

INTERNAL BULLETIN NO. 42

FEBRUARY 1983

Observations on Issues facing the Fused Organisation
(Notes of an Activist)

McKelvie

(A Discussion Article)

The contents of this IB are not intended for voting (although some interesting resolutions might be made of them!)
They are comments on a number of issues which, I hope, will provoke thought & discussion.
Their relative brevity is due to lack of time, not inclination.

Comrades are asked to make a contribution
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Further resolutions, amendments, discussion articles etc
should be sent to the centre, if possible typed A4 on
Roneo stencils.

February 1933

THE JOURNAL OF THE

(Continued on page 100)
(Notes of an interview)

Continued

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OBSERVATIONS ON ISSUES FACING THE FUSED ORGANISATION

(NOTES OF AN ACTIVIST)

A/ The MO

A basic starting point for a discussion of our attitude to the MO must be the history of our movement. That history is very clear. The only revolutionary parties that have ever been built were those formed out of the ashes of the treachery of Social Democracy in 1914. The consciousness of millions of workers in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe (leaving Russia aside) was turned to revolutionary anti-chauvinist politics by the practical involvement of revolutionaries (often unconscious) in the struggles within the reformist 2nd International.

Given the objective situation within which we work it must, or should, go without saying that our practical interventions are within the great sea of Reformism surrounding us. Part of that sea are the Reformist parties of our class. This is not to say that working within these Parties should be elevated into a strategy. Reformism & the mass parties of our class are often far from synonymous. Even within Britain (where workers arguably are more tied, organisationally & ideologically, to the MO than their counterparts in any other bourgeois state) a strategy of working in the MO, come what may, would be plainly stupid. For instance in the late 1960s such a perspective was untenable. I can remember one comrade describing the typical MO GC as consisting of 3 men (yes, men) and a dog. No doubt the dog had the more advanced politics too. It was in this environment that the already clearly reformist politics of M were refined (if that word is accurate), in many ways not surprisingly. Whilst revolutionaries may have retained their membership of the MO (just in case!) their involvement was outside, in the mass movements of the time - the VSC, to a lesser extent the WLM. The shop stewards movement took a course (apolitically perhaps, looking back on it) greatly distanced from the MO, although the 'open-valve' between the TUs and the MO of course potentially existed.

It was within these movements that revolutionaries were organising; in the case of the IS, and to a lesser extent the proto-IMG, winning recruits too. The increasingly sectarian SLL was in the meantime continuing down the path of consigning itself to the dustbin, or sanatorium, of history.

The theory of the 'Revolutionary Party'

Why did the SLL consign itself to the dustbin of history? Precisely because, like myriads of groups before and since them (the IS et al), they decided that they, all of perhaps 4 to 5 thousand strong, were the revolutionary party, or at the least an approximation of its future proclamation. As cde Kendall points out in his reply to cde Evington (IB 30), the basis of many a sectarian leap into oblivion (as with cde Evington's trajectory) is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of a revolutionary party. We, or anybody else, have got no right to proclaim, or even imagine, that we are anything more than a tiny group until we have members in every street, in every workplace..... until we are literally 100s of 1000s strong.

The strategy of a revolutionary Party, let alone a group the size of ours (at best the possible nucleus of what might at some point become a revolutionary leadership) must be to go with the struggles of our class. Right now central to those struggles is the fight for democracy & accountability in the MO. To go with the struggles means just that; taking part in those struggles, whatever their limited aims, building them genuinely & seriously. Only on this basis can we expect, or indeed deserve, to be taken seriously by the militants we fight alongside. Only then will our revolutionary politics have a serious hearing. If we stand outside these struggles, orbit around on the periphery of them (for that is what the cdes of the Tendency are basically saying), then we are wasting our time. We must be central to the struggles in the MO. Our politics, which must be firm & incisive, but the application of which must be sensitive and tactful, are starting to find an echo in our movement. Do cdes want to throw this away?

