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LP Perspectives & Report.....Hill

(\*This document should be taken together with the relevant amendments from Kinnell to Cunliffe's 'British Perspectives', some of which have been incorporated.

\*Almost all the quotes are taken from the Cunliffe and Jones documents on the LP, which are in IB 36 and were originally distributed at the January 22nd NC.

\*This document was more or less completed by the time I saw Cunliffe's own amendments to the LP section in his 'British Perspectives'. With some further amendments I agree with almost all he has written. However, this document still stands as a record of the work and as an answer to the sectarian arguments in the organisation, including in IB 36. )

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## LP PERSPECTIVES & REPORT.

1. Following a significant rise in individual Labour Party membership in 1980/81 (25%) there has been a decline over the last year of something like 20%. Increased membership fees have played a part, but much more significant has been demoralisation with the apparent strength of Thatcher, a string of working class defeats, and the growing domination of the right wing inside the Labour Party. The period of rank and file victories in the Labour Party and the large unemployment demonstrations has given way to the picture of a Party dominated by a leadership that doesn't agree with its policies, that sees its main enemy as socialists within it, that is paralysed. Affiliated membership has also declined, along with the decline in overall union membership.

There has been little loosening of the organic and open connection between the unions and the Labour Party at any level. The threat to that connection comes from the Tories, and their proposed attack on the political levy. If they manage to impose a system of 'contracting in' (as they did for a whole period following the defeat of the General Strike) it would represent a major weakening of the trade unions' political voice, and therefore a major working class defeat. In that situation, one of the central struggles in the working class would be to rebuild the links.

The Tories certainly understand that the formation of a Labour Party represented an historic gain for the working class. It is therefore not surprising that a major plank in their anti-union legislation is an attack on the political levy.

The virtually unique work we have helped to start in the Mobilising Committee for Defence of Trade Union Rights, the connections we have gained in both the TUs and MP, give us the opportunity to play a central role in organising to defend those links. Within that we would fight for our own policies and perspective - tying the question of the political levy and the block vote to a programme of trade union democracy; arguing that the links should be used by the rank and file as part of the fight for an alternative leadership and a transformed labour movement. In the white collar unions it would allow us to raise the question of Labour Party affiliation in a new way, linking it clearly to the defence of the union.

A major weakness over the last year has been the failure to concretise the demand 'democratise the block vote'. We must urgently change that situation - in conjunction with, and learning from, the demands that are being developed for women in the TUs and the Labour Party Women's Conference.

2. The link between the TUs and the Labour Party is likely to be a major issue in the forthcoming General Election. It will be a propaganda issue because the Tories will only be able to launch an actual assault on the link afterwards - if they win or in coalition with the Alliance. This General Election, almost certainly happening within the next few months, will dominate British politics, and relating to it must therefore be a central part of the League's activity.

Our task is to combine organising for a Labour victory with using the opportunities available in an election to draw new militants around us, to get across our ideas, to organise the Left. We should immediately seek to organise such left forces as we can reach to create an independent voice within the official Labour campaign - on the theme 'Vote Labour; organise for socialist policies; prepare to fight'. The fact that the official Labour manifesto almost certainly, after a period of major struggles for Labour democracy, will be a hedged and gutted version of Labour Party conference policy, opens the possibility of doing this on a bigger scale than the S\*V in 1979.

The S\*\*V tactic provides the model, although the exact form will have to be worked out concretely. We should, however, be in a much better position to draw in trade union bodies - using work and contacts in LP workplace branches, Broad Lefts, MCDTJR etc, and even approaching local sections of the TULV if militants have any strength in them (e.g. in the Merseyside area).

After the election, whatever its outcome, a resurgence of the Labour left is very likely. If the Tories or the Tories/Alliance win, there will be recriminations and questioning about why Labour lost; if a Labour government or Labour/Alliance coalition emerges, it will be forced rapidly into conflict with Labour's rank and file and resistance is to be expected. We may see serious attempts to use the power of reselecting MPs to pressurise or destabilise such a Labour or coalition government. We will need to be as well placed as possible to take part in, promote and fight for leadership within this left resurgence, recognising that a working class answer to the crisis of capitalism and the role of the labour leadership will be sharply posed side by side with the possibility of a real element of rank file control through the democratic reforms.

3. The last 16 months have seen real but not decisive defeats for the left in the Labour Party. They have been based on the right wing's capture of the 'commanding heights' of the LP, the NEC - initially in alliance with Foot and sections of the old Tribune left, now with an increasingly clear majority.

Faced with CLPs solidly to the left and relatively confident after the victories of 79-81, the right wing have used their position to launch a witch-hunt aimed at dividing and intimidating this rank and file. They see this, rightly, as a necessary part of re-establishing their control over the Labour Party, and therefore also over its policies. If they are successful they will use their position to reorganise the LP (postal ballots, restructuring the NEC etc.) to strengthen their position. But the fact that the Labour leadership cannot even agree on this immediate programme and that they have laboured over the witch-hunt during the last year indicates the problems they face.

The right wing have little base in the CLPs, which are solidly against the witch-hunt. Most unions have clear Conference policy against a witch-hunt. The Labour rank and file has fought and won on the first test case (Bermondsey), and threatens widescale defiance of any attempted expulsions - at a time when the Labour leadership needs the CLPs to work for their re-election. The invention of the Register, the problems the witch-hunt has run into, flow from this situation.

• They have now also run into the election period. While sections of the right wing see this within a clear perspective of restructuring the Labour Party to consolidate their position, and are not prepared to put the fight off, it is nonsense to suggest that the Labour leadership, including the TU bureaucracy, want to lose the election. With the Tories' attack on the unions, and its links with the LP, the stakes in terms of the bureaucracy's influence and position (let alone careers) in capitalist Britain are very high for them too. They want a Labour government, and will accept a coalition. The enforced delay in their witch-hunt puts them in a cleft stick - they have to 'deliver' something, but need to minimise the disruption caused in an election.

The right wing's tactics now appear to be for a limited purge of leading Militant supporters, using the pressure of the forthcoming election to limit resistance, and then wait until after the election for a much wider assault - whether Labour wins or loses. Militant's actions - their sectarian campaign, their unprincipled use of the courts, declaring against CLPs resisting - will help the right wing in this, and we have criticised them accordingly.

Resistance in the CLPs, tied to a real move in the unions, can stop even this tactic. Our ~~co-thinkers~~ have played a leading role in organising this, and we must ensure that work in Labour Against the Witch-hunt (LAW) is strengthened and this is made a priority. But this can only be done with a clear assessment of the situation.

The fact that Islington Central CLP, one of the less left wing CLPs in London, can openly declare that it will not expel is an indication of the depth of feeling inside the Labour Party. The fact that over 100 CLPs came to the LAW Conference on October 30th is another. But it is important to remember that many of those CLPs did not have policies to resist expulsions and defy the NEC, and that less than 50% have affiliated to LAW since then. Those CLPs that are immediately involved have got that policy, but the indications are that Militant will tell them not to bother. Large sections of the left have formally come out for resistance, and that needs to be built upon and used. But that has yet to be tested, and the crumbling of a number of them before the Register, and even the reaction of many in local government when faced with a sharp confrontation, indicates that there will be a major fight to organise the resistance.

It is by no means certain that the right wing will be able to strictly control the scope of the witch-hunt before the election, now they have been forced to go for bans and proscriptions, but it is unlikely to go beyond Militant in this immediate period. However, we are still only talking about months before the election is over, and then it is certain we will be an immediate target. Our approach should be the same as the one agreed virtually unanimously at the December 1981 NC - to make it as difficult as possible for the right wing to exclude us from the struggle in the political wing of the labour movement; to avoid giving them any unnecessary hostages; to maintain the strictest security; to minimise any losses.

In this context, the fact that it took the NC two months to agree that the Register was a tactical question is one of the clearest indications of how the political problems in the League could have an immediate and potentially catastrophic effect on our work. To be semi-paralysed over such a question for such a period will ruin us in the witch-hunt.

It is too early after the C\*\*\* AGM to reach a definite decision on registration. We need a clear assessment of those that are still prepared to stand out against registration; what the Register now involves after recent developments and how the right wing can still use it. Nevertheless the basic considerations behind the November NC decision should still stand. That it is a tactical question; that our co-thinkers should seek to organise a fight for an effective boycott as long as that is possible (which was done); that it would be wrong in principle and stupid tactically for them to insist on boycotting until the end, or past the time when a boycott was no longer possible; that instead they should use the tactic of registration not to convince the bureaucracy, but to link up with those sections of the rank and file and left who had 'accepted' the Register (as a Conference decision; because we were too weak to boycott) to try and overcome their isolation and therefore strengthen their fight to be in the LP, the political organisation of the trade unions. The approach would be: 'our views on the Register, and the importance of the boycott tactic, have not changed; we are in a clear minority on this; many have now accepted the Register, at least until they can overturn it at Conference, but oppose the witch-hunt; we call on them to openly support us in our fight as revolutionary Marxists to organise in the Labour Party, in the same way as the Fabians and Tribunites do; we call on them to help us defeat the bureaucracy's attempt to exclude us from the Register and witch-hunt us'.

4. The struggle to democratise the Labour Party was and is of major importance. Taken separately and out of context, the reforms were not particularly radical. What gave them their explosive force was that they represented an attempt by the rank and file - embittered by the experience of the Wilson-Callaghan government - to bring under their direct control a section of the labour bureaucracy. From our perspective of transforming and revolutionising the British labour movement it represented a major step forward, a potential turning point in the history of the movement in a way that even big strikes rarely are.

