-political diatribes, and to the sectarian diatribes of the LOR.

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In fact, as I argued in response to the declaration at the TILC conference of a tendency by the LOR and RWL, this tendency could not be only on the question of TILC. The RWL/LOR form a distinct sectarian tendency in TILC on many questions, and inevitably - and, I have no doubt, intentionally - the call for a tendency was the call to organise on a whole range of questions in dispute or in confusion within the WSL, or questions which could be dragged in by hook or by crook to drive a wedge into the new WSL. The new tendency in the WSL has duly and logically obliged. Its platform is the platform for a new organisation - a systematically sectarian caricature of the old WSL.

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The immediate purpose of the RWL/LOR tendency is to try to split the existing WSL back into its main components - the old WSL and the I-CL. Their programme for achieving this was spelled out by Leland S before the 'invited' audience of young WSLers from Leicester and others at the TILC conference over Christmas. It could be summed up as: 'Make Thornett and Lister fight' - that is, by holding the gun of an organised RWL tendency to their heads, force as much as possible of the old WSL within the new WSL to a sectarian attitude to the O. and into a retreat from the politics we have worked out jointly in the new WSL over the last 18 months.

The tendency will recruit on agitation around this, demagogically appealing to a sectarian caricature of 'the old WSL tradition'. If they succeed in pressurising the old WSL leaders into supporting - or attempting to pre-empt or buy off - their sectarianism, then this will further one of their objectives, to divide the new WSL ever more deeply down the middle and turn a section of it away from mass-movement oriented work in the O. If they don't, they will recruit on the subsequent

It is a sign of the times that Mike J who, together with Chris E (also in the tendency), has repeatedly denounced me in the Liverpool branch as "an agent of imperialism within the organisation", now denounces ed Smith as a "charlatan".

A sign, too, is comrade Hunt's youth document. It is a strange document from the comrade who has been our full-time youth organiser for most of the last 18 months: he writes as if he bears no responsibility for the work and has just come back from two years' leave overseas. He says he disagrees with the tendency, but the document is in effect a tendency document.

Is Hunt's intention to forestall the tendency? Either way the sectarians win, as I have argued above.

An even more alarming sign is ed Jones' comment, made originally at the EC and repeated at the January 22 NC, questioning Morrow's right to organise this grouping as a tendency on the grounds that he, Jones, and others, agreed with most of the platform but did not see the need for a tendency... He later proposed that the old WSL should meet separately at conference and elect 50% of a new WSL National Committee...

What if the old WSL/I-CL fusion cannot be split apart? Then the tendency will have to consider what to do with itself.

The LOR favours where possible entry by all TILC groups into the USFI (it is possible I misunderstand them here, but I don't think so). When in Oxford recently two LOR comrades were asked by ed Smith if this meant that the LOR supporters in the WSL would at some point be recommended to join the IMG, their response was to bluster and to storm out of the room. In their own way they answered yes to ed Smith's question.

The minimum that could be offered to try to satisfy the tendency would be an attempt to unscramble the old WSL out of the new WSL. But even if that proved possible they would not be satisfied - not those of them who have seen the RWL light and now consider ed Smith a 'charlatan'.

If the old WSL/I-CL were to split, then the reconstructed old WSL would still be faced with the pressure and activity of the RWL faction. This may be denied, but it seems to me self-evidently true. The tendency is hooped up on a 'TILC patriotism' and on the glories of the RWL.

Not everyone in the tendency would go all the way out of the new - or reconstructed old - WSL on this trajectory. Certainly some would. That would be the next stage of the development of the tendency.

Even a reconstituted old WSL would thus have grave problems, because it would be faced with the implied ultimatum to accept the RWL as a model or have the tendency (or probably a mutation of the existing tendency) as a knife permanently at its throat. To judge by some of the RWL documents I have seen, I doubt that a reconstituted old WSL could accommodate the trade union methods of the RWL - or that its likely future personnel would want to.

If they succeed in splitting the existing organisation, then it will probably only be a matter of time before there is a second split.

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There is no way that a politically primitive cult like the RWL, intent on expansion and plainly taking the international Spartacist tendency as its model, can be bought off or neutralised short of its goal of self-replication. We have seen - to summarise - that they have pursued their own objectives throughout the relationship with the old and new WSLs and with TILC - now by flattering the old WSL leadership, again by denouncing; now by picking and choosing 'issues' between the main components of the new WSL while avoiding (at the summer school, for example) issues like the LP where there seemed to be agreement in the WSL, then again, having gathered the threads of a network of contacts in their hands, and emboldened by the objective difficulties in the LP, launching a full-scale attack on this question at the TILC conference and in the tendency platform.

What I find remarkable is that they have chosen to start independent operations within the WSL with so few forces.