RENOVATING OUR MOVEMENT

Yes, it is our movement. Whether we like it or not, warts and all, it is our movement. It is our job to change that movement. By pretending it doesn't exist, or by absenting ourselves from it on the basis of its undoubted political bankruptcy, cdes waste their time and ours. To ^{my} mind this is what the 'debate' occupying our organisation at the moment is all about - how far we involve ourselves in our movement, with the perspective of changing it. Countless sects have been built in the manner the cdes in the Tendency are proposing (WP is the best current example); swimming against the stream politically is one thing, pissing in the wind is quite another.

What do we mean when we say 'renovate' the labour movement? A lot of cdes, particularly those in the Tendency, have attacked the use of the word 'renovate'. They have counterposed to it 'revolutionise', as though those who use the word renovate don't aim to revolutionise the movement. But where do the comrades think we are? Russia in 1917? And who do the comrades think we are? The Bolshevik Party? Cde Cunliffe's section on alienation & resentment in 'British Perspectives' (IB 25 Part 1) describes adequately the state of our class. In many workplaces now it is extremely difficult to get functioning Shop Stewards Cttees, and indeed shop stewards. There is often nothing to revolutionise!

Our primary task now is to rebuild our movement, renovate the class organisations, reorientate them to take on board (as far as is possible) our understanding of the objective situation. And, given our small size, that must mean carrying through this task alongside many more who don't agree with our programme. Revolutionary practice currently must be to renovate our movement on whatever (progressive) basis is possible. Revolutionising it is our aim, but, if counterposed to renovation, just pie-in-the-sky ultimatums from starry-eyed idealists. Reality is different.

Our understanding of this situation means that we are in the business of turning passive reformists into active reformists. Not because we don't want to win them to our politics, but because we redognise where we are at. We may be able to convince the odd one or two people of our revolutionary positions by persuasion (the RCP take this hectoring idealism to its logical, insane conclusion), but we surely have the perspective of convincing many more people of our politics than that, if not whole sections where possible. This can only be done in struggle. That literally means, and can mean nothing else, turning those passive reformists into active ones (whom we might then win, if we do it seriously).

OUR EXPERIENCE IN ONE MO WARD

Some 4 years ago our local MO Ward had 60 members. In an inner-city, multi-racial area, with possibly 40 to 50% unemployment, it now has 240 members. It was the stronghold of 3 right-wing stalwarts of the local, right-wing dominated Labour Council. 2 other, particularly vicious, right-wing cllrs live in the same Ward. Their base consists of 2 elements; a geriatric and mainly racist, white personal following, and an Asian 'mafia' based on patronage and probable corruption. Our activity in that Ward has led to the increase in membership (directly). It has led from a situation where the left (perhaps 10 strong, mainly petty (sic) bourgeois) lost heavily on every issue 4 years ago, to a situation now evenly balanced. The 1982 AGM was abandoned by the right-wing because they were in a minority of 48 to 35. There wasn't another official meeting for 6 months. In that period we (I am the organiser of the left, and 2 other cdes are heavily involved) organised, amongst other things, the first anti-war meeting in the city during the Falklands/Malvinas crisis. 2 different leaflets were delivered to all the houses in the area of the meeting in successive weeks. The meeting attracted about 80 people, and provided the launching point for a local anti-war Cttee (albeit unsuccessful eventually because of other factors). The reconvened AGM attracted 100 people and votes were won and lost either way by the odd vote. Since then Ward meetings have gone one way or another

on an even basis, with an average attendance of about 50. Both at the AGMs and afterwards (the recent Shortlisting) the right have had to resort to lies, manoeuvres & distortions - lessons in the treachery of right Social Democracy, if ever there was one. We haven't just been a part of the struggle, we have organised it, and gone through it with those who don't yet share all of our politics.

It is true that we haven't capitalised on the situation as much as we might have done (the reasons are too complex to go into here). It is also true that we have on occasions found it difficult to mobilise the passive reformists, indeed revolutionaries, we work alongside. Nor have we made sufficient inroads into the Asian workers in the area (the document on Black Work by PK addresses itself to the problems, and possible remedies here). The same can be said for women workers, although here the recent establishment of a W* group should be of considerable aid. It is also true, and absolutely correct too, that we haven't raised our revolutionary banners as much as we could have done. The reason is very simple; we have been preoccupied with organising a fight against the right, and gaining the confidence of those who fight alongside us. The rewards should follow.