We reject the syndicalist SWP notion that, because the height of the fight for democratic reforms in the Labour Party took place in a period of decline in direct action struggle, it represented a political step backwards.

From the beginning, S\* not only took a leading part in this fight, but also alone clearly spelt out its logic: either the democracy struggle would extend into the unions and would develop into a fight for a militant leadership armed with clear, working class policies; or it would be halted, and then pushed backwards. Far from having a vice like grip on the Labour Party, a badly shaken labour bureaucracy would be forced to launch a wide-ranging purge as part of reasserting its control, if it was left in place. Marxism is not the science of prediction, but we should certainly have made more of the fact that S\* alone had both a clear view of what was happening, and had organised on that basis to fight for the most militant outcome.

The trade union bureaucracy was one of the major elements in the recent defeats. Almost devoid of support in the CLPs, the right wing in the LP depended virtually exclusively on the support and voting strength of the right wing trade union bureaucrats, who themselves became better organised after the fiasco of the Wembley Special Conference (where they had more votes than the left but lost). What has given them a clear majority has been cementing the alliance with Basnett, through the TULV, and also the role of the TCGWU bureaucracy.

At the beginning, sections of the trade union bureaucracy were forced to support the fight for LP democracy because of the strength of feeling in their own rank and file, and also because of the experience of being kicked away themselves in the last years of the Labour government. At a certain point it was inevitable that they would start to move against it - to distance themselves from, limit and openly oppose the democracy campaign. They were frightened by its implications, and particularly the threat of it spilling over into the unions. Far from the fight for LP democracy being of little concern to union members, the strength of feeling in the unions often made this a difficult job for the bureaucracy. The TCGWU - both during the Benn campaign, and also over the Register - is probably the clearest example of this.

Whatever the differences within the bureaucracy, the basic strategy through the TULV has been clear: support the Foot-Healey leadership; go for at least a limited purge; call a halt to the democracy fight; and back this up by controlling the Labour Party's money/resources - both nationally and, to a lesser extent, locally (e.g. offer of 'seconding' local TU bureaucrats). The right wing bureaucrats around the 'St. Ermin's' group (APEX, EEP TU, AUEW etc.) act as a caucus within this - prepared to go for a harder right NEC, flooding local GMCs with their chosen delegates etc.

The strategy has met resistance, and has provoked sharp clashes around the issue of trade union democracy. The clearest examples were the closing of the London Central Branch of the EEP TU, and the enforced resignation of Weighall in the NUR. The influence of the fight for LP democracy in the unions; the struggle for a political alternative to both the Tories and Lib-Lab Labour governments; control over their own leadership - these were the roots of the resistance, and not 'media involvement' spreading the issue.

What was decisive, though, in allowing the labour bureaucracy re-establish its position in the Labour Party were the weaknesses of the left which had led the fight for democratic reforms. As S\* consistently pointed out, they were only prepared to fight the right wing up to a certain point; they were politically indistinct from many they were fighting against; and they refused to organise seriously in the unions.

5. The ideas of the Labour left dominate, in one form or another, the views of of a major section of the British labour movement. That would include, for example, some of the best elements in the NUM. Most militants we come into contact with will share their political framework, and often look to people like Benn directly as providing an alternative leadership. We should not be surprised that the ideas of the AES dominate the British labour movement, certainly in the sense that its general ideas are seen as the only alternative going to Toryism.

We don't have any other labour movement to work in. If we are to win sections to revolutionary politics then we need a clear understanding of that left, both their ideas and practice.

Take the Labour left and the unions. They do organise in them. They have extensive contacts; direct links with major groups of workers (all the left wing NUM areas, for example, are affiliated to the CLPD); and have played a major role in a number of the new Broad Lefts, and the BLOC - with Benn speaking on all their platforms. They took the initiative in establishing the first LP workplace branches. They have started to organise fringe meetings at TU Conferences. They have come out openly in support of major strikes, and publicly denounced the TUC's betrayal of ASLEF. They have called for a campaign against 'a-political trade unionism'.

Much of this is fairly recent, and has come from the logic of the fight within the Labour Party - in particular the dominance of the block vote and the right wing's base of support in the union bureaucracy. It is also limited and held back by the same considerations that determine the role of those they work closely with, the CP - a perspective of electing a left trade union bureaucracy; direct connections with such bureaucrats; and a view of the rank and file as a supporting cast to their Parliamentary road.

Benn will be prepared to have a sharp fight with the UCW bureaucracy over speaking during their Conference, but not with the TGWU; the Labour left will be prepared to work with Broad Lefts in right wing unions, but wants to obstruct, limit and stop them in the 'left' unions; they will criticise the NUR bureaucracy, but not NUPE's; the democratic demands they have been prepared to support in the unions (at a distance) have been far less radical than the ones they have fought for in the LP; the LP workplace branches they organise are limited to discussing 'political issues', and not 'trade union matters'.

The picture is not rigid. The crisis will force the best elements further to the left, and we must seek wherever possible to work with them, coopting their standing and credibility to help organise a militant fight in the unions. Our work around the MCDTUR is an example of this. We should also recognise that, whatever its limitations, the fact of the Labour left organising in the unions will have an effect far beyond what they would particularly want. One of the major features of the Benn campaign was that it brought thousands of trade unionists directly into politics.

Neither is the picture a simplistic one. The Labour left was organising the retreat inside the Labour Party against the right wing at precisely the time they were coming out sharply and clearly in support of the ASLEF strike. To have continued the struggle against the right wing after the 1981 Brighton LP Conference would have

posed in a much sharper form than before a radical shake up in the labour movement as a whole; it would have meant turning to the rank and file in the trade unions in a serious and thoroughgoing way; it would have meant organising against the TGWU bureaucracy. Directly pressurised by the Stalinists; frightened by the SDP's electoral successes - they initially vacillated, and then consciously organised a retreat. It was signalled in the Bishops Stortford 'agreement'; their acceptance of the 'existing' leadership of the LP; and their sabotage of the left organising beyond the minimum level of securing a slate for the NEC elections.

We were the first to come out against this retreat, both criticising and organising against it. At a later stage we tied the agitation on this to a call for Benn to stand against Foot. Our perspective was to organise with those who still wanted to fight the right wing, including elements who had originally gone along with Bishops Stortford because they thought a deal could be struck with the right wing, but also pointing out the lessons of the experience.

The witch-hunt has sharply differentiated the left. Sections who went along with the Bishops Stortford agreement have subsequently played a leading role in resisting the Register, supporting a boycott of it, and opposing expulsions; other sections have moved rapidly to the right. The CLPD has been the clearest example of this differentiation.

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Benn has distanced himself from this fight. He/ opposed expulsions and the witch-hunt, but given the 'existing leadership' his seal of approval for now; he has spoken on the 'policy' issues (including Ireland), he has gone to Greenham Common, but has kept the fight against the right wing in the Party at arms length; he nominated the Tribune section of the left slate at the CLPD AGM, but didn't turn up to the meeting; he is not involved in the new 'campaign group' of MPs. He bears a major responsibility for the retreat of the left. But there is a qualitative difference between his vacillation and timidity and the open desertion and betrayal by Bevan in 1957. He is still the major leader of the left in the British labour movement; hundreds and thousands of workers still come to listen to him speak; and if he chose to fight could summon the kind of mass, predominately working class movement that existed during the Deputy Leadership campaign. Unless we understand this we will not even begin to have the possibility of winning workers from the bankrupt, scarcely radical christian socialist politics that Benn champions.

With the forthcoming election, the pressure from the Bennite left will be to limit rank and file organisation in the Labour Party. Our co-thinkers must continue to criticise and organise against that, at the same time as trying to consolidate the best elements around LAW and draw them into a S\*\*V type campaign. But we need to be clear. Even if some of their central leaders defect, the Bennite left will still remain the dominant force on the LP and TU left after the election - despite the bankruptcy of their programme, and despite much of their record.

6. Compared to the political influence of the Bennite left, we are a tiny, numerically insignificant minority. We have two options. Either we can seek consolation by pretending we're massively more influential than we really are (even that we're in a position to split the Labour Party!), and compensate for our isolation by trying to shout louder and more stridently, and proving our revolutionary virtue to the sectarians. Or we accept that workers will only be won to revolutionary politics in struggle, however limited that appears, and that our ability to win them depends on being part of that struggle, fighting to lead it and develop its logic in a revolutionary direction, drawing lines on the basis of the issues posed in the struggle (and not because we wish to satisfy our sectarian critics). It means being part of the struggle, and not standing outside it.

Here and now that means we must 'stay with the left'. Stay where future struggles will take place, and where we are in a position to talk to those who will



who will look to the left first and foremost; maintain the possibility of playing a major role in those struggles, even leading them; don't needlessly isolate ourselves.

In fact we are in a good position to do this because of the (patient, communist) work of a number of our comrades. It is a major gain for the organisation that we have begun to be seen as a section of the left, our ideas taken seriously. It gives us the possibility of even leading major struggles in the near future. The danger the organisation faces is not one of political adaptation - that hasn't occurred. It is a sectarian danger - of throwing away the possibilities because the going is getting more difficult, the left has been defeated and is in retreat, and we lose sight of our central perspective of revolutionising the existing labour movement.

