

APRIL 1983

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Conference is April 15-16-17

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SECTIONS FOR CONFERENCE VOTING OF I.B. 37

Hill

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a 1 - 6 (except last para)	1-9	General assessment/orientation. Approach to L left.
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g 10 (2nd and 3rd to last paras)	22	General orientation

Amendment for accuracy: page 6, para 4, delete: "he is not involved in the new 'Campaign Group' of MPs".

AMENDMENT ON IRELAND

Jones

Amendment to point 3 of resolution in IB 25 part 2: Add, "This criticism is secondary, and presented in such a manner".

EXPLANATION: In light of Carolan's contribution in IB45 re his criticism of WF reducing the criticism to small print and not putting speaking to British workers first.

AMENDMENT TO GAY COMMISSION RESOLUTION

Kinnell

In last but two para, delete, "The WSL supports the complete abolition of the age of consent", and substitute, "The WSL supports a reduction of the age of consent for everyone".

RESOLUTION ON BUILDING THE WSL

Carolán and Kinnell

- I -

Most organisations on the left are stagnant or have lost proportionately far more members in the last period than we have - the SWP and SL, our most important competitors, for example. What defines the crisis of the WSL is not the loss of some members, but that this happens to us in a period in which we continue to have a big periphery, part of it organised, in which we have been at the centre of struggles in the O., in which setbacks (but limited and not debilitating ones) have occurred for the O. left for reasons which we have long explained in advance and indicating a turn to the unions that we have long argued for and practised. In these circumstances we should have grown (if not enormously), and we have stagnated instead. Why?

- II -

These are the main reasons:

1. Since last May internal conflicts have absorbed much of our energies and made the internal life of the organisation unattractive to most people.
 2. We have failed to knit together the different fields of work, such as TU and O work and work among the specially oppressed.
 3. One of the most promising and potentially fruitful areas of our work - women - has been virtually wrecked by factionalism between groups of League women.
 4. Youth work has had divergent sections within it. Our youth movement was conceived as the broad group for the youth - it has been the empty shell of a League front.
 5. There are real and objective problems about recruiting some of our best O. contacts and quasi-supporters. They struggle through O. structures to which we relate and it is difficult to convince them to join and take personal responsibility for 'the party' - even when they recognise and broadly support its work.
 6. The downturn in industrial struggle and the setback the organisation has suffered at Cowley inevitably have a depressing effect on us.
- The new WSL is doing fewer regular industrial bulletins than the I-CL did. That form of orientation to the working class has fallen off.
7. The organisation - and in the first place its leadership - has been criminally negligent about that area of the left which has experienced mass growth in the last period: CND and YCND. Our involvement has been token. There is a strong streak of sectarian hostility to CND running through the organisation.
 8. As a result of the deficiencies of the leadership, the tendency of many comrades to withdraw into local 'ticking over' in response to the difficulties of the organisation, and the continual factional conflict between blocs of comparable size, there is organisational chaos.
 9. We have failed to intervene in and recruit from the crisis of our competitors - in the first place, the SWP.

- III -

These are the main external manifestations. There are things more basic and organisational as well, which underlie the things listed above.

The fusion brought together in a single national framework two very distinct organisations. Fusion in the sense of the integration and interaction that would come from uniting closely linked groups in day-to-day work in the main did not occur. The two main areas of old WSL strength, O and L, either did not merge with an I-CL group at all (O) or did so only with a small and untypical group (L). At fusion we failed to establish any coherent or articulated division of labour

at leadership level. The factional conflicts over the last year have exacerbated this and made it more difficult to adjust or remedy.

More than that, however, we find that there is nothing like agreement in the organisation on the norms, rules, standards and procedures of a democratic centralist organisation in the Leninist tradition. The pre-fusion groups have rubbed destructively against each other in the framework of the new WSL. We have found at every turn sharp divergences of expectations, rules of functioning, standards and norms. This more than any formal political disagreement has led to the intense heat on the leading bodies.

For this reason it is worthwhile setting out briefly the theory of the revolutionary party that must, we suggest, determine how we function in the future - and also the ways in which we can no longer afford to go on functioning.

- IV -

The working class is unique among all revolutionary classes in that it remains a class of wage slaves until, by seizing political power and the means of production, it makes the decisive step towards emancipating itself. Contrast the classic bourgeois experience. The bourgeoisie develops historically within feudalism and neo-feudalism as part of a division of labour within society which allows the bourgeoisie to own a segment of the means of production, and itself to be an exploiter, long before it takes political power in society. It thus builds up wealth, culture, systems of ideas to express its interests and view of the world. It, so to speak, ripens organically, and the taking of power, the sloughing off of the old system - even if accompanied by violence - represents the natural maturing and growth of a class already in possession of important means of production and a share of the surplus.

