

INTERNAL BULLETIN NO. 41.

APRIL 1983.

Amendment to BRITISH PERSPECTIVES,

Using our Programme.McInnis.

Resolutions.McInnis

Abbott.

'Transforming our Organisation.McInnis.

1912

1913

1914

1915

'USING OUR PROGRAMME'

We agree to take steps to develop the use of our programme:

1. In relation to the world crisis and the effects of the recession on the working class in Britain-to reconsider the way we put forward the Trotskyist programme as an alternative to the reformist strategies.
2. Sharpen our fight for demands like Sliding Scale and work sharing with full pay, and an alternative plan of production, to be adopted by union conferences as part of wage demands, policy on unemployment, etc.
3. Sharpen our fight for an alternative to the AES, particularly on import controls, to be put forward at MP Conference.
4. Organise an educational dayschool to discuss use of the programme in the various aspects of the class struggle. This should involve draft contributions towards 5.-
5. Prepare a popular S@ pamphlet on the crisis, and our alternative - relating all aspects of our programme, including the transformation of the Labour Movement and the fight for a workers government.

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RESOLUTIONS.

1. This conference resolves to aim towards a complete re-organisation of the paper. It should become attractive, relevant, useful and interesting Not Only for activists in the Labour Movement, but for ordinary working class people who are not yet politically active but who are ready to become so, or are already becoming so, through strikes, Labour Party at election time, tenants action, etc.

Overall style, content, headlining and particularly Layout Techniques will be revamped with this aim in mind. We will also seek to improve the scope and appeal of the paper to existing activists in the Labour Movement.

2. Conference resolves that the WSL will develop the journal as a quarterly, which is easily accessible to left-wing political activists and other people with an interest in Left Wing political theory.

The journal will reflect on the issues of the day as well as presenting topics which we feel should also be the concern of socialists.

It will be presented in a lively, entertaining, well thought out way.

3. This conference resolves that from now on, all leading bodies, with the exception of commissions, will be elected from conference, as should leading national positions such as Secretary, Treasurer³ and convenors of commissions. We therefore request the Standing Orders Committee to make provision for the election of these, and any other positions which conference considers necessary, as well as the Steering Committee, Executive Committee, and/or any other bodies conference wishes to elect.

RESOLUTIONS: (Continued.)

4. This conference resolves that the WSL membership will in future be collectively responsible for all fares to national events which our comrades are expected to attend. Whenever it is not possible to get the organisers of such events to work a pooled fare, the National leadership must ensure that our comrades who travel from far away do not have to pay more than those who travel a short distance. In addition, the financial position of unwaged and low-paid comrades should always be taken into account.
5. This conference resolves that the National Committee will begin to promote discussion at all levels of the WSL on personal experience and general social/political understanding. As far as it concerns Women, Gay people and Youth, such analysis has only been partially developed by the organisation as a whole. As regards black people, working people and unemployed people, we haven't yet developed an equivalent set of concepts. As a group, attempting to guide the Labour Movement to a point where it relates to the mass of working class and oppressed people.....we ignore the need for such analysis at our peril.
It is by having more understanding of the personal effects of these general forms of oppression, that we will develop our ability to communicate through word of mouth and through our paper, and that we will learn how to organise ourselves in a realistic and efficient way. Thus we gain the trust of others to whom we are trying to relate, and thus we also better understand ourselves.

This is no easy task. It requires all the conscious attention which can realistically be devoted to it. As a beginning, we will therefore create a commission with the practical task of aiding the N.C. in developing analysis of the relationship between personal experience and general social/political understanding so it is seen as relevant to every comrade in the W.S.L.

Jim McInnis

Mick Abbott

APRIL 1983.

TRANSFORMING OUR ORGANISATION.1. WELCOME THE QUESTIONS.