We must remember "the advice that Lenin was offering (in the early 1920s) to the Communists of Italy: not to 'lose patience' in exposing the social-democratic leaders 'in a practical way', 'not to yield to the very easy and very dangerous decision to say minus a whenever Serrati says a." (Brian Pearce: 'Early Years of the CPGB'). We must remember the history of the CPGB in the late 1920s, where the sectarian turn first expressed itself in counterposing the Party to work that was being done through the Minority Movement in the TUs and the National Left Wing Movement in the LP; in a growing 'inextricability' in propaganda and denunciations of the 'lefts'; and a view that large sections of workers would simply by-pass an increasingly bankrupt LP and come direct to the CP. The growing isolation of the CP that went with this turn helped the labour bureaucracy strengthen their position. Differences in proportion accepted, it would be criminal for us to make a similar mistake.

'Stay with the left' is an opportunist slogan if it is not tied to a perspective of 'organise the left' and maintaining ideological firmness and independence. It isn't and hasn't been.

Rejecting the sectarian and passive notion of standing on the sidelines and 'Shouting at the left', the idea of 'Organising the left' was one of the central ideas in the fusion. It is done everyday in our trade union and industrial work - organising with others on the basis of the actual struggle; measuring the existing leadership and left against the tasks posed; taking responsibility and leadership when we can; using the experience of the struggle to develop the class consciousness of the workers involved, to win the best elements to our programme. It has been the central part of the work of our co-thinkers in the LP. It has marked us off decisively from the other tendencies. At times it has involved our co-thinkers being central elements in a major struggle (democracy campaign/RFMC); at other times trying to organise against the left's retreats (Labour Liaison 82); trying to initiate a rank and file campaign against the witch-hunt from the beginning (Briefing Against the Witch-hunt; Unregistered Alliance), and now playing a major role in LAW; trying to turn the best elements in the LP democracy fight to the fight for trade union democracy (TU Democracy Conference); at all times trying to find ways to organise with others on the issues of the class struggle (strikes, Poland.....). It has been done nationally and in many local areas - e.g. the recent experience of Briefing groups.

If there is a criticism to be made it is not of the idea of 'organising the left', but the fact that it has often been done very badly. We analysed the likely retreat of the Bennites before the 1981 Brighton Labour Party Conference - that they would try to limit and wind up the organisation created around the Benn Campaign, and marginalise the influence of the Trotskyists; we understood that the Benn Campaign created the possibility to organise locally those who had been attracted to the campaign, and to create a structure that could be used afterwards to resist the retreat, and if necessary organise themselves. That decision was taken in September 1981, and confirmed at the October NC. Nothing happened. Or take the experience of B\* groups. Despite a number of decisions being taken both in London and nationally, the work at best has been done by a few individuals and one or two



branches, badly integrated with other work if at all, with no national coordination or leadership.

The most recent proposal to take a serious attitude to B\* groups was in Kinnell's resolution to the October and November NCs. In the same resolution (which was carried) he spelt out our basic guideline for tactics - "total inflexibility on political content, total flexibility on forms of organisation and expression." Comrades have not only raised doubts about the second part of these guidelines, but have increasingly raised the allegation that we have politically adapted. Of course, if you believe that the political positions taken by the League represent an abandonment of Trotskyism then it is easy to accept the charge. But the allegation, or an implied version of it, has been raised in other quarters. That criticism of Benn was dropped because of the witch-hunt (Johnson), or because of "Carolann's conception of MP work" (Cunliffe) or that we have tied "ourselves politically to the mast of left Labourism" (Cunliffe) or the danger that "there have been a whole series of groups and individuals which have opportunistically dissolved themselves in the MP" (Jones). What are the facts?

For what it is worth, I have never yet met anybody - except for sectarians and some of our own members - who think we are anything but a Trotskyist group with clear positions on the major issues of the class struggle, and on the basic issues of reform versus revolution. I've never yet met anybody who believes that S\* held Reg Race's position on the Falklands war, although it carried an article by him without a 'reply' beside it (in fact the arguments against the call for economic sanctions were on the front page of the same issue); that S\* shares Tony Benn's views on Marxism because it reprinted a section of a speech he had made; that S\* was in favour of a retreat in the fight against the right wing; that S\* does not believe its own headlines (e.g. the centre page spread just before this year's LP Conference - 'Labour's Programme for Collaboration with the Bosses').

More importantly, our perspective of 'organising the left' has never stopped us saying what was necessary, and organising for that. The close work of our co-thinkers with Reg Race, for example, did not stop us sharply criticising the NUPE bureaucracy in the health workers dispute, or trying to organise within the union; and the links with the Labour lefts has not stopped sharp criticism of their repeated capitulations in local government. S\* sharply and repeatedly criticised the Bishops Stortford deal and the associated retreat of the Labour left, including Benn. S\* has carried lengthy criticisms of the Bennite programme (e.g. 'Socialism or National Liberation').

The allegations are unfounded - but also indicative. The fact that a comrade who wrote about Benn's ideas (at the height of the Deputy Leadership Campaign) as a "dangerous nationalist/populist knot", and "Not only is he not a revolutionary - which of course he does not claim to be - he is simply not yet even very left wing in formal and conventional labour movement terms" can now be described by one of the editors as someone who supports "'critical support' minus the criticism" or who is lyingly presented as "someone who rushes to prevent any move to raise a critique of Benn" says more about the real crisis facing the organisation than probably anything else.

It is true that there has not been regular denunciations of Benn, and that we have moved away from the view that the best guarantee of our political independence is our political isolation and the regularity and sharpness of our polemics against real forces in the labour movement. We have in fact tried to relate 'saying what is' to the issues posed in the struggle, and to do it in such a way that doesn't cut off the possibility of developing the struggle or needlessly and artificially isolating ourselves. We have tried to do it in such a way that doesn't give the lefts an excuse to ditch us or our co-thinkers; that maintains where possible the goodwill and links that have been built up; that allows the possibility of a real dialogue. If we are confident of our ideas and our party we haven't anything to be frightened of - in fact, everything to gain. We are the ones who are isolated;

they are the ones with the influence and credibility. By organising with them we can hope to reach much wider forces than we can on our own; to play a role in major struggles; to win the best of those who look to them at the moment.

The links have been very valuable. Our co-thinkers have been able to use their links to organise much bigger meetings than they could expect on their own at LP Conferences (1981 - 100; 1982 - 150+); to establish organisations that have or could play a major role (RFMC; MCDTUR); to strengthen solidarity work (Turkey, Poland); to create the possibility of drawing many more people around initiatives like the TU Democracy Conference.

The whole approach is not new and certainly shouldn't be a mystery to comrades who accept it in trade union work, e.g. the work in TGWU Region 5. There we and our co-thinkers have taken the lead in establishing and trying to develop a Broad Left. One of their main considerations has been to broaden it out, to draw in the LP/CP left, to avoid giving them an excuse to boycott it. This has meant being prepared to **refuse to take the main positions** in it at the beginning if that meant helping the process. This approach was right. To have insisted on control from the beginning, to have sharply differentiated from some of the other elements, would have achieved nothing but isolation and making it little more than a 'front'. This would not have taken forward the fight against the TGWU bureaucracy in any respect. Any serious fight on this will involve trying to 'organise the left' in the union along the lines our co-thinkers have worked in the LP.

Or take the work in COHSE. Levy accurately sums up the situation: "In COHSE's Group 81, we have with few comrades won significant authority with a woman comrade standing for the general secretaryship with the caucus supporting her nomination." (Industrial Perspectives). The comrade is the secretary of what is the main rank and file group in the union. What was the approach at this year's COHSE Conference?

With Health Workers for the Full Claim, Group 81 was the main organisation agitating on the pay fight. It also led the struggle on women's rights (particularly abortion) and democracy in the union. It organised a series of fringe meetings on LP democracy, the Falklands war, Tebbitt - with Michael Meacher, Tam Dayell and Margaret Beckett being some of the speakers. They also organised the largest fringe meeting at Conference with Benn speaking - over 200 attended, and a broad groups supporter spoke on behalf of Health Workers for the Full Claim. They circulated a broadsheet, largely written (in fact hi-jacked) by a labour leftists who was an important figure in Group 81. The approach was right. It sought to organise with others on the left, without immediately drawing sharp lines because we disagreed; it sought to coopt the standing and credibility of Labour lefts (and even a Labour right-winger like Dayell on the Falklands war) to draw people around, to organise them, to develop political discussion around the Conference and within that put across our ideas. A 'Socialist Organiser' report of the Conference said: "After only one year Group 81 has already proved itself a real step forward in the long overdue fight to organise the left in the union."

Within this approach we will, of course, make mistakes. We shouldn't be frightened of this, not least because we are doing difficult and new work, we are trying to make a qualitative break from the sectarian traditions of the past. They will need to be assessed on the basis of an accurate analysis - and not on the basis of wild and unsubstantiated allegations; or too easy generalisations on the basis of phrases wrenched out of context; or by confusing essentially technical and journalistic questions (e.g. the clarity and emphasis of a particular article) with more fundamental criticisms.

S\* certainly can be improved on the basis of the approach outlined above. It does need more articles, for example, on aspects of the AES (e.g. import controls and the EEC). There is a need to explain and popularise demands like the sliding

scale of wages and hours. But these are technical questions. A much more important criticism is that the Trotskyist politics in the paper are far too often dressed up in 'Trotskyese' language; that 'big concepts' like bad leadership are often used instead of a real analysis of the situation; that far too often constant repetition of phrases like 'we must fight for an alternative leadership' is confused with the task of providing a lively, readable working class paper that can play a much greater role in building such an alternative leadership. Another major criticism is the failure to get any LP or TU organisation to sponsor S\*.