The working class remains an exploited class - in more developed capitalist countries, the basic exploited class - up to the death knell of bourgeois social and political rule. It does not accumulate leisure, wealth or its own distinct culture. Its 'natural' condition as a raw social category is to be dominated by the ideas of the ruling class. Its own natural and spontaneous self-defence and bargaining within the capitalist system - trade unionism - binds it ideologically to the ruling class, to bargaining within the system and in times of crisis taking responsibility for it. Its natural tribunes and intellectuals are the trade union bureaucracy. On the face of it the proletariat might be doomed to go through history as a subordinate class.

Marx and Engels themselves wrote: 'The ruling ideology in every society is the ideology of the ruling class'.

In fact the working class becomes a revolutionary class, conscious of its own historic class interests and possibilities, in the following way, according to the views of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

A set of social theories is created and developed on the basis of bourgeois social science (economics, philosophy, history) which uncovers the necessary logic of the historic evolution of capitalism towards the completion of its organic tendency to become more and more 'social' and monopolistic - by way of common ownership and the abolition of capitalism. The proletariat is located as the protagonist in this stage of history. Marx analysed and uncovered the modes of economic exploitation of the proletariat within the formal (and seemingly fundamental and real) equality of capitalist exchange relationships. In short, a segment of the 'intellectuals' of the bourgeoisie come over to the proletarian wage slaves.

The proletariat itself evolves as a class through the stage of primitive elemental revolt at being driven into the capitalist industrial hell-holes to the stage of organising itself in combinations to get 'fair' wages, and then to the stage of banding itself together for political objectives. It develops various political traditions. In Britain the world's first mass working class movement

grouped around the demand for the franchise, which meant, in the conditions then, the right to take power. In France a tradition of communist insurrection, involving sections of the proletariat, developed. It was rooted in the left wing of the great bourgeois revolution. A tradition, experience and theory of working class politics developed. Marx and Engels put a 'floor' of a theory of the evolution of society (evolution including revolutions at turning points) under the once-utopian aspirations of the early working class movements.

These developments, in the course of the experience of the 1st, 2nd, and early 3rd Internationals, produced the following solution to the problem posed by the peculiarities of the proletariat as a class.

Instead of control of a portion of the means of production, the working class develops its own organisations. Within these organisations a struggle takes place between the ideas that represent the historic interests of the proletariat - Marxism - and the ideas of the bourgeoisie. This struggle occurs even where Marxists are the founders of the labour movement.

The working class is everywhere forced by its conditions under capitalism to struggle for the basics of life. This struggle tends to break down the power of the ideology of the ruling class. At its highest point, in times of tumult, it can escalate to mobilisations involving the class as a class, and to a spontaneous socialist consciousness capable of being linked through the work of a pre-organised and educated vanguard with a scientific strategy.

The revolutionary party is the protagonist in the work of struggling to emancipate the proletariat ideologically and to organise it for its own interests, as a 'class for itself'.

The revolutionary party has as its central task to achieve the political and organisational independence of the working class. It needs the organisational sinews of a body of socialists organised for combat - all the way from the struggle on a trade union level at the point of production through to organising an armed insurrection. But it is centrally, irreplaceably, and uniquely, the carrier of a system of ideas, a world outlook, a socialist programme, a method of analysing the world and society which serves the interests of the working class.

Only the conscious struggle of the living Marxists, reacting specifically and concretely, focusing and redefining Marxism, can make of Marxism a consistently revolutionary instrument for the working class, for separating out and maintaining scientific consciousness in the revolutionary working class. If there is no irreplaceable function of this type for the Leninist party, then there is no need for our party. Were it not for the ideological task of the revolutionary party of the working class, were it not for the peculiar problems of the proletariat in that respect, then the working class could be expected to improvise the necessary organisation for the seizure of power, as the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie have done. If all the proletariat needs is an organisation, then the tightly knit revolutionary organisations are just sects, premature and almost certainly irrelevant.

If what the proletariat needs is a machine - then it does not need to have its militants labouring for decades in advance of the maturation of the situation where it requires an uprising.

The consequences of this are that our party is in the first place and irreplaceably a selection of politically conscious militants committed to activity in the struggles for the party's goals. It must thus be selected on the basis of a minimum of political education and knowledge, and commitment.

If it is to be a party which is a living organ in the class struggle, then it must try to integrate itself in all the areas of the class struggle. If it is to be a party whose deliberations correspond to experience in the struggles of the working class, then it has to be a party of activists - of people with a minimum of commitment to the struggle. That commitment, under the direct control of the party, must be a condition of participation in the party's deliberations - that is, of full membership.

of full membership.