But we have scared the shit out of the right-wing. We have drawn dozens of workers and unemployed into political activity for the first time (even if it has been, in some cases, only minimal). We still remain in direct contact with 70 or more workers with whom we wouldn't have been in contact with otherwise (with a few exceptions). And we do, between us, sell 30+ papers in the area alone every week (some sales going back the full 4 years).

For these reasons I find Cunliffe's characterisation of the left (pp 15 - 16 of 'British Perspectives') as basically middle-class, and his comments elsewhere in the same about the MO's declining membership, difficult to accept. Perhaps what we are doing is exceptional. If it is, then it shouldn't be. If every cde isn't doing the same, then why the hell not?

The MO or the TUs?

No doubt there are those amongst us who still feel our efforts in this MO are wasted. Should we be better off concentrating on the real labour movement, the TUs? Well, just for the record: one of us is a Senior Staff Rep for several 100 clerical workers, the other 2 are Senior Reps/Stewards for their sections at work (one local government, the other manual). That work in the TUs is far harder than that we do in the MO (despite the time-consuming nature of the latter). It isn't harder in terms of effort, though it often may be, but in terms of the pressures to sell out. We can say anything we like in our MO (barring declaration of the WSL), with no problem whatsoever. In fact the feeling is often (given the freedom and the right's attitudes) to err to the sectarian in our comments. There is no pressure in the current situation to be opportunistic (barring the pressure that it inevitable in any free political dialogue, pressure we should welcome surely). Why is this the case? Because we are responsible to no-one.

At our workplaces we are responsible to all our members, as well as our Reps/Stewards (quite rightly). They are often demoralised, sceptical, not to say downright bloody reactionary at times. Often they are not, and we can see our patient efforts rewarded, as militants come forward who never would have done without our influence. But the pressure to sell out is there all the time, not just from the management and TU officials (which is as you would expect), but from our members as well.

So what's all this garbage about the dangers of opportunism in the MO? They are there, yes, but the stress that some cdes put on them has to be heard to be believed.

It in any case misses the point. An 'open-valve' exists between the MO and the TUs; if we don't use it then we are fools to ourselves. Neither do we deserve to be taken seriously by the militants we do our work alongside. This is particularly so in the situation where moves to democratise the MO have primarily been thwarted by the TU bureaucrats. We should be at the forefront of the challenge to them on this, as well as other, issues.

MO Cs

For cdes who are Cs, the pressure must be very different to ordinary members of the MO. In some ways it must be akin to being a shop steward; in many ways worse because the 'constituency' isn't as homogeneous, and the decisions for resistance have to be taken away from the direct pressure of members. I haven't got any overwhelmingly earth-shattering comments to make other than to point out that, considering the number of C cdes we have, the level of discussion about the problems they face and what should be done is abysmally low. This must be rectified.

There are however 2 brief points:

- a) Cdes should stand for the position only where there is a base of support.
 - b) Cdes must be prepared to stand. Otherwise we will quite rightly be called windbags on the sidelines ('Well, what would you do?' syndrome).
- What worries me is that in too many areas of our organisation it seems that cdes can't have built the base of support necessary to stand. Otherwise why haven't they stood. As people who claim to want to build a revolutionary leadership, we simply have to put ourselves forward as leaders in the existing local labour movement. With thought yes, but just in the same way as we put ourselves forward for Senior TU positions (and even more in workers' vision).

THE REGISTER & OUR PROFILE

Our ability to operate freely in the MO is described, in one area, above. This may change, indeed is likely to (I think cde Carolan actually underestimates the defeats, and consequent demoralisation, suffered by sections of the left, including our own). We clearly have to fight all the way to reverse the setbacks, and extend the gains of the R&F. And, it should go without saying, in the course of that struggle we must put across, and continue come what may to put across, our politics. But there is not only one way of doing that.