7. The potential strength of the fusion was that it created the possibility of an integrated, non-sectarian approach to the labour movement on a much higher level than that achieved by either of the two organisations. A number of criticisms have been made, particularly recently, that call into question the possibility of such an integrated approach, reject the idea that MP work must be a central part of work in the British labour movement now, and raise a number of serious criticisms of our experience. Jones has put it most sharply: "The real crisis of the League lies in its drift away from the proletariat.....the drift of the movement away from the working class and oppressed minorities and towards the radicalised (and important) milieu in the LP, at the expense of these other forms of work."

A large number of points are raised in the criticisms. What the rest of this report tries to do is to look at our experience of MP work through the lens of the main criticisms, and set out a constructive assessment of what has been done, the weaknesses and the strengths. Such an approach has been noticeably lacking in all the criticisms. What are the facts?

#### Turning the LP outwards.

This is not a novel idea. The idea of fighting to turn the LP outwards to the direct action struggles of the working class; to the revolts of the specially oppressed; to the working class estates - this has been a basic and often repeated conception from the beginning. So is its other side - bringing workers into the LP, filling out what is often a feeble shell with militants, women and blacks struggling for their demands. Nobody is suggesting this is an easy job - any more than putting a real life and militancy into the shells of many trade union branches. But the approach has not only existed "in theory". Comrades should take some time to seriously consider what has been done, even by looking at what is generally known.

They should read the description in section 7 of Oliver's document: 'The long road to Wiganisation' (IB 25 part two). They should look through the branch circulars and read the following description from Levy and Kinnell summing up one aspect of the 1981 BL dispute: "In several localities supporters of ours had already got commitments from Labour Parties or Trades Councils to organise support meetings. More or less alone, we took the initiative to bring the BL struggle into the Labour Party - and got a good response." They should read the report in 'Socialist Organiser' of the September 22nd action, and the reaction of a number of Labour Parties where our co-thinkers were active: for example "In Basingstoke, the Labour Party distributed a leaflet calling for strike action at the gates of all the main local factories."

There are, of course, real problems. Very few areas, for example, do estate sales - but it has nothing to do with the fact comrades do serious MP work. The only national record of proposals for such sales being made are from Carolan. He made a proposal that the broad groups nationally turn to estate sales, and this was backed up by a document explaining how it should be done (this was reprinted for the broad groups AGM). He made a further proposal that there should be a drive in the Oxford area to start such sales, as part of a general discussion of the problems there (particularly the weakness in MP work). It is not at all clear that

anything has come from these proposals.

It is instructive to look at the experience of London. No branches do estate sales. The branch that is probably in the best position to do them is Hackney, and it has been agreed in the past. There is no broad group, and MP work has only recently started. The estate sale hasn't happened. Obviously a complete picture would have to include other considerations (e.g. Turkey work), but the point is a different one - looked at concretely, there is no basis at all for blaming the failure to do such bedrock work as estate sales on our MP work.

### LP and TU/industrial work.

The argument now being raised is that TU and MP work are not only different but counterposed; that one is increasingly a diversion from the other; that the crisis in our trade union/industrial work is accounted for by doing too much MP work, or by being too concerned with the LP.

The point has already been made here, and often enough in other documents, that it makes no political sense to counterpose the Trade Unions and the Labour Party; that they are, as Trotsky put it, "only a technical division of labour"; that the LP simply transposes trade union bargaining into the political sphere; that there is an organic connection between the LP and TUs from top to bottom; that the Labour Party is not separate from the working class.

Of course, they are not the same. No-one has suggested that you can do 'trade union work' by turning up to a Labour Party meeting. But it is the case that you can turn up to a LP meeting that is dominated by direct delegates from the trade unions; that you can go to a LP Conference where the outcome is overwhelmingly determined by trade union votes; that 'LP' issues (LP democracy; the Labour leadership; the political levy; the block vote; the behaviour of Labour governments and Labour councils) are major issues inside the trade unions; that trade unionists vote Labour and a number are active in the LP (and massively more than in any other political party).

It is now possible, in some cases through the activity of our co-thinkers, to go to a LP meeting in the factory, at the workplace. Of course the bureaucrats, the Stalinists and many Labour lefts will try to ensure that they don't discuss 'trade union work'. But rather than accepting such a division, we will argue for a fight against it. (The ability to win on this will partly be influenced by whether our co-thinkers take the initiative in establishing LP workplace branches. They should do this as a priority in the next months.)

And what is 'trade union work'? Is it only concerned with wages and conditions, with waging militant struggles around these, with fighting to transform the unions into weapons of the class struggle? That is its major concern, but on its own it's a syndicalist view. The task of a Bolshevik party is to integrate the class struggle on its 3 fronts: economic, ideological and political. Here and now politics, for the working class, is dominated by the Labour Party. We must seek to integrate the struggle there with the struggle on the other fronts - not try to make them separate.

The connection is often very immediate. Does not the 'trade union work' of a Trotskyist in Lambeth, for example, also consist of taking the fight into the local LPs, to get a Labour leadership that is prepared to give a lead against the Tories, and not pass on Tory attacks onto the backs of the local working class, the women, the black youth. Or does it mean being consigned, like the SWP, to shouting insults from the outside, or regarding it at best as 'fraction' work?

Or take the Islington experience. Our co-thinkers played a major role, largely through the local Labour Parties and Labour Council, in organising a mini-general strike for one day in support of the health workers. Did this help or hinder our 'trade union' or 'industrial' work?

This has been the exception rather than the rule! Much more common has been mobilising support for direct action struggles. Some examples have already been mentioned. Another important one was in the Glendales dispute. There it was possible to mobilise, largely through the local LP and our broad group, support for the regular picket. Again, such work is not strictly 'trade union work' (unless, presumably, you mobilise the support through the trade unions.....) but surely we would regard it as a central part of our orientation to turn people to the direct action struggle of workers, and use that as a means of winning them.

The connection between the LP and our trade union work has occurred in other ways which has helped that work. To take 2 examples. It was <sup>as</sup> much through the LP contacts and links of our co-thinkers as through our trade union ones that allowed the launching of the MCDTUR, and it was the LP contact with Reg Race that created the possibility of bringing together "various rank and file TU bodies and others to establish a broad anti-Tebbitt organisation. A successful meeting was held which included a delegation from S.Wales NUM and representatives of numerous Broad Lefts as well as the LCDTU." (Levy: Industrial Perspectives). To which should be added - in the meeting at least Race was decisive in stopping the Stalinists ditching the whole thing. Or take the NHS dispute. It was links with some Labour lefts that created the possibility, at a certain stage, of significantly broadening the base of Health Workers for the Full Claim.

These are some of the best examples, and no-one could or would deny that there have been some major weaknesses in the work. In one recent case, an obvious and immediate connection between the work of co-thinkers in a local LP, on a Labour council, in local unions and an important industrial dispute was scarcely made (Camden and the Arlington House dispute). Virtually no work was done around the very important Laurence Scotts dispute (except at the Doncaster picket) - and an important contact wasn't made until the 1981 Labour Party Conference. But there is also another side to this. The branch responsible for Laurence Scotts was Manchester. It was the same branch, without doing any less MP work, which did the work around the Leyland Vehicles dispute, and responded to the national lead given.

We shouldn't seek after convenient scapegoats for the real problems in our work. We should also keep a balanced view of what has been done. The work done around the BL strike in 1981, or the NHS dispute last year, was done with the existing orientation, with the MP work continuing (and directly linking to it). In the BL dispute <sup>we</sup> were able to focus the organisation's resources with the full agreement of all comrades - indeed, the original proposal to produce a twice weekly paper during the dispute came from Carolan. The summary of this work appeared in Branch Circular 8 (14.11.81), which is quoted in full as an appendix to this report.

More recently, the work done around the NHS dispute not only stood head and shoulders above what any other organisation managed, but was also done with full agreement and indeed using resources from the MP area of our work. In fact there has been no case on any of the leading committees where there has been disagreement about focussing the work around disputes, improving our trade union work or spending a lot of time discussing the situation in e.g. BL. Nobody has got up and said - we can't do this because of our MP work. On the contrary, those most associated with MP work have often been the ones to make the proposals.

There is also the question of resources - if we did less MP work wouldn't we then do more TU work? Put like this the question is a-political - we should allocate

resources on the basis of our political orientation, not a head count. Within our orientation and perspectives there is a need, of course, to be flexible - to assess concretely what resources should go where at any given time. But that assessment cannot contradict the basic orientation - which is certainly what it would mean doing if we reduced the level of our existing MP work.

It is wrong to start off by asking the question in this way. But it also bears no relation to our actual experience. It is not true that the branches which do the least amount of MP work do the best TU work. If any generalisation can be made, the opposite is probably true. It is not true that our national resources have been funnelled into MP work instead of TU work. Indeed, the major shifts that have occurred in the use of resources have been in the opposite direction - e.g. around the BL dispute - with the partial exception of our work around MP Conferences. Almost all the 'special supplements' in S\* have been industrial or trade union supplements.

We obviously do have a crisis of resources - both in terms of their size and in the best use of those we have - which needs to be looked at concretely. We have two main organisers - with individual responsibility for not only Industrial/TU work (Levy) and MP work (Hill), but also for a wide range of other work (Turkey work, branches, London organiser, national mobilisations.....). We have effectively two centres. The administration falls almost entirely on one comrade (Kinnell), who is also an editor, has been Treasurer for a period, etc. Improvements have been made, but time after time the weaknesses in national resources have proved a millstone around our necks. This, and not MP work, is one of the real problems facing the organisation - and we should deal with it urgently rather than looking for scapegoats.