It has to be a party of the proletariat, but it is not identical to the proletariat: it must be capable of standing against the proletariat and of struggling within it when the mass of the working class is under the influence or domination of the ruling class. Its proletarian political character depends in the first place on its programme and its historical relation to the proletariat; a proletarian character in the crude sociological sense is not sufficient and in some epochs may not be possible.

The proletarian party without a mass working class membership organised at the point of production and deploying the power which the working class potentially has at the point of production, is impotent; proletarian militancy at the point of production devoid of the historical programme of working class socialism and perspectives for achieving it, is sterile and ultimately impotent.

The party is 'the vanguard of the class' - a selection of the most militant, educated, devoted persons in the working class, and ^{among} its sympathisers and protagonists from other social strata. Within the party, a similar unevenness in education, experience, commitment to that which characterises the relationship between the party as a whole and the class, emerges between leading layers and the rest of the organisation.

Certain organisational structures flow from this: the party, when it chooses to, cuts itself off from the class, though ultimately it is subject to the class and can have no interests separate from it and can achieve none of its objectives without its activity. The National Committee and its subsidiaries within the party cut themselves off from the party where necessary to deliberate and discuss - though ultimately they must submit to the control of the party and can do nothing without it. There is a whole literature on these questions.

- V -

What does all this mean for the WSL now and for the future, and what does it say about the problems of the last 18 months.

a) We have a totally inadequate system of education of new members: i.e. we do not have a membership that has the elementary education necessary to a Marxist organisation. We need to restore some system of basic Marxist education. Many of the most heated disputes come from sheer misunderstanding - from us not speaking the same language.

b) We do not in fact have a system of membership in which only active members exist: we have a de facto category of inactive, or semi-active, members, and of members who do not even fulfill their basic financial commitments. Inevitably this demoralises the active members. (For example, on the week's wages levy, many of those who were up to date on their commitments felt that they were being asked to pay double and more because of those who did not meet the minimum). We do not have a reliable system of compliance with NC/EC/OC decisions.

c) We do not have an efficient national organisational structure in which an educated membership deliberates, votes, and, having taken decisions, carries them out.

d) We do not have the most elementary degree of separation of the leading committees, even for initial deliberations, from the rest of the membership. At the same time, lack of organisational structure, and freelance systems of information, mean that members are patchily and inadequately informed of decisions and discussions in the organisation.

e) We do not have a system of resolving differences politically on the basis of structured discussion.

f) We have, to crown all this, a central day to day leadership which not only has different standards within it on the points above, but is unintegrated and often divided.

The reason why we do not recruit is because of the chaos described above, which means that we are still in the process of struggling for a WSL which is minimally modelled on the Bolsheviks and the Trotskyist movement in Trotsky's time.

- VI -

To favour a looser structure for the sake of being able to recruit workers is short sighted. Loose standards of discipline in a revolutionary organisation make it uninhabitable for workers.

A regime of hyper-activism and 'permanent emergency', in the Healyite style, is equally destructive. But the answer is a regime where discipline and reliability are demanded and ensured on the basis of education and rational political perspectives.

Where there is no adequate education, and no system of generally enforced and understood norms, discipline becomes an arbitrary and subjective matter. Effort is wasted: arrangements miscarry, meetings are chaotic, some comrades are overworked trying to cope with the mess, others are under-utilised. Inefficiency leads to more waste of effort through recriminations. Such a regime is uninhabitable for most workers.

- VII -

Youth work is a crucial area for recruitment, especially working class recruitment. The experience of both the SLL in the early '60s and the Militant in the early '70s indicates that work through the J. is perhaps the major opening that the British labour movement (at present) offers for working class recruitment.

Efforts to recruit or win influence over established activists in the labour movement are also vital for us. The existing left current in the labour movement cannot be bypassed. Yes, it is weak and limited in many ways. But it is the political 'active minority' that exists, and it is massively more powerful than we are.

We must seek to win over a segment of it, and neutralise the rest - as far as we can. Otherwise someone else will win it over, and it will be consolidated as a force against us (as the Spanish Socialist youth in the '30s, who had declared for a Fourth International, were won to the Stalinists, and became a force against the revolutionaries who had neglected them through sectarianism under cover of a concern for the 'broader masses'). Or if the existing left current is completely dispersed, then the whole development of the British labour movement will be set back a long time, and us with it.

However, we cannot confine ourselves to the established activists. We must be constantly looking to new struggles and new activists coming from them. And quite likely in the short term raw youth will be a bigger proportion of our recruits.

This demands more resources to youth work, and implementation of the policy of 'Wiganisation'.

It also demands a disciplined organisation. Working class youth new to revolutionary politics, eager to learn, eager to get things done quickly, are the first to be repelled by a regime of bickering, routinism, and muddling along. It requires a proper system of education of contacts and members: otherwise the energy of revolutionary youth can quickly spend itself in demoralisation.