The Register must be seen in the light of this. Our ability to function as an effective, and clear, political force is not governed by our elevating the Register to a point of principle. Nor indeed is it determined by having an independent 'legal' paper. It is determined by what we do and what we say.

Cde Chris E (now in the Tendency) wrote to me recently, and mentioned that he did not see the B groups as a substitute for building a British section of a reconstructed IVth International. Does anybody? The fact he felt the need to say it illustrates to me the deep level of unjustified suspicion existing within the WSL. His comment is nevertheless of course correct. But as a method, tactically, of getting our politics across 'legally' they may at some point be even more important than they are now. If this were the case, it still in no way would stop us having other 'illegal' publications where our politics would be more specific.

Our rejection of registration, even up to this point, has quite clearly differentiated us from the 'soft' left and the scoundrels of M. This was seen particularly sharply at the C*** AGM in January. (And, incidentally, what do we make of the support of BENN at that, given his collapse on other issues?) But registration is a tactic, governed by 3 things:

- 1/ Where we stand in relation to the rest of the left (would we be selling anybody else out?)
- 2/ If we wouldn't be, do we need to register in order to still operate in the MO?
- 3/ Whether registration will stop us putting over our Trotskyist politics.

I hope I have already dealt with the last point (albeit briefly). The first two are even more obvious. The cdes who see registration as a principle have yet to make it clear what other factors they think are involved. If there aren't any, then their argument falls.

As for the paper, it has been accused of being soft on the rest of the left. Specific examples have been cited by members of, and sympathisers with, the Tendency.

One example was the article by RR on the Falklands/Malvinas. True, he didn't

put our line, but he stood out clearly against the line pursued by virtually the whole of the rest of the British labour movement establishment. What do cdes suggest? Ultimatums to RR that we won't print his point of view until he gets it right (that is, the same as us), every last dot and comma?

It may be true that we should have been clearer in our disagreement with him (although our own views were clearly put on the same front page), but we quite rightly gave support to his stand. I think cdes ~~have~~ are disagreeing more with the line of the paper at that time than with what RR actually said. And that disagreement, within a d-c organisation, should be strictly internal, and seen in that perspective.

Another example that has been cited has been uncritical support for PT. Since when has it been uncritical? In the eyes of most advanced workers his campaign deserves total support. We agree. It is true that in the campaign politics have often been secondary. That is deplorable, but ^{we} can see why it has happened. So what do we do? Churlishly criticise him for positions few workers even know he holds, or fully support him against the witchhunt? The answer is obvious I would hope. Only then will we be in a position to pursue political battle with him in the future, should that be necessary.

The same criticisms have been raised over our relationship with Benn. Similar comments as above apply here too, when Benn has been the spearhead of campaigns against the right. His brand of politics is of course relatively well known within the class. We have had long articles in the paper criticising the AES (in my view sometimes too long). We have continuously taken up the questions of import controls. We recently had a series of articles on 1917. What more do cdes want us to do? I suspect they might want every Bennite article to be accompanied by a disclaimer on behalf of ourselves. That is not the way to conduct ourselves in discussion.

There may be more examples cited by cdes, but I'm not aware of any serious ones. Even if all our criticisms of non-revolutionary positions which have appeared under signed articles in our paper are correct, then to print them would simply amount to nothing more than mealy-mouthed, penny-pinching sectarianism. Our paper is for serious campaigning, and discussion within that, not for sideswipes at individuals struggling alongside us at every opportunity.

ENTRYISM - STRATEGY OR TACTIC?

If ever there was a false assumption on the part of some cdes, then the view that the group now sees work in the MO as a strategy is the false assumption. To go back to the beginning of this section on the MO, my brief description of what happened in the '60s I hope in itself explodes the myth. Whilst it is true that the only revolutionary parties that have ever been built came from a split in Social Democracy, that doesn't mean that this is the only way they can be built. Neither does it mean that they won't be built in this way.

Who can say? If we base our activity on the progressive struggles of our class, throughout its many spheres, then who are we to judge?