If the existing WSL were to divide, that might bring a slowdown in the process and a change of tactics towards the old WSL leaders: back to flattery. It would not change their pressure, their objectives, or their goal.

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For all these reasons I believe that a conciliatory and tolerant attitude to the tendency is an acceptance of a perspective of splitting the new WSL right down the middle - at best a tacit acceptance of it, and at worst the conscious pursuit of it.

The declaration of the tendency has - as it was intended to - put the leaders of the old WSL forces within the new WSL up against the gun, and up against a decisive test of what they are made of politically and where they are going. 'Turn your faces to the tendency and RWL/LOR, and away from the rest of the WSL and the British labour movement - or continue the fusion and the present orientation to the broad labour movement of the new WSL, and risk facing a 'left' (that is, sectarian-propagandist) split' - that is the choice.

This is not said by the tendency, but it is implied, and everyone knows that it is.

A major problem of the organisation since fusion has been the severe pressure from some comrades in the old WSL on the old WSL leaders to 'assert themselves' and defend the 'old WSL tradition' and so on. This pressure, as far as I can see, has come from a section of the organisation that is sectarian and backward-looking, and which essentially was against the fusion.

The pressure is now massively increased by the desire to stop some of these people joining the tendency. Much in the future of the new WSL will depend on whether the main leaders of the old WSL forces in the new WSL can resist this pressure.

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The problem confronting the organisation is therefore graver than indicated by the numerical strength or political weight of the tendency alone.

From a point of view grounded in the elementary norms of a democratic centralist organisation, the issue is whether to allow a British RWL to incubate inside the new WSL, or to stop it. It may indeed with patience prove possible to save for the WSL this or that person now with the tendency. The cost of such patience would be to allow the relatively free intervention into the delicate and complicated affairs of our organisation of the brutally hostile and alien concerns of the RWL leadership.

They do not only have political disagreements with us, but think that the existing WSL should not be allowed to continue to exist. Their drive to split the WSL is the immediate cutting edge of their politics, with the obvious tactic of sharpening as much as possible the political differences in the new WSL.

Old WSL comrades should remember that conciliation did not prevent the hardening out of the two Spartacist groups in the old WSL.

It seems to me that a competent WSL leadership - or rather, one less paralysed by divisions than we have been, and less inhibited than a section of the new WSL's leadership has often been by the belief that 'the main enemy is at home' - would have long ago taken action against RWL colonisation. After the summer school, at the latest, nobody had any right not to understand what was going on. We failed to nip it in the bud, and now we have a full-blown tendency. If we don't act now, it will continue to develop, batten on the real problems of, and continuing differences of tradition and politics within, the new WSL.

Because of the delicate situation inside the WSL, I have confined myself to arguing my view in the EC and publishing my opinions here. But the proper course of action now, I think, would be to suspend the leaders of the tendency from WSL.

membership, and instruct the others to disband by the end of the conference or face discipline.

The members - especially the old WSL comrades - would not understand this? Then we should explain it to them. It has nothing to do with the democracy of a democratic centralist organisation - which presumes commitment to build the organisation even through faction and tendency struggles - to allow an alien and hostile cult to operate within it.

These comrades have roots in the old WSL? So did Mark Hyde, Pru Chamberlaine, etc. So, and much more so, did Lawrie White in the IMG... A serious and responsible leadership determined to allow the experiment of the I-CL/WSL fusion to develop, and to guard it against being ruptured, would know how to convince the rank and file of the organisation about all this.

Considerations by the old WSL leadership that this is unthinkable because it would probably change the political ecology of the organisation really amount to a decision by them to turn their faces to the tendency and away from the rest of the WSL. I think I have traced the logic accurately.

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It is a matter of great urgency that all the members of the WSL rally to save the organisation from the present attempt by the RWL to use the tendency as a wedge to divide it down the middle. All members committed to the fusion and to building the organisation must insist that every responsible leader of the organisation turns her/his face decisively away from the RWL/LOR tendency and towards preserving and improving the fusion, and the new WSL which came out of it.

## THE SECTARIAN OFFENSIVE

At the end of the last NC comrade Jones proposed that at our February conference the new WSL should divide into ex old WSL and ex I-CL caucuses (with post-fusion members choosing their camp individually), and proceed to elect two NCs of equal numbers, which would later be fused as the new NC of the new WSL.

Our understanding is that Jones' proposal was also supported by many of the ex old WSL leadership.

The proposal is not practically possible, and we trust that it will soon be withdrawn. But the fact of it even being proposed has grave political implications. It crystallises a trend for the new WSL to 'flake apart' into two blocs, and for fruitful political discussion to be stymied by harking back to old traditions.