- VIII -

To recruit we need contact work - that is, intensive discussion and education work with contacts to convince them. Starting from a perhaps limited area of agreement on practical work, or agreement with a WSL position, we have to work to convince contacts of what we are trying to do, and, on the basis of this, of the irreplaceability of the WSL and the need for them to join it and take up the responsibility of one of its militants to build it. Organisational chaos, lack of basic Marxist education, lack of education or agreement on our policies and

perspectives, prevent many of our comrades from being able to convince our contacts (and mean that many probably don't even try much - instead 'ticking over' in routine labour movement activity). We have no systematic drive to work through our basic politics with contacts and recruit them.

Yet this is a fundamental part of our work - in historical terms. The chaos in the organisation and the tendency to break down into unintegrated constituencies means that we lose the chance of appealing to one-sidedly TU or O militants on the basis of being an integrated and coherent party which links the various segments of struggle. Above all we fail to convince many of our comrades that the WSL is irreplaceable - and naturally this reduces the pull these comrades can have on our periphery.

The devotion of the militant to the party is the product of such a conviction. Sects achieve it by way of a paranoid counterposition of themselves to the rest of the world, and in particular the rest of the labour movement and the left. It is achieved in a serious organisation by way of the education of the militants in a revolutionary outlook and psychology, and a devotion to the organisation as the embodiment of this; instead of the sticky substances of sectarianism you get rational devotion. This presupposes an educated cadre which collectively applies the standards of minimum activity, comradely relations in discussion, etc.

- IX -

Antonio Gramsci pointed out that the Catholic Church does not maintain its ideological unity "by bringing the 'simple people' up to the level of the intellectuals (the Church does not even set itself this task...), but by an iron discipline over the intellectuals so that they do not pass beyond certain limits of differentiation..."

"Marxism is antithetical to this Catholic position: Marxism does not seek to sustain the 'simple people' in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but instead of lead them to a higher view of life. If it asserts the need for contact between the intellectuals and the simple people it does so, not in order to limit scientific activity and maintain unity at the low level of the masses, but precisely in order to build an intellectual-moral bloc which makes politically possible the intellectual progress of the masses and not only of a few groups of intellectuals..."

"(This) means working to produce cadres of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses though remaining in contact with them and becoming 'the stay of the corset'..."

Thus Marxists aim to build a party in which the division between 'workers' and 'intellectuals' is broken down by workers becoming 'intellectuals' and by 'intellectuals' from non-worker backgrounds being tied by party discipline to activity in the working class.

- X - (for voting)

We need to do the following:

A. Make contact work a major routine activity of all branches. Each branch organiser must compile and maintain a branch contact file. Each comrade should have a list of contacts - maybe only one or two - whom s/he sees at least weekly to get them the paper and discuss. Each branch meeting should monitor progress on contacts.

The leading committees should discuss preparations - circulars, notes for guidance, internal meetings - for this turn.

B. Draw up a basic reading list for all comrades. Start classes for members and contacts on the basis of this list.

C. Initiate a series of discussions, beginning on the NC, on the party norms of our movement and key texts of Trotsky and Cannon.

D. Rationalise our organisational structures, starting from the top. We need to establish a proper central office, an organisational machine, over which the leading committees should function as a political leadership. In the branches and fractions, we need 'one person management' - in each situation, one person able to take decisions, give instructions, and be held to account.

E. Formally reaffirm the document adopted at our fusion conference on 'Obligations of Membership' (this will be republished).

F. Enforce it. Branches should review their membership, call to account all comrades not fulfilling their obligations, and lapse members who fail to respond adequately. New recruits should be required to work with us (selling the paper etc.) for a period before being admitted to candidate membership. No candidate member should be admitted to full membership unless s/he has fulfilled all the basic obligations of membership.

AMENDMENTS TO JOPLIN'S DOCUMENT ON STUDENT WORK

P

PAGE 2 paragraph 2
delete 'Clearly the Militant.....sexual politics'

replace by:

The Militant nominally have a labour movement orientation. In practice what this means is abstention on the immediate struggles of students, or right wing passivity on campaigning issues. In addition they are unable to operate in a student movement with some degree of sophistication on particular issues, especially sexual politics.

The IMG's student fraction has collapsed. It's erstwhile front (now independant from it) the SSA barely exists outside of NUS conferences. The SMP's mindless 'occupy anything that moves' mentality fails to relate to anybody except in colleges where they are traditionally strong. However they are better than us at getting strikers to speak at student union meetings etc. We need to rectify this.

PAGE 3 after paragraph 4 'independant group in NOLS' ADD:

The existing state of the student movement and the problems facing student militants have not been adequately assessed by the left - including by those section of the far left that in the past had an excessive orientation towards students.