#### LP and work with the specially oppressed and unemployed.

The view that MP work diverts from, hinders and is even counterposed to other areas of work is now not just confined to our trade union/industrial work. It has increasingly extended to all the other areas of work of the organisation. On the one hand we have the working class and specially oppressed ("Black people, gays, working class women, youth" - Jones); on the other hand the Labour Party. Jones talks about "the movement away from the working class and oppressed minorities [women??] and towards the radicalised (and important) milieu of the LP..", which is taking place "at the expense of these other forms of work". Presumably, therefore, if we move in the other direction (away from the LP) it will help to solve "the real crisis" of the League. This is demagogy.

Who doubts that many of the specially oppressed are bitterly alienated from the labour movement - both the Labour Party and the Trade Unions? Who doubts that there is not a major crisis in recruitment of the specially oppressed to the League? But there are no panaceas. All general political tendencies have a 'crisis' in recruiting the specially oppressed, all are dominated by white males - whether they proclaim themselves as 'the party' or not. It is one of the major problems facing us in building a revolutionary organisation, but let's not pretend we can solve it by saying "There has to be a drive towards recruiting them....." (Jones).

Of course, we need to devote considerable time to discussing how to overcome these problems. This will involve learning from the specially oppressed, and perhaps even other organisations (e.g. the WRP and black youth....). A symptom of our failure to do that is the fact that there has been no discussion on the leading bodies of the unresolved issue of black and women's caucuses - and presumably some comrades from the old WRP\* still oppose them. We had to abstain on the issue at the Unemployed Workers Movement Conference. The only comrade to have raised this as an issue urgently needing consideration was Kinnell.

But that must take place within the framework we have at least formally agreed. Rejecting a sectarian or economic attitude to the struggles of the specially oppressed; understanding their central importance; developing special methods of work (e.g. publications, organisations) to relate to them; learning from them; doing this with our understanding of the centrality of the labour movement and the socialist revolution to the emancipation of all oppressed groups.

Many of the details of how we have tried to do this are dealt with in other documents. Here I am concerned with the relation to MP work. The first thing to say is that there are "Black people, gays, working class women" in the adult Labour Party. They are (as in the trade unions) discriminated against and massively under-represented at all levels. But the LP has also seen some of the most important struggles against this that has existed so far in the labour movement - involving especially women.

It is true that many of the women involved come from a petit-bourgeois background, and work in white-collar unions. But the struggle they have organised has taken the issue of women's rights to the centre of one of the two major labour movement conferences during the year. As with the Labour Party democracy campaign, the issue inevitably spills over into the trade unions, and link up with the fight there, stimulate and encourage it. We fight for that to happen. It is of major importance, and the work of some of our co-thinkers has been at the centre of it. Rather than ignoring that, or trying to counterpose it to 'trade union work', we should be strengthening it.

The idea of a separation of the work is ridiculous. The ability to play a leading role in organising the June 4th Women's Right to Work demonstration depended crucially on the LP contacts of our co-thinkers. The demonstration was organised for in both women's sections and also trade unions. We fought to get the Rulecan women to lead it. Did that help or hinder our work among the specially oppressed, or 'trade union work'? Comrades should also consider the connections involved in the report by Harry Sloan of a LP Conference fringe meeting ('Socialist Organiser' 7.10.82 - reprinted in appendix).

Black people, as a matter of fact, have been the most consistent Labour voters. This hasn't yet translated itself into any significant move for black rights in the Labour Party and against the racism that exists (unlike with women). But that should be put into context - it hasn't happened in the unions either (and no-one would suggest that that would be a reason to do less trade union work). In fact, what has been done (e.g. the Black Trade Unionists Solidarity, which Cunliffe rightly describes as a "possible major step forward...") involves people who are also in the Labour Party, and our co-thinkers have contact with them through their work there.

When MP work has been done properly it has strengthened our fight against racism and helped us to relate better to the struggles of black people. This has been true from the S\*\*V mobilisation to stop the fascists in Brick Lane in 1979, to the central work our co-thinkers have been doing through the LP and Labour council in the Afia Begum campaign.

Nobody has argued that examples like these have or should sum up our work among the specially oppressed. They haven't and they shouldn't. But we should also recognise that the struggles in the Labour Party have in fact been some of the most successful struggles of the specially oppressed - e.g. with women, and also the fight for gay rights; and that the work there is not counterposed to the work elsewhere, or to the fact that the whole work needs to be radically improved. Also, if we take seriously our orientation to the labour movement as a whole, both the MP work and TU work must be a central part of the work among the specially oppressed.

Very similar points could be made about work amongst the unemployed. We argue



that they should have full rights and facilities in the labour movement, and particularly the trade unions, and that the labour movement should wage a militant struggle against unemployment. But that is not separated off from our fight for a political answer to unemployment, and against the quackery of the AES; from our fight to get the labour leadership to mobilise action against unemployment, including calling mass demonstrations (as the Labour Party did); from our fight to mobilise labour movement support for the struggles of the unemployed. Cunliffe rightly says, in 'British Perspectives', that the organisation should "make a major turn" to the forthcoming People's March from Scotland. This must take place in both TU and MP work. The MP work gives us a major arena in which to fight for democratically elected local labour movement march committees; to campaign for support for the march and sponsoring/financing marchers; to support the fight for a women's section on the march; to mobilise the local labour movement. But let's be clear - we are not going to be able to do that if we scale down our existing work. Neither are we going to be able to organise to get Labour Parties to support the work in UWM; or develop the possibility of Labour Party unemployed groups (which are now starting); or use Labour Party workplace branches to campaign on the question of unemployment on the shop floor.

#### LP and solidarity work.

Hunt suggested in a recent London aggregate that the demise in Irish solidarity work could be dated from the time TOM was effectively abandoned for the LCI. In case other comrades might be thinking that the problems that do exist in our solidarity work, as in other areas, can be put down to MP work (or doing too much of it), they should first consider the record.

The most important recent development in Irish solidarity work in the British labour movement has occurred in the Labour Party. There has been nothing comparable in the trade unions. The major debate that took place in the 1981 Labour Party Conference, and the solid support inside the CLPs for a Troops Out position, created for the first time the possibility of seriously moving beyond the isolated work done in largely Irish activist circles over the last 12 years. It provided, at least potentially, a springboard for raising the issue in the trade unions - indeed, the LCI was one of the/organisations behind the labour movement conference in February 1982. Our co-thinkers have played an important role in the LCI, which was the main organisation involved in the Labour Party developments.

Part of this same development has been the recent events over the Sinn Fein visit, in which the work of some GLC councillors and our co-thinkers opened up the possibility of widescale propaganda on the issue of Ireland. Our role in that would not have existed if we had been doing less MP work. In fact, and taken together with other ways in which the Labour Party has been used (Scottish labour movement delegation to the North of Ireland and subsequent report they did; the labour movement contingent on the August 1981 Irish demonstration), we should be talking about strengthening this aspect of solidarity work, not trying to downgrade it.

MP work has been important, even essential, in other areas - e.g. TSC and LCP/LMCfP. Through the work of a co-thinker, through the Labour Party, the LCP was launched and it played an important role in securing the historic decisions at this year's Labour Party Conference. It was a major act of solidarity with the Palestinians. And now comrades who want us to do more 'anti-imperialist work' are saying that we should move away from MP work! (It is important to add that this work was done, and S\* openly and sharply criticised Benn for his support for the Zionists - open letter by Kinnell on the suggestion of Carolan).

Or on Poland. There is a clear connection between MP work and work in the PSC (getting affiliations, etc.). But also look at the labour movement demonstration on Poland our co-thinkers organised in March 1982 - together with London Labour Briefing, Reg Race and with the support of the London Labour Party Regional EC.

They mobilised next to nothing, but their support created the possibility of organising a much bigger demonstration than our co-thinkers could have on their own. In addition they have been able to get one of their resolutions on the Labour Party Conference agenda. This, of course, is not in the same order of things as working class direct action but it is not counterposed to it; could provide a boost to getting such action; is seen as important by Solidarity; and could have given our co-thinkers an audience of many thousands for our views. As with Palestinian solidarity, this was done at the same time as S\* sharply criticised the semi-Stalinist position of most of the Labour lefts - e.g. the front page open letter to Benn and Scargill.

A final point. Our co-thinkers organised a little known but nevertheless important (and probably unique) campaign by a labour movement organisation against the Falklands war. The comrades involved were from both sides of the argument on the war. On their initiative a CLP printed thousands of leaflets headed 'Stop the War - Withdraw the Fleet' and distributed them on working class housing estates.

8. At the Fusion Conference we passed a document 'Obligations of Membership'. The first part of point 3 said: "The basic minimum activity expected of all members is: Regular attendance at and participation in:

- your League branch and any League committees you belong to;
- your local broad group;
- your union branch and workplace union activity;
- your MP and/or YM.

You should not miss any meetings or activities of these unless the branch or branch organiser has agreed to it. This is the norm expected of comrades."

Broad groups were seen as a central part of building the organisation, although clearly not the only way. And they were not only concerned with MP work, because our agreed orientation was to integrate our work in the labour movement and not accept the social-democrat's division between 'economics' and 'politics', trade unions and the Labour Party. Within that we accepted there would have to be flexibility - relating both (at least initially) to how the old organisations had done their work, and also to the concrete situation.