For an organisation with so many articulate individuals who thrive on mental jousting tournaments, the arrival of the Internationalist Tendency' should not come as a surprise. It is a pity that their arrival has been accompanied by derision and paranoia because many of the questions which they are helping surface in the group are important ones. Whilst I think that the idea of democratic centralism between a few tiny groups in the imperialist countries is an impractical one- I welcome many of the questions which our comrades in I.T. have caused us to consider. As for their name- it's up to them to characterise themselves-its up to the rest of us whether we accept that characterisation.

WHAT QUESTIONS?

The questions which for me are being stirred up by I.T. and also Hunt Jones Smith and Cunliffe (at times!) include the following;

- * Should some comrades concentrate more exclusively on work with those specifically oppressed as workers, blacks unemployed, young people even when it is not feasible for them to immediately relate to the M.T.? Couldn't a C.F. group function as a youth section of s.o.,-ie have a separate existence within L.P. but also relate to any struggles the Y. has not embraced?-Should these activities be given equal emphasis with the fight to democratise the existing Movement?

- * What methods should be used to carry out such work?- To what extent are the problems of organising more working class people to do with an inadequate use of our own programme? Is our own programme adequate? To what extent is it knowing how to communicate with and organise with those who may have every interest in fighting with us but aren't yet included in the Labour Movement?

- * And a question arising from Carolan's reply to some of these questions. Can questions of Communication, presentation and organisation be relegated to the 'technical'?

2. WE NEED INFORMATION.

Many of these questions are hanging around in the background of every major discussion. I consider our outmoded method of clarification through mental jousting matches to be the major reason why it's so hard to resolve anything. After a year and a half, a trickle of information with which we could really confront these problems

is emerging from one or two documents. All too often we resort to the retorts of abstracted mental machismo - 'whose the best Trotskyist in the pack' antics, antics which will relegate ourselves and our movement to the permanently peripheral backwoods of history, IF WE DON'T GET OUT OF THIS RUT WHICH WE ARE MOST SURELY IN.

AND A CHANGE OF METHODS.

I am doubtful whether this or any other conference can solve our problems which I believe to lie even deeper within the inadequacies of the political method which is common to us all, than can be touched by any of the 'solutions' offered by I.T, or Jones/Smith or even by Hill's spirited defence of the 'Status quo'. We should, I think, admit that we have a crisis of political method which prevents us from seeing situations clearly enough to find solutions- particularly when the situation involves ourselves as a group- and even more so when we are needing to look at ourselves as individuals.

HAVE A REAL LOOK AT OUR WORK.

My own view is that we need a systematic examination of all the work we are doing and descriptive analysis of the methods of being used. To date I have seen actual examples described in documents by Oliver, McKelvie, Paul and Hill.* Whatever we may think about any of the conclusions in these documents- they have attempted to depict some of the situations we are involved with AND BEGUN TO GRAFLE WITH THE PROBLEMS OF ORGANISATIONAL METHOD. So we at last have some information presented in a way that we may really look at it and be placed to start making our own minds up about our direction.

END THE OLIGARCHIC CLIQUE.

I believe that the attempt by the combined leadership of the fused organisation who are concentrated in the O.C. to keep the fusion together by fighting in private has had many bad consequences.

*Firstly they have devoted endless energy to the private perspectives battles which should have been used to oversee each area of work and obtain the necessary information as outlined above.

*Secondly they ended up depriving the group of the substance of their differences- we should at least have records of their discussions.

*Thirdly, if experience in Edinburgh is anything to go by, they have payed scant attention to resolutions from the branches and problems raised from experience on the ground.

*In the international analysis and sphere of negotiations between ourselves and other groups, real information and explanations have been incredibly short. We are instead expected to accept other people's 'characterisations' of groups and situations. This is very similar in practice to the time-worn recipe of maintaining power within the hands of a few 'experts'.

In the last analysis we are expected to go along with the HIGHLY SUBJECTIVE AND EMOTIVE METHODS used by our leadership in their dealings with other groups be they R/L or SL and hear the report backs without really ever having full descriptions of what is happening or any power to influence it OURSELVES, even it seems THROUGH CONFERENCE DECISIONS.