The problems facing the working class at national and shop floor level are reflected in, and themselves have an effect upon, the problems facing students - although we reject the view that student militancy has no autonomous dynamic and is merely a function of worker's militancy.

The current situation facing students is severe, and the student movement at national and college level faces a serious crisis in perspectives. This is because:

1/ Earlier traditions of 'student radicalism' in the late 60's/early 70's over international issues (Vietnam, South Africa) are dead. The heady days of '68' have no reflection at all amongst students today.

2/ More recent developments in student activity have been over more direct, immediate questions (overseas students, cuts), for which NUS has lacked any coherent strategy.

3/ Despite considerable militancy by broad section of the student movement, these campaigns with rare exceptions (and then because of sympathetic college administration) have failed to win. A whole break in the pattern of defeats was the retraction of the first Tory proposals, but similar proposals have already been put forward and stand the possibility of implementation.

4/ The defeat on the overseas students question in 1979 has led to the virtual disappearance of a particular militant layer of students (ie. the overseas students themselves).

5) The system of union funding in operation since 1981 has forced college unions into defensive positions, and already enormously hampered local campaigning activity, e.g. against cuts.

6/ NUS remains highly disorganised in the FE sector.

7/ Both the old Left Alliance leadership and the present NOLS leadership of NUS has hindered local campaigns, particularly against cuts - although the NOLS leadership's failure has been more it's lack of a coherent strategy than any decisive sell-outs.

8/ All these combined and in particular the annual failure of the major campaigns, make it almost impossible to re-involve last years militants.

The student movement now faces a series of major attacks: the proposed loans system, the combined deepening cuts in education, and the possibility of the collapse of the 'closed shop' in tune with attacks on trade unions.

The NUS Day of Action on February 23rd posed a potential breakthrough in terms of organising national action. (Further amendment to follow on an assessment of Feb 23rd.)

The WSL recognises that it is extremely difficult for students to win anything but the most minor concessions without developments on the industrial front in the class struggle. We can, of course, make links with even the smallest industrial dispute, But any perspective on resisting cuts in education DEPENDS on a generalised class assault with which to connect student struggles.

This does not, of course, mean that students must WAIT for the working class to move, and we are in favour of and argue for, the most militant possible direct action by students. It is of course possible to defeat particular cuts in particular colleges and we should not be overly pessimistic in struggles over immediate specific cuts. However we are opposed to, and argue against any illusions in the possibility of students action 'going it alone'. Concretely this means:

- 1/ Our position on, eg. the call for or duration of a particular occupation depends upon our assessment of
 - a) The number of students involved and the potential of involving more students;
 - b) The extent of campus and local labour movement support and the potential for winning short-term concessions.
 - c) The possible negative effects of either staying in or going out.
 - d) The national situation, the existence or real potential of other similar action by students elsewhere.

Further we are opposed to SWP type arguments that 'indefinite occupations' are the sole viable tactic. We are equally opposed to Militant type arguments that occupations are impossible without prior full trade union backing. Faced, as is often the case, with support from some unions and opposition from others, we must assess the actual situation. We neither capitulate to particular reactionary union opposition if other more militant unions support the students (as happened in Manchester 1982), nor argue that union opposition is irrelevant and that 'we can win the workers over through action' (a la SWP).

More generally we are in favour of building support amongst students for local labour movement campaigns against cuts.

In the present conditions of overall lack of direction in the student movement, we recognise that if students are to win anything, all campaigns must be turned outwards to the labour movement. We should attempt to break students out of the campaigning mentality that focuses only in the student union building and the halls of residence, and make connections with local campaigns on racism, cuts, international questions etc.

We recognise the enormous importance for the student movement of returning a Labour government, and the particular potential for involving student CND groups in an alternative election campaign.

PAGE 4 para2 (after 'from student work') ADD.

At the forthcoming NOLS conference we will transfer to Militant in all cases with the possible exception of Women's officer depending upon the candidate. We recognise the bureaucratic and Stalinist character of the existing NOLS leadership and see breaking their domination as a central task for us in NOLS.

We reject as pathologically sectarian the idea that we should vote for Clause 4 because they are in the leadership of NUS, as this subordinates the tasks facing NOLS students to a manoeuvre designed to maintain the credibility of part of our present perspective for students.

We also reject the view that our role in NOLS is 'to hold the balance of power' on the NOLS NC. We cannot subordinate the overall task of defeating the Clause 4 leadership to bureaucratic/tactical manoeuvres.

ADD AT END

The extent to which students comrades involve themselves in day to day student politics must be assessed by each branch/broad group.

ELLIS

Workers Socialist League,
PO Box 135,
London N1.

Socialist League,
Upper St.,
London N1.

March 28, 1983.