In practice, all the work has been done in the name of S\*, or of a particular rank and file caucus. In the case of workplace bulletins and leaflets, they have been produced as S\* (rail, Lairds, GEC), or as LAC or HWftFC. No criticism has been raised of this, about how we have tried to relate to the workplaces/struggles involved, with one exception. There was a discussion on the EC after the BL strike in 1981 about our profile (this was the main discussion, although it was referred to at other times - e.g. the proposal by Kinnell and Carolan for an S\* bulletin into the factory). Jones said he thought our very good work had been handicapped by the lack of a clear organisational profile (not political profile), and cited the relative advantage the WRP had in being able to offer workers a clear organisation to join. Nobody disputed this as a problem, although in the subsequent discussion there was disagreement about what the best organisational profile would be in this particular case. Carolan proposed it should be the League; Cunliffe moved a longer resolution which also contained this point. Other comrades (e.g. Levy, Hill) argued it should be as S\*. In the end this issue was left over for further, more general discussion, although everybody agreed to the proposal to start a new series of League classes in the factory. Nobody has re-raised this issue in the following 14 months, although we are now told "We plainly have a crisis" (Jones).

Some comrades, who have been members of all the leading bodies since fusion (i.e. those responsible) now "argue for a change" from the "status quo". They complain (of comrades they know were not formally or especially responsible anyway) that there has been no attempt to draw in League terms "any kind of a balance sheet of the successes and failures of 4 years of broad work." They make no attempt to draw a balance sheet themselves. If they had tried the first thing they would have

found was that the resolution that had been agreed at the fusion conference has not been implemented by the whole organisation. A significant number of League members do not attend broad groups; in some areas, broad groups don't even exist. The second thing they would have found is that some of the very few cases where we have recruited industrial militants has been through broad group work (e.g. Sheffield, Basingstoke). In fact if they had looked just this far they would have got the balance sheet they say they want. Where the work has been done properly, the tactic has enabled us to establish an organised relationship with people close to the organisation; out of this we have recruited people, including industrial militants. In most areas the work hasn't been done properly, if at all. What has been wrong has therefore been the League, not the tactic.

What would an accurate picture of the "status quo" be? The circulation of the broad paper is significantly greater than the circulation of either \*P or W\*, although no-one doubts it should be much greater. It is beginning to gain a reputation amongst a much wider group of people. There is something like 50% more registered supporters than League members, although not all League members are registered supporters. Most of this is ~~despite~~ <sup>because</sup>, rather than because, of its organisational structure - which has a flimsy existence, at best. Regularly functioning groups are probably still the exception rather than the rule; the delegate meetings have only recently begun to be properly attended and with any life; no EB exists. S\* TU caucuses have been established in some areas (e.g. rail, CPSA), but have had only a fitful existence in others (e.g. TGWU).

At its best, the broad group tactic has enabled us to organise our periphery; develop and recruit the best of them; and at the same time provide a way to openly organise as revolutionary Marxists in the labour movement as a whole. It has given us a <sup>close</sup> periphery, although its size is admittedly limited - the ratio of League members to non-League organised supporters that would correspond to our real possibilities would most likely reverse the present situation immediately - i.e. 2 non-League organised supporters to every League member. But to realise even this would involve the groups functioning and have a real life - and not being lifeless League front organisations; not being organisations in which the League is known to play a central role, but which League members themselves obviously don't take seriously in many instances. One of the worst comments on the state of the broad groups is when a supporter in them decided to join the League in order to fight to get the League to take them seriously.

It was always accepted that the activity of the League was central to the broad group tactic. "...of course at all times League members will act as the most dedicated and responsible members of the S\* groups...."(original I\*L resolution). The basic conclusion to be drawn is that that has not happened, with the exception of a few areas. Why?

A major responsibility must lie with the whole leadership, who have presided over this situation for the last 18 months. Insufficient resources and attention has been paid to developing the S\*\* as a clearly functioning revolutionary Marxist organisation with a real life - it remains generally a feeble caricature of that. Insufficient leadership has been given to ensure that the decisions agreed have been carried out - including guidelines and assistance for comrades who haven't been sure about the tactic. These points are sides of the same coin, and must be a major and urgent priority for the organisation to rectify. Equally clearly, however, the problems with the broad groups cannot be divorced from the general problems facing the League - organisational chaos and collapse of party norms; the fact that a section of the organisation has never been convinced about our MP work; the fact that disagreement, however ill-defined, is taken as a licence in some cases to drag feet and even opt-out - rather than existing within a framework of properly and conscientiously carrying out agreed decisions.

Two further points about the broad group tactic need to be made. It is now suggested that those who support it have a 'stagist' theory of recruitment. This is nonsense. The original resolution proposing the tactic in the I\*L, from Carolan and Kinnell, said quite clearly: "Inside the S\* groups we will recruit to the League on the basis of the need for a full Marxist programme and a hard democratic-centralist organisation. (We may also recruit people to the League directly, of course)." The second branch circular after fusion, written by Kinnell, had a long section on recruitment which finished with: "NOTE. We have possibilities for a big expansion of the broad groups, and there will be further circulars on this. But it is also important not to get trapped by a 'stages theory', thinking that we must approach everyone first to become a supporter of the paper and only after a time to become a League member. The broad groups should be an addition to our possibilities of organising people, not a restriction." (16.8.81).

In fact, the approach we are using in the broad groups is in principle no different from our other broad work - organising people around us on the basis of something less than our full programme; using that to develop our work and recruit them. Does our work in the LAC or HWfFC involve a 'stagist' theory of recruitment? No in the sense that we don't - or shouldn't - believe that there are inevitable stages to be gone through - first LAC, then recruitment. In certain cases we will - and should - recruit directly to the League. But we also recognise that 'broad work' gives us a massively greater chance of drawing people around us, of organising with them without presenting joining the organisation as an ultimatum.

The question of 'convergence' has now also been raised as a battle-cry - by comrades from an area (Leicester) where a broad group has never functioned properly. The original I\*L resolution was clear about what 'convergence' meant: "We can talk about any further structures we may need at the appropriate time. Here and now it must be understood that the proposal to do most of our practical work through the S\* groups will be a formula for liquidating the League organisationally unless it is linked to a firm perspective of developing and hardening these groups towards a serious revolutionary standard of discipline - i.e. 'convergence'. We should be flexible on the tempo and forms of convergence. But conference must pledge itself to fight any such liquidationist interpretation of the turn." (underlining in the original resolution). It dealt with the potential problem of organisational liquidation - of seeing the tactic as a static one, in which the broad groups become a permanent soft option to the League. It envisaged the hardening up as a process - both in the individual groups and the S\*\* as a whole. The question was discussed subsequently, and some steps were taken (e.g. the national school on building a Marxist left in March 1981, which included the decision to improve the national organisational profile). The more recent development of regional day schools (North-West, Torkshire) is another step. Nobody would pretend that these are sufficient, or that the work has been done adequately. But one of the basic problems of even discussing a real process of 'convergence' is that it presupposes a functioning broad group tactic. You can't 'converge' with yourself!

9. During the December TILC meeting, Smith said for the first time that our MP work would be judged by the development of the work on councils. It was as useful as saying that our trade union work should be judged by what happens when our comrades take positions in the trade union movement.

Any review of our work on councils shows the importance of getting an objective assessment, of not trying to factionally generalise on the basis of impressions. Everybody accepted that the work on councils was a generally new and difficult area of work. The main experience of it in the fused organisation was with the old League, and the comrades involved and responsible for it (the leadership) never raised questions about the desirability of the new organisation doing similar work.

After the May elections, 11 of our co-thinkers had positions on councils (i.e. the equivalent of about 5% of our organisation). In many cases it had grown directly out of a fight for leadership against the Tory government cuts, and the capitulation of the lefts on councils: the view had to be that it was no good denouncing Kngiht et al for betraying if our co-thinkers, when it was possible, refused to stand themselves. The fact that they were able to stand in a number of areas derived often from the strength of the work they had been doing. S\* has gained credibility from that. As important, our co-thinkers have been able to use the position on the councils to develop our politics - for example, taking a lead in trying to organise a fight with the government, and helping to organise strike action in support of the health workers (Islington); Irish solidarity work (Islington); CND work (Coventry, Hounslow); anti-racist work (Bradford, Tower Hamlets); improving our contact with trade union militants (Newham) - as some of the cases.

There have been two general discussions between the EC and comrades involved one before, one after the May elections (also a brief discussion at the Summer School). In probably the most important case for our work (Islington), there has been regular and detailed discussion in the local branch and a special EC discussion (which produced unanimous agreement on a resolution from Kinnell).

Of course there is the other side. Our co-thinkers on councils becoming isolated, or becoming over-involved/over-burdened with Council business, or even raising basic questions on our policy on the rates. Lack of connection with our branches; lack of support from them. An inadequate response from the leadership - both in proper preparation for the work, and subsequent monitoring and assistance. But these problems can be approached in 2 ways. Either we can throw up our hands in despair and use the difficulties involved as a stick to beat MP work with; or we can make serious and constructive proposals for improving the work and building on the strengths. Such proposals must include: more regular meetings between the EC and comrades involved - including closer monitoring of decisions to stand; proper arrangements and discussions in the branches of the work; regular exchange of information in S\* about the work of our co-thinkers. The League Conference should support this latter approach, and reject the former.

10. "We as an organisation have only a handful of industrial members.....Look at the class composition of our NC. We plainly have a crisis.....where are the black comrades being recruited to our movement?" (Jones).