Nothing is yet irreversible or irremediable. There are some hopeful signs in the other direction, such as comrade Cunliffe's expressed willingness to discuss large-scale alterations on the LP to his British Perspectives document. If we take the proposal narrowly defeated at the January 22 NC, and, by postponing the major conference decisions a month or two, give ourselves time for discussion, then we can reverse the present unravelling or flaking-apart of the new WSL. But right now we must first state and recognise the problem.

The following table of events since last April summarises the process as we see it.

Some comrades will find it irritating to have the Falklands/Malvinas debate brought up again. But in order to make sense of what is happening in the WSL now, we need to put developments like Jones's astounding proposal on the NC and the dispute on the LP (which many comrades evidently find bewildering) into a coherent framework - a continuous chain of events stretching back from our present problems to that debate. We are experiencing a sectarian offensive against the politics which have been the basis of the new WSL since fusion.

There are three interwoven strands in the story:

a) The intervention of the RWL, and the emergence of a 'RWL tendency' in the WSL.

b) The response to this of the central ex old WSL leaders. They have been quite fully aware of what the RWL was doing, and have kept a distance from it; but they have also chosen never to clash with the RWL or its supporters sharply unless they had to.

They have chosen to try to 'strike a balance' and not to confront the pro-RWL elements among their 'base' in the new WSL.

The problem is that this has meant: (1) wavering and unstable politics; (2) the pro-RWL 'tail', with its hard factional line, has been able to wag much of the ex old WSL 'dog'.

c) Therefore, a process of the central ex old WSL leaders again and again being pulled back into a sectarian regression, re-assembling much of the old WSL as a bloc within the new WSL, and beginning to unscramble the fusion.

These are the facts.

## THE CHAIN OF EVENTS

- April 2 Argentina invades Falklands
- April 9 EC discusses Falklands. Unanimously supports Kinnell resolution.
- April 10-11-12 TILC meeting: major debate on Falklands. Comrades Smith and Jones (who had missed the April 9 EC) plainly drawn to pro-Argentine position, but eventually agree to position of supporting neither side, which is carried against RWL and LOR opposition.
- April 18 (or thereabouts) Morrow informs OC that he has pro-Argentine line on Falklands.
- April 25 NC confirms support-neither-side position on Falklands, with no votes against and 2 abstentions. (Morrow absent).
- May 2 General Belgrano sunk; May 7, 12-mile 'exclusion zone' declared.
- May 9 EC: Smith and Jones move that we switch to support for Argentina in the war (while still endorsing self-determination for islanders). Carried 5 to 3 with 4 absent.
- May 16 NC rejects the move to switch position. Smith declares a tendency.
- May 20 Tendency platform written. Still rejects Argentine claim to islands (apparently - it's not entirely clear), and bases itself on the war situation having changed in early May.
- June 11 Second tendency document (IB 7). Argument now based on capitalist Argentina being in our 'class camp'. Self-determination now strongly denounced, invasion assessed as 'objectively anti-imperialist', argument of situation having changed in early May abandoned.
- June 14 War ends.
- July 10-11 NC: tendency calls for a special conference on the war.
- July 22 Extended OC - supporters of NC majority line ask for discussion on IB 7 to find out whether the 'class camps' argument is the considered view of the tendency. After initially refusing to discuss, tendency comrades insist that IB 7 is an agreed document of theirs. Cunliffe says he 'would have put it differently'.
- July 24 TILC meeting. RWL, LOR etc launch violent attacks on WSL NC majority - 'capitulating to bourgeois democracy' (by way of the LP), 'at best pacifist', etc. WSL tendency join in this denunciation of the WSL line and the record of WSL NC majority representatives present. WSL summer school: attacks continue. RWL, in particular, is clearly making an 'intervention'. Many tendency comrades join in, or at best remain silent.
- July 29 NC meeting: some of us protest at this factionalism. Stormy, inconclusive discussion. Some improvement in the behaviour of tendency leaders follows.
- July 31 Summer school debate on Falklands. RWL (and supporters) try to shout down chair and finally walk out, accompanied by LOR.
- At immediately following EC meeting, tendency leaders allege that the whole fracas has been somehow deliberately 'set up' by Carolan and/or Kinnell. Eventually they calm down, and a joint statement is written condemning the RWL's behaviour. They also stand firm at TILC session on August 2, where RWL/LOR press for almost immediate democratic centralist forms in TILC and make thinly veiled threats that they will try to split WSL.
- Leland S. of RWL stays on in Britain for some time after summer school.
- August 15 Minority resolution drafted for special conference. Bases assessment of Falklands on previously unheard-of theory that the islands are part of a world "imperialist system of control" through "enclaves", of which other examples are Gibraltar, Guantanamo, and the Panama Canal Zone.
- September 15 Special conference on Falklands. Final text of tendency resolution - drops all the examples of "enclaves" (they had been challenged in EC debate), but retains the theory. Proposal to vote separately on different parts of resolution vehemently opposed by tendency leaders, and voted down.