Dear Comrades,

Thankyou for your letter setting out your proposals for discussions between our two organisations. We are indeed willing to discuss the possibility of unity, and immediately to begin joint work wherever this proves possible. Our proposals include a joint discussion bulletin to get the exchange of views under way.

But, in keeping with Leninist tradition, we should begin from each side with a clear statement of the differences that exist between us - differences which involve principled questions both of tactics and strategy, and which your letter appears to minimise or avoid. We do so not to rule out unity, but to spell out clearly for our respective memberships the issues that must be confronted if unity is to be achieved.

1) We assess the SL, and the United Secretariat of which you are a part, not merely from your written texts (with which we certainly have numerous substantial disagreements) but also from your practice in the class struggle. It is no secret that, over many years, your line of analysis, orientation and tactical approach has repeatedly led you to adopt positions which we regard as inconsistent with revolutionary Marxism, and brought your organisation into political conflict - and seldom political agreement - with the organisations which fused to create the present WSL.

2) Your letter suggests that we debate in closer detail on some of the more recent differences that have arisen - over work on Palestine, BL, etc. We are of course prepared to conduct such discussions. But we feel that the consistent pattern of tactical disagreements suggests that more fundamental issues are involved than minor differences of assessment of this or that particular campaign.

Discussions between the SL and WSL which seriously attempt to lay a principled basis for unity must probe more deeply, to the political method of your organisation and ours in the class struggle. We believe that our tactical differences in Britain are related to three main problems:

(a) The question of how Marxists should relate to prominent and leading left wing figures and sections of the bureaucracy of the labour movement. The sharpest differences between the IMG and the WSL in the recent period have centred on what we consider to be the IMG's opportunist attitude towards Stalinist convenor Mick Byrne in the Leyland Vehicles strike; the soft line taken by the IMG towards Ken Livingstone on questions including the Tube pay dispute; and your failure to take a firm line in opposition to Ted Knight's manipulation of the LCP conference.

In our view these differences are linked, and related to your general orientation, which embodies an opportunist retreat from the necessary fight within the left wing of the labour movement for the programme and perspective of Trotskyism.

(b) The IMG/SL method in relation to the left, which we see as political adaptation to a chosen milieu. As your comrades pointed out at our first joint leadership meeting, your proposal for fusion with the WSL is simply a (subordinate) part of the main SL turn - towards the MP. One comrade compared this "turn" to your previous attempts to fuse with the British SWP in the late 1970s. In our opinion that "turn" resulted in the IMG succumbing to and echoing the political weaknesses of the SWP - most obviously its sectarian abstentionist position towards the Labour Party and its soft line towards the British CP. During that period you pursued the fight for "unity" not by a clear political struggle for your positions, but by soft-pedaling the differences. We wait to see in practice whether this same method will produce a new political turn - to the right - following the SL's latest change of orientation towards the left in the MP.

(c) The question of how to conduct international solidarity work and more generally the building of broad campaign organisations has been a third recurrent facet of the differences between us.

We should discuss these differences not as a series of isolated examples, but in the general context of the orientation of both our organisations towards the class struggle and the workers' movement.

3) Your letter speaks of what you see as a "political convergence" between the SL and WSL, and cites the Malvinas issue as an example. We are not convinced. Indeed, a real discussion on the Malvinas issue would reveal substantial differences in approach between the SL and the majority position of the WSL. One obvious example of this was the attitude of the IMG/USFI to the Argentine junta's participation in the "Non-Aligned" summit. Another is the way in which your analysis of the Malvinas war flowed from your analysis of events in Central America - an analysis we do not accept. In any event, the SL leadership knows very well that the majority holding the present WSL position on the Malvinas is not a large one.

4) The Malvinas is not the only international issue on which we have differences. Though we do not consider the USFI to be the Fourth International, we have nevertheless been particularly concerned at what we regard as a totally inadequate political struggle by the majority of the SL and the USFI against the large, vocal and public minority within your organisation, politically led by the American SWP, which embraces wholesale the politics of Castroism, and has mounted an increasingly open political and theoretical attack on the foundations of Trotskyism. We have seen and remarked upon instances of political adaptation to these Castroites by the USFI majority. But we have seen no evidence that majority comrades in the USFI are currently fighting the necessary political and ideological battle to defend your organisation - and Trotskyist politics - against liquidation into a populist and pernicious form of Stalinism. It would appear, therefore, that we have a difference not only with the Castroite minority, but also with the majority of the USFI on this question.

This overshadows, but does not negate a number of specific political differences we have on other international questions. Not least, we are concerned at the USFI's history of evading the necessary balance sheets on its past disagreements and practical failures - most notably Portugal - since only through such assessments of past practice can Marxists learn from their work and avoid repetition of mistakes.