We are not reformists who believe we can introduce socialism in our way for the benefit of those who look towards us. Nor (I hope) are we ultimatists who preach that only a revolutionary party can show the way forward to socialism. (In essence both of these positions, on the surface polar opposites, boil down to the same thing, only that the latter has a more radical and insurrectionary veneer to it.)

We should be revolutionaries who recognise that our activity can only interact with, and strive to give a lead to, the spontaneous struggles of our class. Whole revolutionary upsurges of workers are spontaneous: it is the job of revolutionaries to provide leadership within them to ensure that they are successful. Such an upsurge is rare. For now we go with the mass reformist movement (including the MO), aiming to politically transform that movement, and to intervene as leaders in the partial struggles that are constantly taking place within it.

It is in this context that we fight to build a revolutionary party. It is not at all clear how it will be done (but be done it must!) What is clear is that it would be stupid to rule out any serious possibility. And that includes the present struggle to transform the MO. And before cdes say "Aha, now we've got

you, reformist shit", I mean the struggle for a totally transformed (nay, revolutionised) MO, unrecognisable by today's standards. That is one possibility. And one possibility only.

B/ CND

The above comments draw out the importance of us being directly involved in the progressive struggles of the moment. Not as supposedly knowledgeable outsiders, but as activists concerned with developing, and learning from, those struggles in and of themselves. Of course we have a perspective for those struggles, but that perspective is only relevant if we involve ourselves in the nitty-gritty of them. It is only in this way that we will have any significant response to the politics which we hope to raise.

The CND is a case in point. I have read an article elsewhere, in an *S** Discussion Bulletin, criticising the attitude of that paper towards Greenham Common as sectarian. That criticism was absolutely right, and we must take it on board in our own work. And this for a number of reasons:

The importance of Greenham Common

It is certainly the case that the Greenham Common women, and their 1000s of supporters, have done more to raise the consciousness of workers (particularly women workers) against this government's policies (death, rather than life) than anything our organisation has done. This we should not be surprised at. But to react in the negative, carping manner in which we have is ludicrous. It is not just unjustifiable, but it also makes us, in the eyes of the movement generally, and quite rightly, look foolish.

Our attitude to date can be summed up like this:

"Mass movement? We see no mass movement, just a bunch of passivists outside the labour movement. Still, if only they'd look to the trade unions for help".

This is not to say that many individual cdes haven't played a good and active role in CND, or in this particular case the Greenham Common protests, but as an organisation our record is shameful.

The threat of nuclear annihilation

I can only assume that our negative attitude to CND means that our cdes generally (including the leadership) only pay lip service to the (admittedly non-revolutionary) message CND is putting across. In case cdes missed it (do they believe Reagan & Heseltine?), it is quite straightforward: unless we rid imperialism, if not the world, of nuclear weapons then the imperialists are highly likely to destroy the world, and us in it, several times over, quite possibly in the near future. Now unless you happen to be a Posadist this has rather severe implications for our ability to do work within our class. This message doesn't seem to be getting across. It is about time it did. One immediate thing would be for the paper to include factual accounts of the properties of the new-generation of nuclear weapons. This would include pointing out that imperialism has dropped all pretence of 'deterrent' and is now talking of a 'limited' or 'theatre' nuclear war in Europe. That the Cruise missile is designed precisely with this intention in mind. The Russian SS20 missile has an accuracy of some 2 miles. Cruise has an accuracy of about 100 yards. In other words it is a first-strike weapon, designed to knock out the Soviet missiles before they are even launched. The Pershing missile (to be positioned in the FDR) is a low-flying missile which takes only 5 minutes to reach its destination. By comparison Cruise takes $\frac{1}{2}$ hour. In other words if Pershing is installed there will no longer be such a thing as a false alarm. Given that there are now probably several dozen each year, that too has rather serious implications.

If we don't, as an organisation, pull our fingers out on the question of nuclear disarmament soon (and I make no apology for saying nuclear, because that is the priority) then we simply won't have a TU movement, or an MO, or indeed a human race, to revolutionise or renovate (take your pick, it won't matter!)