IB 17 appears (at least, this is the first time we saw it: some

comrades may have had it earlier). In it Jones writes, with reference to IB 7, "We have admitted elsewhere that the use of the term 'class camp' is not accurate". We don't know where this "elsewhere" is.

Leland S of RWL arrives at special conference, allegedly to discuss with WSL leadership. Stays in Britain for some four weeks, during which he has only one meeting with the WSL EC, and that one in which all the EC members present - including Cunliffe and Levy - find his account of himself evasive and unsatisfactory. Smith (absent from this EC) protests bitterly about minutes of it - says Leland has done nothing out of order.

Morrow informs EC that he has asked Leland to talk to cds Morag, Alex, etc, about their work.

September 16. Kendall presents resolution to EC on our orientation to LP and response to register and witch-hunt. Argues that we must fight for our rights but adopt subterfuges if necessary to remain in O. Ex-tendency comrades object that it is 'vague'. Agreed it should go to NC.

September 18. NC. Discussion on Kendall resolution and register. Ex-tendency comrades still find it vague. Agreed to postpone decision.

September 27 - October 1. LP conference.

October 3. EC. Move by Morrow and Smith to "restore parity on NC" by holding a caucus of ex old WSL NC members and deciding on some co-options.

Finally dropped, when Smith convinced he has false picture of the 'disparity'.  
October 9-10. NC. Carolan presents resolution supplementing Kendall's with assessment of LP conference and tactical details. Proposes we fight by every means to maintain 'legality' of paper; if nevertheless it is proscribed, we should continue it (for a period) while also seeking to create a new publication capable of acting as an organiser for the Left. This proposal has in the months since then been denounced on the grounds that "Carolan wants to scrap the paper".

At NC, Carolan/Kendall line is violently denounced by Smith ("a further major turn away from TU work") and Jones ("not relating to mass struggle").

Major concrete point of contention is register. Smith and Jones argue that Marxists should not try to comply even after it is successfully imposed (if it is).

No alternative proposals other than a resolution from Cunliffe (IB21) (drafted on the spot) which makes no assessment and outlines no perspectives, but just says that we should maintain the 'profile' of our press.

NC decides to postpone vote again, to November.

NC also discusses RWL. Smith (introducing and summing up the item) criticises RWL, but sums it up as having a "long and fairly tortuous, but consistent, development away from sectarianism". He sharply denounces Carolan and Kinnell, who argue that the RWL is a sectarian cult, without serious politics, destructive, out to develop a faction in WSL and try to split us: "Carolan and Kinnell seem to want to throw just anything at RWL... RWL is zero factor in the internal situation of the WSL". Our hostility to RWL is put down to a lack of concern for international work.

November 13-14. NC. New Cunliffe resolution on LP. Practical conclusions identical with Kendall and Carolan resolutions of one or two months previously. Supplementary comments, however, include the idea that a LP-'legal' paper is "necessarily of limited relevance" to most workers, etc.; i.e. continue the TU (etc) versus LP counterposition previously argued by Smith and Jones.

No-one at NC now argues that registration is other than a tactical issue: line of October 9 Carolan resolution is in effect agreed unanimously. But a solid block of comrades vote against practical conclusions section of Carolan resolution and even against a Carolan proposal for education/discussion internal meetings on LP to include speakers from all viewpoints. General denunciations of us as liquidationist, not concerned with TU work, etc., continue exactly



the same, despite comrades having come over to our practical proposals.  
 December 27-31. TILC meeting. RWL attacks WSL leadership - all of it - as "bankrupt". Ex I-CL members are "revisionists", ex old WSL are "capitulators". RWL and LOR call for tendency. For the first time RWL denounces WSL openly on LP question (they had largely kept quiet on this at the summer school).

At a session where Leland S violently denounces WSL line, and where a number of the young comrades now in the 'Internationalist Tendency' on LP are present, Smith replies by saying that "there are major differences/in the WSL". Tells these comrades at a WSL caucus that they should not draw bad conclusions about RWL from Leland's behaviour: "Leland is not representative". (At the London area aggregate on January 30, this strange distinction between the RWL's politics and the line pursued by its leadership was presented to the meeting by Andrea C, present at the TILC session though not now in the tendency. She also excuses RWL record on 'open borders')

Leland remains in Britain for some weeks after TILC meeting; no-one even pretends he is doing anything other than organising a tendency in the WSL.

January 8-9. NC. Morrow says he will form a tendency - claims it is not a pro-RWL tendency.