It is our own responsibility as members of this group to see too it that sensory deprivation ceases and we enjoy a degree of control and understanding of all matters connected with our survival as a good organisation. We have only ourselves to answer for letting our leadership get lost in their own navels. Changes will not occur if we patiently await an improved practice from the elected leadership.

3. WHO KNOWS WHICH WAY TO WIGAN?

I believe that the main answer to the underlying problem raised by I.T. and some other comrades is the complete implementation of what has been called 'Wiganisation', transforming Labour Movement Organisations into mass organisations that really DO relate to working class communities, workplaces and oppressed groups. This requires us to break out from the all too clique like peripheries of the 'activists' whilst demonstrating to the existing activists the PRACTICE OF EXTREME PARLIAMENTARY ACTION. But we've NEVER SYSTEMATICALLY EXAMINED the implications of really DOING this. WE JUST ADOPTED IT (in ICL) as another 'good idea' without adapting OUR EXPECTATIONS OF EACH OTHER to fit in with the new perspective.

WHAT SORT OF PAPER?

So our paper has been one that is oriented to a periphery of activists RATHER THAN TO TENANTS, WORKERS OR BLACK PEOPLE NEWLY DRAWN INTO STRUGGLE OR THE PEOPLE WE WOULD BE ORGANISING WITH IF

WE REALLY OPENED UP A LABOUR PARTY BRANCH TO THE WORKING CLASS PEOPLE in the area it is meant to cover.

In Edinburgh we sold the paper in two housing estates fairly regularly for about a year each WITH NO POSITIVE COMEBACK. It was to become quite clear to me that whatever the good aspects of our paper- and I am very impressed by some of the articles and columns- IT IS NOT DESIGNED TO INTEREST THE NEWLY OR POTENTIALLY NEWLY POLITICISED WORKING CLASS PERSON. Again, NO ONE seems to have examined this problem IN A SYSTEMATIC MANNER in order to start working out how to make the necessary changes.

CUT DOWN AND CONCENTRATE OUR EFFORTS.

To work in the concentrated manner necessary in order to really TRANSFORM part or parts of the local Labour Movement we will have to give up the multiple expectations which each comrade is pressed with locally or nationally which usually make comrades become LESS reliable and effective. We will need to plan and work out priorities in a way that takes account of each comrades' circumstances - giving up many of the tasks we usually do - each branch only concentrating on the ONE or TWO situations where they can really exert some influence. We will have to stop chasing each industrial dispute that comes along like locusts AND WORK IN A MORE SUSTAINED WAY in relation to groups of workers with whom we COULD HAVE REAL INFLUENCE. Whilst LOCAL ASSESSMENTS will need to be based on the real living situations of various comrades (eg if they've children, particularly tiring jobs).... NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS AND DECISIONS must be based on the ACTUAL potential of the branches. It's completely DAFT to come up with ideas we think are right for the class struggle AND EXPECT THEM TO BE IMPLEMENTED.

EXCHANGING IDEAS.

No action can be effective if we continue to coerce one another with sets of ideas which ARE INCOMPLETE and which each of us RELIGIOUSLY sees as THE TRUTH. Only by looking at the problems from different sides and ASSESSING all available information INCLUDING THE ABILITIES AND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE OUR MEMBERS and of THE BRANCHES WHICH MAKE UP OUR ORGANISATION will we start to get a realistic picture of what is POSSIBLE -and stop expecting a lot and being dealt damp squids.