This doesn't mean that our whole group has to bury itself in CND - branches are quite often sterile & dominated by a CP-dominated bureaucratic aridity. It does mean that we have got to prioritise the issue however, in our MO and TU work, and through whatever other methods are available to us. It also means that our interventions in CND mass events have to be coordinated with the paper having a relevance to those participating (a real relevance, not a lecturing tone from afar). It also means that we have to give ^{support to} our/edges who are heavily involved in CND or YCND; at the moment they get little or no support and are consequently (and rightly) pretty pissed off.

Unilateralism as a Transitional Demand

As I understand transitional demands, there are two basic aspects to them. On the one hand the realisation of the demand takes our class a step forward, whether it is in defending living standards (the sliding scale of wages), jobs (worksharing with no loss of pay), or, as with unilateral nuclear disarmament, defending life as we know it! (That is life under capitalism rather than the life of a mutant).

On the other hand transitional demands involve the development of class consciousness and control, whether it be in the factories or neighbourhood. They involve the at least partial overturning of bourgeois control. This is as against reformist demands, for instance a basic minimum wage or 35 hour week, which, whilst they may well involve massive struggle, don't require workers' control for their implementation. There is a (non-Trotskyist) school of thought which says that transitional demands are unobtainable under capitalism. M. take this position to its logical conclusion in their demand for the nationalisation of the top 200 monopolies, which, their more advanced cadre will say, would expose the limitations of capitalism and invite a workers' revolution. (How this would actually come about, given that all their propaganda up to that point had argued in favour of parliamentary democracy, they are unable to say.) If we take a Trotskyist understanding of the element of workers' control developed in the struggle for a transitional demand, then unilateralism falls clearly into our definition: non-violent direct action, and within it the challenge to the state's right to produce weapons of mass destruction, must be seen as a central part of our struggle to exert our control over society. And this transitional demand has in it more resonance than any other that we might care to raise at this present moment in time. So what the hell are we actually doing about it??

There is another aspect too. If any transitional demand is won, then it is immediately under permanent threat of being taken back by the capitalists. If then we are to win the closure of the bases, then it will be workers' control which will ensure that they stay closed.

There is also the whole international perspective, which was touched upon in the previously-mentioned article elsewhere too. END is just that, European-wide, east & west. We should be using international meetings, events etc as a forum within which our various European co-thinkers can intervene together with ourselves. Why aren't we?

There are of course other questions that the disarmament issue brings up, most of which have never been properly debated, either within the fused organisation or in its previous two component parts.

These include disarmament in Eastern Europe (the 'workers Bomb'), and our attitude towards pacifism (there has been a lot of bullshit vented towards pacifists). Both these issues, and others, are sure to reveal deep divisions within our organisation (no bad thing). They must be discussed. I propose that we open the columns of the paper to debate.

In conclusion, the question of CND, and the wider-ranging question of the survival of the human race, illustrates to my mind the depths of the morasse that the group has got itself into. The discussions we are having become quite pointless, not just when you consider that they have been had countless time before in the Trotskyist movement (witness all the sects that have resulted), but that they are actually trivial compared to the massive tasks before us. We are in a swamp; let's go into our movement and out of the swamp.

C/ YOUTH WORK

Coventry's document, and Jagger's document in particular, (both in IB 38) sum up pretty much where we are in terms of Youth Work, and where we want to go.

Coventry's document falls down in one instance I believe. Whilst his emphasis on the orientation to the Youth MO is correct, he puts too much emphasis on debating with the M. Our success in overcoming that obstacle (as with any obstacle) will be determined not so much by rational (or in this case not so rational) argument, but by what we do and how we do it.