Start of present dispute on Ireland. Resolution from some Glasgow comrades wildly denouncing editorial on Ballykelly ('scab politics', etc.) Jones - who, when this whole issue first came up, after the Chelsea barracks bombing, initially proposed at the EC an all-out condemnation of that bombing, and had to be persuaded by Carolan and Kinnell that the condemnation should be qualified - responds to Glasgow resolution by deploring its tone but saying he 'agrees with much of it'.

'British Perspectives' draft from Cunliffe presented. This is in effect the first counter-proposal to the Kendall/Carolan documents of September/October. It calls for a self-presentation in sharp distinction from the Labour left (p.10-11), in the name of avoiding "further (?) dilution of our political line and submergence of our revolutionary organisation". No details are given on this "dilution" alleged already to have happened. I.e. general, undefined condemnation of politics of post-fusion organisation, call for a return to something nearer a "party profile".

January 16. New tendency announced (though in a phone message to the January 13 EC Morrow had said he would not form one). It has a pro-RWL platform.

January 22. Tendency discussed at NC. Jones deprecates its formation but says he agrees with much of what it says. General line of his objection to the tendency is that comrades concerned have no warrant to form a tendency on that basis when he (Jones) is already fighting for much of the politics they propose.

LP discussed. Jones, Cunliffe, etc. say we are being too polemical, artificially sharpening the debate, etc., but issue documents accusing us of a 'consistently scornful attitude to the Marxist programme', of considering a fight for reforms quite sufficient, of blocking all criticism of Benn, etc.

At end of NC, Jones proposes that new NC should be a composite of two separate NCs, elected respectively by separate ex old WSL and ex I-CL meetings at our conference, with post-fusion comrades throwing their lot in with one or another "camp" as they choose.

January 23. Hunt youth document: condemns post-fusion youth work, proposes return to SYL-type orientation.

January 28. Public appearance of a new document from the new tendency (evidently drafted and discussed within the tendency some time earlier). Spells out clearly the logic of the tendency: expresses warm solidarity with RWL, says fusion was a mistake, declares that being in the LP is incompatible with being an internationalist at the present time, calls for 'TILC' to be put on masthead of paper, etc.

## REGRESSION AND RETREAT

In broad political terms, the sectarian regression inside the WSL is a response to the defeats suffered by the broader Labour left and the partial (and, we believe, conditional and temporary) retreat of the left over the last period. It is - despite the bravado, despite the optimistic prospects the comrades talk about - a reflection within our own ranks of the broader defeat, a shift to defeatism about the irreplaceable work we must do in the mass political wing of the trade unions and the trade unions themselves.

Triggered by the compulsion to consider tactical options to deflect and survive the witch-hunt, comrades Jones, Smith and Cunliffe and a big block on the NC developed a distinct inclination to go back to previously abandoned sectarian approaches.

## THE LINKED CHAIN

Chris E, Sue E and Mike J (EEJ) have spelled out the sectarian perspective. We should put TILC on the masthead of the paper and go out of the LP with a bang.

Not all the comrades involved in the sectarian regression agree with this. Cunliffe assured the January 22 NC that he advocated no turn away from our present mass-movement orientation, but only a 'sharpening-up' of the paper.

The problem is that no lines are clearly drawn. The EEJ document is issued after discussion within the 'Internationalist Tendency' as essentially reflecting the views of the tendency. Morrow has said that the IT largely agrees with Cunliffe's 'British Perspectives'... There is a sort of political 'chain' in which Cunliffe basically agrees with Jones, who basically agrees with Morrow, who basically agrees with EEJ.

The 'British Perspectives' document tells supporters or potential supporters of the 'IT': "Don't worry, we will fight to restore the 'party profile'." At the same time it includes all sorts of qualifications and provisos designed to reassure comrades committed to the work of the new WSL. It tries to placate the tendency without going out on a limb with them. It tries to deal with sectarianism, not by fighting it, but by conciliating it.

This creates, on what we would see as the sectarian side of the present dispute, a confused, undefined bloc, held together not by a clear positive view but by common disquiets, misgivings, and resentments. If this bloc had its way, it would blunder us into sectarian self-isolation.

We hope this 'chain' alliance will break up, and that comrades such as Cunliffe will undertake an open political fight against the sectarians of the IT. But de facto the alliance exists. The tendency can agitate on the slogan: 'Make Cunliffe fight for his perspectives'. There is a common sectarian regression - where some have regressed further than others (some, indeed, perhaps never progressed), but where the more sectarian are dragging the less sectarian in their wake.

## THE UNEXAMINED MISTAKES OF THE PAST

At the time of the fusion we all said that this step was possible and progressive because it came out of both pre-fusion organisations moving away from a heritage of sectarianism. Our concern now is that many ex old WSL comrades are retreating back to that sectarian heritage - and therefore also away from the fusion.