If discussions between the SL and WSL are to make any progress, then there must be a willingness on both sides to spell out differences clearly and draw balance sheets on our past practice.

5) If your proposal for fusion is to be pursued, therefore, these differences of position and political method must be confronted. Probably there are additional points from your side which would also need to be addressed. We propose that we launch a joint discussion bulletin, which should raise the level of debate on these issues in the context of a programme of joint work. In this way we can probe the extent of our agreement and disagreement, and set out formal agreement in the class struggle.

6) We therefore accept your four proposals for joint work (some of which are already in progress). And we in addition propose specifically: (a) joint work of our youth comrades to build the "YS for YCND" campaign and Gay LPYS; (b) joint campaign work on Palestine and Poland; (c) work in the NHS unions against cuts and privatisation; (d) a renewed joint initiative on Ireland through the LCI to follow on the successful Plastic Bullets conference and the Livingstone visit to Belfast.

7) Finally we should refer to the framework of discussion necessary to assist clarification and establishment of the mutual confidence and respect that would be vital if fusion were to be contemplated. We have been concerned by the way a number of our branches and individual comrades have been approached by SL comrades at local level for discussions before any national framework for

debate has been established by our two leaderships.

Our experience in having conducted a major fusion in Britain convinces us that if we are to conduct a serious discussion, then it is necessary to coordinate leadership meetings and discussions with the development of the written dialogue and properly convened area meetings.

Unless we can structure it in this way, the whole exercise could degenerate into a sequence of manoeuvres on each side. This would fail to yield any political clarification, but would rather reinforce the mutual suspicions, organisational antagonisms and political divisions which have separated our two movements for so many years, and sour the atmosphere for the necessary joint work.

We trust that we can mutually agree a structure which will avoid such dangers, and create the best conditions for both sides to explore how much of a political basis exists for unity.

Yours fraternally,

John Lister
For the Organising Committee,
Workers Socialist League.

LETTER FROM THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE (dated 23.2.83)

I am writing to you on behalf of the SL's Political Committee to confirm the results of our meeting on 9 February.

1. The representatives of the WSL explained that they were there to listen to our proposals and that the WSL has not adopted a characterisation of the SL nor an attitude to our fusion proposal. They asked us to explain our proposals in writing.

The basis on which we are proposing fusion with the WSL is as follows:

a) We characterise the WSL as a revolutionary marxist organisation. We stand for the unification of all revolutionary marxist forces in a single revolutionary international.

b) We believe that the Malvinas war constituted a decisive test for the British left. The fact that the final position of the WSL was essentially identical with that of the IMG marked objectively a programmatic convergence of our organisations.

c) The decision of the SL conference to support the launch of a new newspaper within the Labour Party - Socialist Action - will ensure that over the next period the relations between the WSL and SL will become an increasingly practical question for the supporters of both organisations. In the view of the Socialist League the most effective means to ensure that our supporters collaborate in fighting for a revolutionary marxist programme within the labour movement is through a systematic process of joint work and political discussion within the framework of the objective of fusion of the two organisations.

2. The representatives of the WSL asked about our views of existing political differences between our organisations and in particular the positions of the minority of the WSL at our last conference(*).

In the view of the SL our discussions will necessarily have to include the chief outstanding political differences. We believe the most important of these to be the question of the Fourth International. But we are firmly of the opinion that discussion between the WSL and the SL must centre on the existing public positions of our organisations and not of minorities within them or past positions. This is the basis on which we will approach discussions with the WSL and we would expect the WSL to approach the SL in the same way.

3. The representatives of the WSL asked whether or not we considered joint work possible in the light of disputes between our organisations on such questions as the Leyland Action Committee, the Labour Committee on Palestine and Polish solidarity.

The view of the SL is that none of these disputes preclude either joint work or fusion. We are prepared to directly discuss all such disputes.

4. The representatives of the SL explained our proposals for joint work as follows:

a) Joint work around a socialist campaign for a labour victory in the run-up to the general election;

b) Joint work around Labour Against the Witch-hunt;

c) Joint work in industry in particular around British Leyland;

d) Joint work in building the LPYS conference and the Youth CND Festival in May.

In all cases we think the best way to conduct such work is through regular meetings between the relevant comrades from each organisation as

* Presumably a typing error for "... minority of the SL..."

well as meetings between representatives of our respective leaderships.

We have already had fruitful local experiences of joint work, for example around the North West march to last year's LP conference, we think that these should be pursued locally between branches of our organisations.

Through such a process of joint work we think that a degree of trust can be built between the comrades of each organisation. We don't think that the many tactical differences that will undoubtedly emerge should be an obstacle to this, rather they are a product of the long separate existence of our organisations.

5. In order to pursue the political discussion between our organisations we proposed that we establish regular leadership meetings, the first of which should raw up a programme of such discussions.