The fact that the organisation has a crisis of recruitment is not a new idea, nor one just discovered by a few comrades. It has been discussed a number of times (although not enough) on the leading committees; it has been raised by a number of different comrades, not least by those it is now implied (lyingly) are not interested. For example, proposals about a drive to recruit from our work in the NHS dispute were made by Kinnell.

"We plainly have a crisis". But comrades are seeing it in a selective way. If they wanted an accurate assessment of the situation we face they should also ask - where are the MP members (industrial militants/black comrades/working class women/others) being recruited to our movement? The truth is we are scarcely recruiting in any of the areas of our work - but to admit that would knock holes in the view that sees MP work as the scapegoat for our problems. So it is not mentioned. (Neither is there any consideration of, for example, the fact that an organisation like Militant can do both 'MP work' and recruit 'industrial members').

Nobody can or does doubt that our failure to recruit is one of the central problems facing the organisation. But even if comrades accept the definition of the crisis (e.g. "drift away from the proletariat" - Jones) by those who "argue

for a change", they shouldn't pretend that the 'solutions' proposed ("higher political profile", "identification of our current as clearly Trotskyist", etc.) are going to solve the problems of recruitment, or that we are going to "proletarianise our party" (Jones) by "the comparatively mild changes in programmatic profile proposed for our broad paper" (Cunliffe). Was not SP all these things now advocated, and was there not a crisis of recruitment (of "industrial militants", "black comrades", "working class women" etc.) in the old League as well? Was that organisation 'proletarianised'?

The question of recruitment of workers, women, blacks, youth must be a number one priority, particularly in view of the opportunities that all the positive sides of our work (including MP work) have consistently opened up. But this will only be done on the basis of an honest, non-factional assessment of the situation, not by easy or quack solutions suddenly produced 17 months after the fusion, and a few weeks before our first Conference.

Any honest assessment of the situation would have to ask why we didn't recruit any members (not least working class women) during the NHS dispute? Comrades didn't argue at the time, and presumably are not going to do so now, that we didn't offer "a clear fighting perspective" during the dispute, or "a programme for shaking up the whole labour movement"; that our 'broad work' submerged "at best" our "own propaganda as a Trotskyist organisation"; that we didn't develop a close and consistent relationship with militants on the picket lines in a number of areas. Yet we recruited nobody, and that wasn't for lack of trying in some areas. Our best work as an organisation (as opposed to individual comrades) was probably done in Oxford. We had a number of militants around us there, who presumably were able "to discover our existence, examine our policies" (Cunliffe), were given "a way to join" (they were asked), but who refused. The most important contact joined the IMG, where he has stayed partly because of their MP turn. (He is also a member of Jones' "radicalised (and important) milieu in the MP").

Clearly you have to look concretely at each situation (e.g. in Oxford the importance of an IMG member in the hospital) as well as looking at the general problem. But we didn't recruit either in London, Manchester, Leicester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Edinburgh, Coventry, Cardiff or Basingstoke. A recruitment drive was proposed by Kinnell on the OC in August, and this was the subject of a circular sent out on 21.8.82 (see appendix for reprint), but was not acted upon by branches.

The fact that such problems are not just confined to recruitment gives an indication of the real causes. They were basically behind the problem we faced at the C\*\*\* AGM and in the registration ballot, where the failure to mobilise not even  $\frac{1}{4}$  of our organisation directly accounted for a major victory for our enemies - and this despite countless circulars from fusion telling comrades to join C\*\*\*. They were behind other major failings - broad group tactic's functioning, work around some industrial disputes, finance.....

In part the background must be the present difficult objective conditions, and the inevitable effect they must have in our own organisation. It is part of the picture, but in no sense an adequate explanation. We have not suffered a political collapse like the SWP; and the very positive work we have done is the best answer to anybody looking for excuses in the 'objective situation'. But that work has taken place side by side - and sometimes despite - an organisation that more often resembles a loose federation than a democratic centralist organisation, that has functioned internally with the persistent thread of organisational and (increasingly) political chaos. In such a situation it is inevitable that decisions are often not carried out; that comrades find it difficult to recruit; that there is widespread demoralisation.

For Trotskyists the state of the party/organisation is a political question. A number of aspects of this situation have already been indicated, with the

seriousness most recently and clearly underlined by both the C\*\*\* experience and also the financial situation - where it was found that the only time members had paid subs was to get a vote at the Special Conference; what had been until recently a growing and chronic deficit; massive debts in certain branches. There is a collapse of party norms, organisational chaos - but also political chaos. One of the dearest examples of this is the question of MP work.

It has always been clear (and not much of a secret) that part of the fused organisation was not convinced about MP work. Despite their reservations a number of such comrades have loyally (and often successfully) done the work; others, however, have voted with their feet, or only do it half-heartedly. The first time the question was formally raised as a political disagreement, as opposed to existing 'under-ground', was by Morrow. He told the EC that he had important differences with the work. It was immediately proposed that he should have the chance to present these to an extended meeting of the NC/national aggregate. When it took place the 'important differences' apparently didn't exist - to the extent that one comrade complained that he had been brought to the meeting under false pretences. These 'differences' are presumably the ones that have now suddenly surfaced in public in the Tendency document 4 weeks before the first Conference.

At the extended NC Carolan gave a detailed introduction along the same lines as IB22+. Only one comrade (from Nottingham) raised a criticism of that introduction, and he has subsequently left the organisation. It was not done by any of the comrades who now say there are 'major differences'. Doubts and reservations had been raised by some comrades on the leading committees (e.g. Jones expressing doubts on the EC about MP work; Smith saying at the December 1981 NC that he felt the paper's orientation "too much towards MP rather than the working class") but were done in passing and never pursued. They didn't voice disagreements with Carolan's introduction to the extended NC in March of last year. These only appeared in October and the period after then.

At the October NC Smith talked about "a further major turn away from TU work", and announced 'major differences' at the December TILC meeting. The introduction to Cunliffe's second resolution (the one to the November NC) indicated where some of those differences lay; then 5 weeks before our first Conference they have begun to be spelt out. The trigger to this, we are told, was the debate on registration and/or Carolan's "extended polemical resolution on the LP (IB22+/23)". But this is scarcely credible.

Carolan has been arguing his position in the organisation ever since fusion, and during the discussions which led up to it. He argued them at the extended NC in March 1982. He argued them in his resolution about registration. In addition, at the November NC all comrades supported proposals that accepted the Register as a tactical question, and also the possibility of registration if there was a defeat. None of the arguments now raised relate to the issue of registration - or even to any new developments in the Labour Party in the last 3 months.

It is not credible that a comrade (Jones), who has sat on the NC and other leading committees for 17 months, should suddenly discover "the class composition of our NC", and that the organisation is dominated by the politics of "being a pressure group" instead of "the struggle for leadership", just a few weeks before the first Conference. It is not credible that it should take the same length of time for one of the editors (Cunliffe) to find out we haven't been providing "a consistent and revolutionary orientation to the class as a whole", that "experience has shown an inadequate focus on our programme, and in particular an inadequate critique of the politics and policies of the left".

In fact all the arguments now brought up are not new - they're identical to the sectarian arguments many comrades have gone through in the past. Why they have



been discovered/declared now, just before the Conference, is not a consideration now - except to say that now they have been argued we should accept that the organisation needs proper time to seriously discuss them, and that cannot be done in a few weeks. The point is a different one. We should not be surprised in the present situation - where not only a section of the membership but also the leadership is plainly 'unconvinced' about a central part of our work; where important differences are declared, then dropped, then re-raised just before our first Conference; where MP work is suddenly dragged in as a scapegoat to 'explain' both real and invented problems in the organisation - that comrades are demoralised, disorientated, or any of the work is done properly.

The comrades say they don't want to stop MP work - just move in what they see as the opposite direction. But in the history of our movement the 'big bang' idea of suddenly picking up your bags and going has been the exception rather than the rule: much more common, and certainly the main part of what has been a process, has been organisations drifting out, and taking a series of decisions that progressively distance themselves from the work. We should remember the example of the CPGB in the late 1920s and their process of leaving the Labour Party; and we should also remember the initial way they applied for affiliation. Most of that organisation would no doubt have denied any intention of not wanting to affiliate, and indeed they went through the motions; but they did it in such a way that ~~virtually~~ invited rejection, and many were clearly relieved when it came. It seems that a similar feeling of relief would exist for Jones if we moved away from "the radicalised (and important) milieu on the MP" and towards "the working class and oppressed minorities".

The comrades "who argue for a change" are not at all clear about what precisely and concretely they are proposing - anything from "comparatively mild changes" (Cunliffe), to stopping "our drift away from the proletariat" (Jones), to "challenging (the LP's) current politics of both left and right.....(and advocating) a consistent and revolutionary orientation to the class as a whole" (Cunliffe). Such an approach - leaving aside the fact that the basis of the criticism is unsubstantiated nonsense - only makes sense as a proposal to return to the old format of the SP. But that format didn't solve the crisis of the old League - and, more importantly, failed to link up to and work in the struggles in the labour movement as a whole. Much the same could be said for WA and the I\*L. The move away from sectarianism, on which the fusion was based, went with a move away from such a format. Taken with the arguments now put forward criticising MP work, suggesting it is counterposed to TU work etc., the proposals can only mean a move away from MP work and the whole orientation. By looking at a number of the arguments advanced, and the actual experience of our work, it is possible to show that. The comrades who are arguing for a change of the "status quo" want to move backwards to the past.