Obviously ex old WSL comrades feel that they have much in their old tradition to be proud of. And certainly when we criticise aspects of that tradition, we don't mean to minimise achievements like the old WSL's courageous fight against Healyism.

But for Marxists one of the most precious elements in a political tradition is a continuity of political accounting, honest self-appraisal and self-criticism, acknowledging and rigorously drawing lessons from mistakes.

For our part, we have tried to make that element part of the tradition we brought into the fusion: where we think we were wrong, we have said so; where we think we were right, we defend the record.

In 1978-80 - the period now identified in Cunliffe's British Perspectives as the high point of the Labour Left - a rank and file movement developed, aiming to transform the LP. Socialist Press related to it in a fundamentally literary, propagandist way: by examining what its leaders, like Benn, said, and denouncing their failure to say what the WSL advocated. SP did not focus on the more important development behind the leaders' speeches - the rank and file struggle - and on developing that struggle. Its approach was rather like relating to a wages strike by propagandist denunciations of reformist arguments used by the convenor to support the wage demand, and of her/his failure to advance other demands.

Of course what Benn said was reformist. Of course anti-reformist propaganda was necessary. (The paper carried it then and carries it now). But denunciations of Benn or others for not being revolutionaries are pretty irrelevant. And Marxist tactical discussions must focus, surely, not on routine, valid-for-all-time propagandist tasks, but on what is now, on how we can interact fruitfully with the development of the mass labour movement.

SP in that period related to the LP as outsiders coming into this arena to cross ideological swords with reformism, not as militants active within the rank and file struggle and concerned first of all for that struggle and perspectives for it. (Individual SP supporters doubtless were more involved, but as individuals).

In line with this approach, S P roundly denounced the SCLV ("A 'socialist' campaign which supports Callaghan", was the headline) and the RFMC ("errand boys for Benn").

It continued to promote pre-conceived formulas when they were completely out of gear with reality. When Callaghan was on the verge of resigning to make it easier for Dennis Healey to succeed him, evading the electoral college, and the serious left in the LP were saying prayers and lighting candles that Callaghan would not go just yet, SP raised the slogan that Callaghan should be forced to resign!

Mistakes can be remedied: but we must be willing to examine them honestly, and probe the misconceptions that led to them. On the SCLV and the RFMC the comrades who previously denounced them have implicitly conceded that they were wrong. But for the most part they have never done a thorough self-criticism. (Comrade Levy has made some thoughtful contributions on this issue - but he has been pretty much out of line on this with most ex old WSL leaders). And many comrades are now reviving the same errors of approach, the same misconceptions, as led to their mistakes of 1978-80.

They now concede that the SCLV and RFMC were right; but they advocate an attitude which, if it had its way, would have stopped the SCLV and RFMC ever emerging.

The basic argument of Cunliffe's document is that the labour movement

and especially the Left is in retreat, "alienation and resentment" is rising in the working class at large - and that therefore we must distance ourselves more from the broad Left and develop a more strident denunciatory profile so as to attract the alienated and resentful workers.

But the conclusion does not follow from the assessment, except in a literary-propagandist conception of politics. If the labour movement and the Left are in retreat (and they are, though Cunliffe considerably exaggerates the Left's retreat), then we have to adapt tactically to that retreat (while fighting against it). If working class 'alienation and resentment' contains the seeds of political militancy (and it does), then it is ridiculous to suppose that by a more strident profile we can get that militancy to crystallise round a small group of Trotskyists rather than round the mass labour movement.

The drift of Cunliffe's document - swathed in 'balanced' verbiage, it is true - is back towards the propagandism of 1978-80, in which political struggles (less so economic ones) are seen primarily as opportunities to denounce the leaders - - so a retreat by the Left means more opportunities to denounce. The ridiculous condemnation of Greenham Common - said by Cunliffe to have been added in by Smith - is the sharpest example of the drift. And it is that sectarian component of the old WSL tradition - shelved but never fully purged - which is the common political element in the 'chain alliance' described above.

The same matrix, the same basic model of proper Trotskyist activity, is shared by a range of comrades. (Fundamentally, it seems to us, it is the model of the SLL in the middle and late '60s). In recent years it has been overlaid by more or less intelligent, but always empirical, tactical additions. Now, under the influence of the difficulties of the Left in general and our fusion in particular, comrades are reverting to 'bedrock'.

Some - EEJ - twist the matrix into a sectarian caricature. Others - Cunliffe - offer a more liberal, less stereotyped interpretation. But the common matrix is the problem.

#### THE CONNECTION WITH THE FALKLANDS/MALVINAS DEBATE

Since May 9 last year, the process within the organisation has been one of the unravelling of the fusion. To refuse to see this, or to deny it, will only deprive us of the possibility of reversing the process.