AND EXPERIENCE

We have a tremendous wealth of experience of industrial disputes, work as Labour Movement activists, and of all the situations each of us faces day-in-day-out trying to fight with others who are confronting oppression in this society. We need, I believe, to see one another

much more often, not at the frenetic beck and call of overworked O.C. members in last ditch attempts to deal with failing industrial disputes- but to exchange information and ideas on related problems in each major area of our work. That's why commissions/ and/or Broad Group caucuses are vital- but require thoughtful planning to meet the varying needs of comrades from different parts of Britain. Educational dayschools on different aspects of our work might also serve this purpose. To do these things properly we would HAVE TO LESSON OUR INVOLVEMENT in other things. I guarantee our recruitment would go up as a result.

4CURRENT FISTICUFFS.

None of this is going to happen just by coming up with perspectives and directions, especially if these emerge through narrow victories at traditional Trotskyesque mental jousting matches. We are now rightly wondering whether aspects of the Transitional programme are being quietly sat on for the sake of work with left reformists in the Labour Movement. However no one seems capable of explaining what this actually MEANS apart from as a new HATCHET with which to abstractly smash up opposing oligarchs newly emerging out of their organising crysalis and admitting to differences.

USE OF OUR PROGRAMME.

During the last bit of conference a comrade from Oxford did talk to me about why 'open the books' wasn't raised in our paper during the health service dispute. As part of the customary list of abstractions at the end of incompetant front and back page articles this would, I think, have made little difference either way. But it's relevance IF explained in practice and related to INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROFITS of the drug companies, and the conniving of management would have enabled us to make more impact. Similarly the need for a PLAN OF PRODUCTION was sneaked into the end of an article during the last miners dispute. It was a typically incompetant article based on the author's illusion that he can produce any positive results by bashing out his moralistic instructions to those in struggle. I don't suppose many miners payed much attention to the article itself let alone the bit at the end. But if that idea had been drawn out AND EXPLAINED IN PRACTICE the Plan of Production could raise all the practical problems of the plight of the N.U.M. We could, indeed, be relating to the problem of the survival of the mining industry, the mining communities and the power of N.U.M. instead of chasing the latest sniff of militancy with our already overstrained resources and speaking to virtually none of those concerned.

I think that the use of our programme has become so thoroughly inadequate that we present no OVERALL DISTINCT ALTERNATIVE TO WORKING CLASS PEOPLE, WHETHER THEY BE IN THE LABOUR PARTY, HOUSING ESTATES, TRADE UNIONS, OPPRESSED GROUPS OR ALL FIVE AT THE SAME TIME. However, I see NO reason at all why this problem's solution need prevent us in ANY way from fighting alongside the Labour Left in a NON-SECTARIAN WAY. Indeed. Indeed the abilities we have developed to do this AND THE EMPHASIS WE HAVE RIGHTLY GIVEN TO IT should put us in a far better position to find ways of putting over the more complete positions which DISTINGUISH THE TROTSKYIST TRADITION FROM PIE-IN-THE-REFORMIST-SKY.

WE NEED A NEW SPIRIT OF UNDERSTANDING.

And so I return, in a way that may well irritate many of our comrades to my much repeated point. THERE ARE NOT GOING TO BE ANY REAL ADVANCES TILL WE START TO EXAMINE OUR PRACTICES-LOOKING AT FACTS-SHARING THE EXPERIENCES, WORKING ON IDEAS, AND CONCENTRATING OUR EFFORTS. The squabbling matches between partially complete sets of ideas have to cease So we can get down to business-or expect to be locked in eternal conflict and lose a lot more members than we gain. WE ARE STILL A PARTIALLY EFFECTIVE AND POTENTIALLY POWERFUL GROUP. Let's start listening to each other before it's too late.

Jim McInnis. Edinburgh 10/4/83.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE IDEAS CONTAINED
ABOVE LAY NO CLAIM TO ABSOLUTE TRUTH.

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* Page 2, line 22;

" There are also many useful descriptive examples in I.B. 34, 'Methods of fighting women's oppression', despite its confusing presentation; If members from the opposing point of view were to draw out examples of the positive effects of work around WF, it would be easier for us to assess our direction by examining the practical results of their ideas."