This document has been written in defence of the "status quo", in the sense that the "status quo" is the orientation and tactics agreed at fusion - that we must build a revolutionary party in the labour movement as it exists; that the transitional programme of that party is based on, and seeks to integrate and lead forward the 3 fronts of the class struggle - economic, ideological and political; that the fight for that programme is not a propagandist idea, but activity within all aspects of the class struggle; that here and now the MP is a central part of the labour movement, and that therefore work in it must be a central part of our work; that such work is not counterposed to our other areas of work, but should be integrated with them. It is this "status quo" which is the basis for the real strengths of the fusion.

On the basis of that political "status quo" we can improve the very bad "status quo" in the coherence and discipline with which we carry out the orientation in all areas of the work.

This document is not a complete factual report of our MP work over the last

17 months. The examples used do not give a complete summary of our work - other examples, other branches could have been mentioned. It has scarcely described our work with other organisations in the MP. It is a ~~frankly~~ polemical report. It defends what must be a central area of work from being used as a scapegoat for real and invented problems; from being damaged by being downgraded or approached in a sectarian way. It puts forward in summary form what I believe to be the real problems of the organisation, and the direction for their solution - establishing the League as a properly functioning democratic-centralist organisation, with a functioning organisational and political centre, with proper party norms for sorting out differences and implementing decisions. It does not pretend there are any easy answers to this, but starts off from the view that a precondition for doing this is that the League Conference agrees to defend the existing orientation and tactics.

Hill. 5.2.83.

#### APPENDIX

##### 1. THE B.L. STRIKE. (Branch Circular 8. 14.11.81).

\*Despite its eventual outcome, the BL strike produced an important development for our organisation in terms of the response of the movement faced with its first real industrial test since the fusion.

The fact that we responded so strongly is something we should recognise as a significant step forward in the process of integrating the two former groups. In particular our ability to draw successfully on the far greater resources we now have - especially as regards full time party workers - is something we should be looking towards building on when faced with similar national struggles in future. For that reason, and to give comrades an idea of the kind of preparations we had made and intervention we had, this report gives a brief account of the work carried out.

Leyland Action Committee: We were instrumental in setting this up several years ago from Cowley and it has been able to establish a principled record over that period in coordinating action on a national level within the company. By drawing together members of other left groups in BL and independent militants it has been possible to develop a vehicle for what have very largely been our positions to reach forces previously outside the influence of our comrades in Cowley and Longbridge. Though being until now a skeleton framework in many ways, it was precisely mass action at a national level which could potentially flesh it out into a major pole of opposition to the national leadership at rank and file level. Right from the start of the wage review campaign there were many positive signs that this would happen.

An LAC bulletin, planned for production the week before the strike was due to begin and to appear ~~weekly~~ throughout the dispute, was organised well in advance to launch the LAC intervention. Plans were made to distribute it on a much wider scale than previously, with the aim being coverage of all sizeable plants which were involved in the dispute. Largely due to the response of our movement, this was fairly well achieved, with distribution being possible in Cardiff and Llanelli and Swindon as well as the West Midlands factories. Local LAC meetings were fixed for the first week of the strike.

Thanks to comrades in Leicester making use of the Coventry badge-making machine, LAC badges were ready for sale at BL factories in the week building up to the strike date. Apart from the political importance of popularising the LAC with a broad layer of BL militants - and getting mentioned in local and national press - they proved a valuable means of raising funds. For instance, over £70 worth were sold in Cowley alone, the vast majority being clear profit.

Generally speaking we have in the past been weak on these kinds of initiatives. Now that the facilities exist we should make full use of them in disputes, campaigns etc. There is no need to let the devil (or SWP) have all the best tunes!

Women's Fightback, too, prepared thoroughly for the strike to make contact with the women workers and equally crucially develop links with wives and girlfriends of the BL workers. Leaflets were produced, a special Fightback issue was planned, and WF comrades went down to the picket lines. Teams were being organised for shopping centres in the vicinity of BL plants.

The paper's coverage in the run-up to the strike brought out the political implications of the strike going ahead. Virtually alone among the left press, the paper anticipated the kind of struggle that was on the agenda. A decision had been taken for the paper to be published in a twice-weekly, 8-page edition had the strike continued.

In several localities supporters of ours had already got commitments from Labour Parties or Trades Councils to organise support meetings. More or less alone, we took the initiative to bring the BL struggle into the Labour Party - and got a good response.

Central to all this was the OC's reorganisation of our resources. Full-time party workers were allocated to Cowley and Londbridge to ensure close political contact with our BL comrades and provide them with adequate support. In addition some unemployed comrades from other areas were being moved to Birmingham and Oxford. The OC began to meet on a daily basis.

Solidarity work was being carried out in most areas, with TU and LP meetings on BL being planned, invitations being fixed for BL speakers, and plans for Support Committees were in hand.

We had a clear and united political line throughout the struggle. In particular, the apparently contentious issue of the general strike slogan actually produced agreement on the concrete tasks.

We worked out the following line:

- \*Fight to develop a general strike through bringing out other workers for their pay claims and against the 4% alongside BL, and through pressing for all-out strike action by TGWU and AUEW if their members in BL were sacked;

- \*Raise the call to drive the Tories out;

- \*The struggle itself will decide the relation between these two aspects.

Overall, the response was extremely positive and can give us confidence for the future. Not least financially, where there was serious commitment to raising extra money to finance this work in virtually every area it was argued for. London and Coventry branches produced large amounts right at the beginning. Without this extra finance we would literally have been able to do next to nothing. We should build on this experience, which has reflected the great potential that exists in our new movement.'

Kinnell/Levy.

## 2. THE N.H.S DISPUTE AND . . . L RECRUITMENT (Branch Circular 24. 21.8.82).

'At an Organising Committee meeting we decided to do a circular to the membership about the NHS dispute and recruitment.

Through HWftFC, through our work at the NUPE conference, and through all sorts of local activity, the League has played a role in the NHS dispute out of all proportion to our size. This work has been valuable and positive in itself. But from our point of view it also needs to be complemented with activity specifically directed towards recruitment to the League.

Recruitment work should not be delayed. After the dispute it will be more difficult than now, maybe impossible: whatever the outcome of the dispute, there will be an inevitable slackening of interest and enthusiasm.

Local recruiting meetings can be useful, and the centre can provide speakers. But don't wait for such meetings. The first step, immediately, is simply to ask contacts to join.

Be bold. Once in a long while we may make a mistake by asking someone too soon and frightening them off, but far, far more often we are too diffident. Don't wait until you are sure that the contact understands fully what the League is about. Ask first, explain in detail later. If the contact really is not prepared to take on the commitment, s/he can always back out when you make the explanation. But if you assume without asking that s/he is not ready, you may be wrong.

Don't get trapped by a "stages theory". It is possible, sometimes even advantageous, to approach people to join the League before recruiting them to the broad groups or even before recruiting them to HWftFC. Some, of course, will refuse the greater commitment but be willing to accept the lesser.

It should go without saying that a bold recruitment policy must be accompanied by serious organised education to make sure that new recruits know what the League is, know what they are committing themselves to, and get regular education in Marxism.'

Kinnell for the OC.

## 3. 'WE NEED A MARXIST VOICE' by Harry Sloan in 'Socialist Organiser' 7.10.82.

"Three women speakers formed the platform of a successful Socialist Organiser fringe meeting on the Thursday evening (of LR Conference).

To an audience of over 50 delegates and visitors they spelled out Socialist Organiser's orientation towards the struggles of the most militant, oppressed and exploited workers, and the fight against the bureaucratic leaders of the labour movement who wield the block votes in favour of right-wing policies. CoHSE militant Andrea Campbell, who dealt with the NHS pay struggle, showed this well:

'Take the example of Alex Kitson today, answering those who complained about the NEC staying in the Imperial Hotel. He said delegates have a 'free choice' about whether to stay there. But you have a free choice only if you have money. What about the unemployed, the law paid, the homeless? These bureaucrats have lost any link with the rank and file.'

This separation is particularly acute as far as women are concerned. In Andrea's own union, 77% of the membership are women, yet there is only one woman on the NEC. And while General Secretary anfer General Secretary had got up to condemn Militant as undemocratic, 'I'd like to say that my General Secretary cast votes in the NEC elections without even consulting the CoHSE delegation.'

Winnie Murphy from the textile and garment union NUTGWU showed how Socialist Organiser sets out to offer workers 'a paper they can talk to and express their

problems'. What is needed is an alternative to the politics of reformism.

'Bureaucrats don't just wake up in the morning and say 'we'll betray this bunch of workers today'. As reformists they believe they can win concessions bit by bit. But that doesn't work anymore. They separate union work from political work. Yet the answer to workers' problems is political.'

The fight back must involve the working class. The block vote is designed to exclude the rank and file:

'Even if it was controlled by the left, the block vote would still be wrong, because it would be leaders taking decisions for people instead of convincing them.'

Gerry Byrne, from the Socialist Organiser editorial board, pointed to the paper's origins in the struggles against the betrayal of the last Labour government:

'Our campaign began against those Labour leaders taking their policies not from the rank and file but from international bankers. We have a perspective of transforming the labour movement, wiping out the backwardness which bureaucrats rely on - racialism, sexism and gradualism.'

The huge crisis creates huge opportunities. It is necessary to have a clear Marxist voice pointing the way forward.'

Floor contributions included a comrade from the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights, and Ernie Roberts MP, who pressed for a campaign for control of the block vote."