Inevitably the decision by the ex old WSL leaders to form a tendency (which could more or less automatically function on the informal network and linkages of the old WSL) led in the ensuing months to the division of the organisation into two blocs. The comrades were repeatedly warned that this was inevitable. They proceeded nevertheless to use the occasion of the British-Argentine war to re-divide the organisation and to rally the forces of the old WSL.

They sincerely and consistently had an impulse to support Argentina right from the beginning: their conduct, however, had a factional logic quite separable from this political question. If they had called for a special conference in the middle of the war, that would have been politically respectable and honourable, even if we would think it ill-advised and irresponsible. But they did not support the call for a special conference until four weeks after the war ended, i.e. when it was no longer a live political issue. And the position they put to the special conference - expressing what they had finally decided the WSL should have been saying during the war - was only arrived at two months after the war ended.

This way of proceeding could not make sense as a necessary by-product of a political dispute. We know of no precedent for it in the history of the Marxist movement. It could not undo the performance of the organisation during the war.

It could not even satisfy the groups the comrades wanted to satisfy internationally, such as the FIT, RWL, LOR, TAF. Its central purpose could only have been to achieve a desired factional result inside the WSL.

Why did the comrades do this? Even before the fusion, some comrades in the old WSL were uneasy about the identity of the organisation, which they saw in terms of the middle/late '60s SLL 'matrix' discussed above. They came into a fusion, the basis of which included the continuation of the broad paper and the O. work pioneered by the I-CL, without really being convinced about this work. We did not succeed in convincing them (though efforts were certainly made). They became increasingly unsure of their political identity. There was alarm, demoralisation, dissatisfaction, resignations. There were bitter private denunciations of the ex old WSL leaders for 'not fighting' the ex I-CLers on the EC and NC. This was intensified by a strong fear of the supposed devilish intentions and cunning of some of us in the new WSL. The ex old WSL leaders certainly did nothing to fight this fear. People considered important (Todd, Connolly, etc) resigned, and others threatened to.

These problems could have been limited, and we could eventually have got beyond them, with a concerted political will and a less fearful attitude to the dissatisfaction from the EC members. But instead, as a solution to the problems and the threat of the loss of a section of what they saw as their 'base', the comrades latched onto the polarisation in the organisation around the Falklands war.

Initially they rejected the call for a special conference. They took it up only when they became convinced that they had a lot of support, and perhaps could gain a big majority of the organisation, isolating the ex I-CL leadership.

They must have been bitterly disappointed by the result of the special conference. They had a minority of the active WSL members, and gained a nominal majority on the basis of inactive members paid in at the door (from Runcorn, for example). But nevertheless they had re-assembled 'their side' of the WSL, and rallied it.

Pressure against the broad paper approach could only be encouraged by this, and by the denunciations of half the organisation as pacifist, equivocal towards imperialism if not pro-imperialist, and bending under the pressure of the LP environment. (Actually, most of the Labour left had a vaguely pro-Argentina position, sometimes wrapped up, as with the CP, in phrases about the UN.) The spirit of a big section of the pro-Argentine section of the organisation was expressed immediately after the vote at the special conference, when a young comrade from Leicester (now in the 'Internationalist Tendency') shouted to Kinnell: "Now the next thing is to get rid of you".

#### FROM FALKLANDS/MALVINAS TO LABOUR PARTY

At that stage, the fusion agreement about the character of the paper held. But it could only be a matter of time.

The Falklands/Malvinas episode was the beginning of a flaking-apart into which the LP dispute has now been inserted. There are common roots. The pressure for the attitude that the comrades have adopted on the LP is the same as the pressure which culminated in the moves to divide the organisation after the Falklands/Malvinas war had ceased to be an issue of current politics.

And the LP dispute erupts within an organisation where the divisions have not healed. A central fact of life in the organisation since the special conference has been the scarcely hidden existence of two camps.

For that reason, the proposal of Ed Jones about how to elect the NC is a proposal that 'puts the cap' on a process of division and re-separation.

It is the perfectly logical culmination of everything that has happened since the May 9 EC last year. It was preceded on October 3 by the demand (eventually withdrawn) of cd Smith that the ex old WSL NC should meet and nominate people to be co-opted to the NC to 'restore parity'.

If cd Jones's proposal is implemented - which is, we trust, inconceivable - the new NC would probably be the beginning of a cold split. Why? Conference is the highest body of the organisation. The election of a new NC is the culmination of a political process, of the work of the conference. For the WSL now the election of the NC will have to be tied, in one way or another, even if loosely, to the organisation's decisions on central issues in dispute like the LP. For the conference to break apart at the very point of electing a leadership to carry out its policy decisions is to deny the existence of a common organisation - and to take a giant step towards making the one that exists, cease to exist.