More important, all the documents which I have seen so far on Youth Work (including Hunt's) miss one fundamental point. That is the question of how, in practice, we carry through the apparent agreement on the need to prioritise Youth Work. In many ways I think the argument about what we then do is secondary. Cde Jagger, and the cdes who wrote the Resolution on Youth Work (IB 39), both suggest some undoubtedly good organisational changes within the organisation. What they all miss however is the fact that if Youth Work is to be prioritised, then this must mean a massive and deliberate reorientation of emphasis in all the work we do as an organisation. We already have a situation in which many cdes are running around like the proverbial blue-arsed flies we all know and hate. The Glasgow cdes make this point in 'The Galtieri Gang Rides Again' (IB 38 again) in relation to MO work generally; we are, for a reason which defies all logic, expected to take out membership, if not involve ourselves, in just about everything going. This is not on. Not if we are to remain effective anyway. Prioritising Youth Work, without looking at this prioritisation in the context of our whole outlook, would simply make matters worse. Imagine cdes' reaction to being told that they must now prioritise Youth Work, on top of everything else they do. "Sod off!" is the most likely reaction, and quite right too. That is exactly why similar statements of intent, passed on many occasions by both the pre-fusion organisations, have failed miserably.

Towards a new Orientation to Youth

If we look back over the history of post-war Trotskyism in this country, the SLL is the only group to have ever done Youth Work seriously, and successfully (insofar as it went). That is why cde Oliver has rightly brought out the lessons of Wiganisation. But why was this successful? Not because the SLL prioritised Youth Work, but because they did something about it! Well over half the resources of that organisation were devoted to doing serious Youth Work. That meant that they simply didn't involve themselves in whole areas of work which they might have done otherwise. The same comments apply too to M., although their 'prioritisation' is a blinkered one, and not so successful as that of the SLL (because of their dead-end politics and boring approach).

As a much smaller organisation than the SLL we have to recognise that if our commitment to Wiganisation is to be turned into reality then we are going to have to take a probably even more momentous decision than the SLL did. We will have to devote massive organisational resources to Youth Work, at the expense of other areas of our work. Without a decision of that magnitude we will continue to fail miserably in our tasks regarding youth. And that goes for whether we have an SYL-type orientation (which is what cde Hunt is basically arguing for) or a Youth MO orientation. And such a decision doesn't just mean individual cdes, or individual branches, taking that decision (some do already), but the whole organisation.

I'm not suggesting that means not taking up other issues, but those issues must be taken up through our Youth Work. Nor am I suggesting counterposing Youth Work to MO or TU work; an orientation on youth will aid the other two and vice-versa.

I'm not even sure that we should do it. But one thing's for sure - if we don't our Youth Work will continue to stutter along as it is doing now.

D/ WORK AMONGST WOMEN

The following comments are made without yet having seen the massive document apparently forthcoming from cdes in Oxford.

W* - A Reflection of our own Problems

There is a problem with the 2 documents from Cunliffe. The first, 'Womens Oppression and Socialist Revolution', written in August 1982, has a fairly open-ended attitude to W*. The second, the section in 'British Perspectives' (IB 25 Part 1, January 1983), has a very different, negative attitude. I can only assume that this is a subjective response to the course pursued by RL, and our own disastrous interventions in W*.

Now, whilst RL is no doubt wrong in her withdrawal from the WSL, many of her criticisms seem to me well-founded. For instance:

The refusal to supply copies of W* to us nationally because of unpaid debts is quite justified. It is also a pertinent comment on our commitment to the women's movement. (It is of course true that we have problems with debts to our own paper, but the situation with W* was considerably worse, precisely because of many cdes' lack of commitment).

It is also the case that sexist attitudes continue to dominate our organisation. We could not be satisfied even if they persisted, although that at least would be understandable, but to dominate is quite a different matter.

This is firstly within the sphere of personal relationships. I can think of countless examples, including ones perpetrated by myself. Too often there is a lack of commitment from male cdes to actually do anything about their own attitudes, or, worse, not recognise there is anything wrong with their attitudes in the first place.

This becomes clearer when it actually comes to practical work. Selling W* in many areas was, and still is where it continues, too often seen as the task of women cdes.

Further, the issues have never been seriously debated on our NC. They seem to be generally hived off in the most obnoxious way to the Women's Commission. That in itself is a problem; it includes some of the cdes, from both sides, who were the least convinced about the fusion in the first place. Rancour has ensued, and with no real attempt on the part of our leading bodies to sort it out.