We may wish for the discussion on certain points to be conducted publicly in our theoretical journals, but this is something which can be judged from the standpoint of how best to advance the progress towards political clarification and agreement.

Following your conference last weekend we would like to arrange the earliest possible meeting in order to hear from you its results and to decide on the next steps in carrying through the process of joint work and discussion which in our opinion can lay the practical basis for fusion of our organisations. For ourselves the framework within which we will approach this is that of seeking the earliest practicable fusion of our forces into a single organisation.

Revolutionary greetings, David Biggs.

NEW TECHNOLOGY. IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR PROGRAMME.

Please note that I've made some revisions since I put this forward as an addendum to the 'industrial perspectives document at conference. There are some particularly significant additions at the end of 1, 4, and 5. I hope these proposals are RELATED to the CURRENT DEBATES ON HOW WE USE OUR PROGRAMME. Let's develop a programme that is in touch with the times. I expect additions and WELCOME IMPROVEMENTS. If at all possible branches should discuss this in detail BEFORE THE NEXT N.C.

McInnis. Edinburgh.

The development of technology over recent decades has had far-reaching social, cultural and political effects. Particularly the recent rapid development of video, computer and information technology, together with changes in media techniques are altering the character and consciousness of the working-class. They also form part of a change in the methods of the ruling class. We agree to analyse the implications of these developments in order that we more fully understand the changes taking place in our society and so develop our own programme in a way that is more relevant to the actual lives of working class and oppressed people.

The National Committee will initiate discussion throughout the organisation, and in the paper and magazine, which will include analysis of the following:

1. Changes in the make-up of the working-class as a result of different employment patterns which result from New technology and the restructuring of industry. This alters the economic position and comparative power of various groups of workers. We should examine changes in the position of office workers, miners, factory workers. We should look at the position of computer programmers, electrical power engineers etc. We should also examine in particular the implications for women workers.
2. These changes also effect management, giving rise to problems with their traditional structures, lots of confusion, and attempts to develop new ways of weakening workers organisations. We must see how management is adapting and will continue to adapt to computerisation.
3. The introduction of more advanced technology may result in severe changes in working conditions. As well as being used to cause more lay-offs, computer technology can lead to increasing surveillance, control and deskilling. We must examine ways of resisting its misapplication from workers' point of view, and making use of management's weaknesses.
4. New technology could develop in many different ways, in creative or destructive directions. Technology is not neutral but each form of technology has specific effects which depend only partially on how it is used...

...For this reason we should look at the whole question of alternative technology, not just in relation to the arms industry and nuclear industry but also in relation to the closure of industries and expansion of the Public Sector. If the demand for/ creation of alternatives and the transference of skills can be integrated into this fight, any feasible strategy cannot be confused with alternative methods of reforming the Capitalist economy. It would have to be linked with the idea of 'AN ALTERNATIVE WORKING CLASS PLAN OF PRODUCTION'.

5. Unless there is a much more coherent and offensive Labour Movement intervention, businesses will be able to go on cutting back as will the public sector. Defensive resistance alone are insufficient to prevent closures and lay-offs, as technology continues to develop and the world economy continues its crises. Nor is the fight for shorter hours alone sufficient to deal with the scale of the problem. Therefore we need to develop a more farsighted strategy of opposition and positive proposals based on actual resources and the needs of working-class communities; This would have to be combined with a forthright fight for the development of community based Public Services to bridge the gap between the unemployed and employed. In this way the fight against the cuts could be made more directly relevant to the working class. We should consider giving a lot of importance for the demand for free access to computer and video equipment for creative, educational and other uses with free training in their use in every local community. Why not combine the many relevant vital demands on housing, health, education and other facilities into 'AN ALTERNATIVE WORKING-CLASS SOCIAL-PLAN'.

6. We must assess the overall social effects of video, media techniques and information technology and consider how the Labour Movement could be relating to such developments. We'd also be wise to work out ways to make more use of them ourselves.

7. The state continues to develop its subtle and less than subtle methods of surveillance and control. The special sections of the armed forces are trained in methods and weapons which could be very lethal at times of working-class upheaval. We should avoid underestimating these developments if we believe there can be a successful revolutionary movement. It would also be a mistake to overestimate their power to control the working class, if adequate countermeasures are developed. We have to consider the practical implications of that, rapidly, as the state seems to be well prepared to clamp down with force when our movement starts a concerted return to a fighting attitude, which is after all what we are working for.

19/3/83.

I have been approached by someone who is interested in forming a commission to discuss 'New technology'. If anyone else is interested please let me know and we can get it set up by the next N.C. In the meantime LETS GET THE DISCUSSION GOING ANYWAY. Letters, scribbles and other reactions are always replied to in one way or another.