We are to decide on perspectives collectively, and then separate to decide on how to implement them, each segment to choose representatives more or less outside of reference to the collective decisions. It seems probable to us, for example, that if the ex old WSL met separately to elect half the NC, there would be a shift in that half towards the more 'hard-nosed' and obdurate comrades in the disputes of the last nine months.

Jones's proposal was made after a discussion on the 'Internationalist Tendency'. If the IT is to be part of the procedure he proposes - presumably being taken under the wing of the 'old WSL' - then a sectarian shift in the 'old WSL half' of the NC seems virtually certain.

And after the NC election? We would be virtually forced to 'renegotiate' the fusion, the character of the paper, etc.... and not in conditions making for easy agreement.

Wittingly or not, Jones's proposal was a giant step towards split.

## CONCLUSION

What can we do about the situation?

In the first place the sectarian offensive must be defeated politically. For once the organisation has the choices posed sharply and clearly: to go backwards with the IT, or to return to going forward with building the party in the existing labour movement according to the basis of the fusion, which as cd Smith repeatedly and truly said, was a move away from sectarianism.

The unity of the organisation must be defended.

Despite massive problems, we have done sufficiently positive work to more than justify the fusion. It must be preserved, and the experiment allowed the chance to prove itself. There are a number of possible ways of electing a new NC: separate elections is not one of them.

For our part, we pledge ourselves to combine the fight against sectarianism - which we see as central to the development of the organisation - and against the disruption of the IT, with an effort to seek organisational formulas (including on the election of a new NC) that will reassure cds Smith, Jones, etc.

Carolyn  
Kinnell  
Hill

## British Perspectives - Industrial Perspectives

### Amendments - Levy

Page 2 Para 4 insert after line ending 'had died down.' new sentence 'The end came after more than 8 months with the union leadership agreeing to further talks during the consultation on all-out strike action despite the government being adamant that they would concede nothing more on that year's offer.'

Page 2 Para 4 insert after last line new sentence 'One very important feature of the settlement was agreement on a 2-year deal, accepted by the TUC NHS committee despite all the biggest unions having mandates to oppose this. Alongside the imposition of a similar deal in BL, this must be seen as an important victory for the Tories; long-term in their declared strategic objective of ending regular annual wage reviews and immediately in not having to run the risk of wage struggles with these two important groups of workers in an election year.'

Page 2 Para 5 delete 'July to September' insert 'from mid-May - when Task Force chauvinism was at its height - until the end of July and in September'.

Page 2 Para 5 add after last line new sentence 'Significantly, this happened generally only after local NHS activists had sent out delegations to argue for solidarity and win pledges of supporting action. Where this was done amongst miners in S. Yorks, Lancashire and S. Wales and elsewhere it had a national impact and gave confidence to weaker, less well organised groups of workers who quickly began to follow this lead.'

Page 3 Para 2 insert after line ending 'all out action failed.' new sentence 'Such sporadic, piecemeal action of strikes on odd days, with the demoralising affect of work not done having to be made up afterwards, had the major weakness of not allowing the development of sufficient rank and file organisation on picket lines making control of accident and emergency cover much less effective than it might have been.'

Page 3 Para 2 add to line ending 'area strike committees.' 'and Joint Shop Stewards committees, many of which still remain.'

Page 3 Para 2 insert after line now ending 'which still remain.' new sentence 'The TUC's call for local Coordinating Committees was turned in some areas strongly to the advantage of militants who, in a few cases, wrested control from the bureaucrats.'

Page 3 Para 3 insert after line ending 'history of struggle.' 'At the beginning of May it became evident there was a need for a national rank and file organisation to propagandise for these demands, take initiatives and coordinate activity. The demise shortly before of the SWP's Hospital Worker paper and Rank F group, which might have provided a suitable vehicle, and the absence of anything else meant we had to launch something ourselves.'

Page 4 insert after Para 2 'The severity of the privatisation offensive and its inevitable increase over the next period means that opportunities exist for us to offer a lead in the fightback. While it would be wrong to exaggerate our strength, it is a fact that the bulk of our trade union comrades and many of our supporters are members of the main public sector unions involved if not themselves in jobs directly affected. From NALGO and local authority workers and the civil service to the NUR, UCW

and POEU, in the NHS unions and in BL etc we have a broad base of members and contacts from which it would be possible to build a strong national conference on this issue. Our aim should be to draw together the broadest group of activists who have been involved in fighting privatisation and commit Broad Lefts and other groupings active on this question to support. Such a meeting would allow us to bring out the experiences made so far in opposing privatisation and introduce our policies to a wide range of militants. Another important dimension to a meeting of this kind would be to link it firmly with the struggle within Labour controlled councils.'

Page 5 Para 2 add after 'into the hands of the members' 'through media influenced postal ballots.'