This basic unwillingness to confront sexism in the League is both a reflection of, and has its repercussions in, the current attitudes to W* on the part of many cdes.

Practically it means we continue to waste golden opportunities. RL is one individual, with a few co-thinkers. If we made a serious attempt to build W* then the problem would actually cease to exist. W* is the easiest paper of the entire lot to sell in the movement. It is also the only paper of its kind! Actually avoiding the opportunities it affords us is lunacy.

The Orientation of W*

Cdes have commented that W* has a basically petit-bourgeois orientation. They say it doesn't relate to the struggles of women workers.

I don't think a discussion on this claim is particularly fruitful. It may be true that on certain occasions W* hasn't given the prominence it should have to a particular struggle. If that is so then it is the responsibility of many cdes for not involving themselves, in a constructive and disciplined manner, in the W* groups and EB.

More significant are the phrases used by the critics. What does having an orientation to working class women actually mean? For the Tendency it means 'Women in Struggle'. Presumably this means occupations, strikes etc.

For Cunliffe it means women in struggle and women in the home, though how we should relate to the latter isn't drawn out.

It seems to me that these terms actually obscure the point. Our orientation should surely be a fight against women's oppression, specifically that of working class women, in all its aspects.

There was a recent example in my workplace where an elderly male shop steward was approached by 2 of his women members who had refused to make tea for their

(male) boss. In complete bewilderment he asked me what he should do. Were they within their rights to refuse?

Particularly given that shop stewards attitude, the fact that those 2 women had refused to make their boss' tea was tremendous. It would be exactly the same (in terms of male-female power relationships) had the same thing happened at home that evening when the husband/boyfriend had demanded a cup of tea. That for me, in both instances, is 'women in struggle'. Is it for cdes critical of W*? I ask the question quite genuinely because their emphasis, up to this point, has been on what are basically economic issues. At least that's what Lenin called them. Marxism is about having a rounded, total view of social relationships. Struggle at the point of production is our central focus, but struggle against sexism on every plane is often just as important, particularly when the majority of working class women have no direct relationship to the point of production.

Towards a Broad-based Working Class Women's Movement?

Perhaps I'm being unfair to cdes. After all the old WSL was centrally involved in the NCCC (another important aspect of pre-fusion work mostly down the drain). As I understand it that was a broad-based campaign where many of the participants didn't share the views of our cdes on a whole range of issues. And yet now, nearly 2 years later, there is an evident unwillingness to work constructively in a broad-based campaign (RL cannot be a serious excuse). There would appear to be a regression.

Cde Cunliffe argues, in the section on Broad Groups in his August '82 document, essentially for W* as a WSL Women's Section. True this is not explicit, but it is exactly what is meant when he writes about W* "incorporating more propaganda for socialism & revolution", and "We see our task as giving leadership within them (the W* groups)".

If our perspective is of building a broad-based working class women's movement (we are too small to attempt to impose our own politics, other than partially, on a serious women's paper), then this is precisely what we must not do. Otherwise it does become, more or less, a WSL women's section. Have a political dialogue yes, orientate the W* groups to areas we think they should be intervening in yes, but to dominate them would be the kiss of death. It would mean that we wouldn't have the dialogue, by definition.

All in all I think the debate on this particular point mirrors the debate we are having on our attitude towards the MO. And similarly my comments against deluding ourselves over ^{our} strength, or indeed relevance, in the earlier section apply here too.

Footnote on Sexism

All too often sexism isn't seen by the women's movement and the left (when it cares to think about it) in its entirety. The emphasis, quite rightly, is on oppression by men. But this often obscures the extent of the reciprocation and internalisation of oppression by women.

My experience of selling W* at work particularly is often of a disinterest from women members. Clearly this may have a lot to do with me being male (this in itself raises the entire question of just how far male cdes can go in doing 'womens work'). But it also indicates a prevalent attitude, particularly amongst young women, that their central task in life is to get engaged, get married, have children and do the housework. And, in my experience, they are often genuinely contented (in themselves) with this prospect.

I don't think that this whole problem has yet been examined with the attention it deserves. It needs to be.