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"How not to build the WSL"

(Part 1 of a reply to Carolan and Kinnell in IB50)

. . . . . Jones.

Two resolutions on work amongst women ..... Smith.

Further resolutions, amendments, discussion articles, etc,  
should be sent to the Centre, if possible typed A4 on Roneo  
stencils.

Comrades are asked to contribute  
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The first thing to say about Kinnell's and Carolan's document is that it covers positions on absolutely everything that is going on inside the W.S.L., as well as presenting their theoretical approach to the party, all in 6 pages. It would take at least a 2-day conference just to discuss and vote on this, even if we only voted on the 'practical proposals'.

### 1) Theoretical approach

Because it tries to cram so much into such a short space, the theoretical approach is in my opinion loose. For example, on page 2: "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..." It is true that on one side bourgeois social science is "the basis", but it is also in contradiction to it that Marxism is developed. I.e. there is a relationship between the revolutionary party and the development of Marxism that is active, in that the party is struggling to "change the world". "This is what Marx called 'revolutionary practice'".

The "intellectuals", even in Marx's time, did not just have bourgeois social science, they had the French Revolution (or rather the left wing of it), and they had the struggles of the working class which were part of their thinking.

I would be prepared to see what I have said above being described as nit-picking, if what I would term "looseness" did not fit in with the direction of the document. This "lesson" in the history of Marxism which teaches nothing can only be intended to fit in with the later arguments about the sociological make-up of the party being irrelevant. I will deal with that later.

### 2) Method

I want to deal in some detail with the methodological approach of the document, and use one particular example. In the document there are contradictory statements. In amongst many statements of orthodoxy are revisions of Marxism. These revisions reveal to me the true position. This method of orthodox writings, within which there are wrong statements, I think reveals the problem of what we are dealing with.

Over many years of revolutionary activity, sometimes up to 20 years, within which capitalism hasn't collapsed or been overthrown and within which the social democratic and T.U. bureaucracy has maintained its place in society, great pressure is placed on the thinking of activists. This is a conservative pressure. It does not necessarily mean that they become reformists, although many outside the party do. It does not mean that they see socialism as something for May Day or the far distant future. What it does mean is that the apparent stability of capitalism and its institutions, like the trade unions and the Labourites, creates pressures.

For some, this means going to sectarian propaganda. For others, it means a form of routinism. Of correctly seeing the Labour Party as a major question facing the working class, but drawing from this not only the correct necessity of working within its structures, but actually centering all our work on it, in a fixed way.

This in practice is getting over-involved in the minutiae of developments and not seeing the basic economic and political developments that will affect those developments. Everything then starts from developments within the reformist structures, i.e. the 'mentality' of the workers and not the objective conditions.

Formally, the comrades would present a different assessment; in practice. I think this is the case.



## Socialist Consciousness

The example I want to use is from the fourth paragraph on page 3: "The working class is everywhere forced by its conditions under capitalism to struggle for the basis 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".

This concept of a "spontaneous socialist consciousness" is entirely **wrong**. It goes against much of what is in the rest of the document with regard to the struggle of Marxists. But does it really? Look again. Four questions spring to mind.

Firstly, and I think most important: If the working class rises to a "spontaneous socialist consciousness", what is the "scientific strategy" of the party? Can it be that the party is an organiser of what is? The working class arises to socialist consciousness, then it simply needs organising for power, at its already achieved political level.

Secondly, and related, what is the working class (I don't mean sociologically)? Is it the rank and file, or the rank and file plus middle leadership, or does it include the likes of Scargill, Race etc. If it does include the latter, then our task really is "organising the left". Or, alternatively, presenting them with a strategy!

Thirdly, where does the Transitional Programme as a "bridge" come in? We will build a bridge for people who can swim across!

Fourthly, what is the organisational form of this consciousness? Is it the Labour Party in a higher form? Or even its present form? I don't think the comrades think this, but it does need answering. All these questions are related, particularly the form and leadership.

### Lenin

The comrades argue for a Leninist party, and yet in his works on the party, Lenin strongly attacks the above formulations. Just look at the works around the 1903 Congress. In What is to be Done, Lenin quotes Kautsky:

"Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without" (p.40), and he says himself, "Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of the movement, the only choice is - either bourgeois or socialist ideology" (p.40). He goes on to argue that our task is to "combat spontaneity".

In a footnote on page 42, he says, "It is often said that the working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism. This is perfectly true in the sense that socialist theory reveals the causes of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and for that reason the workers are able to assimilate it so easily, provided it subordinates spontaneity to itself."

Or, "The spontaneous working class movement is by itself able to create (and inevitably does create) only trade unionism, and working class trade unionist politics is precisely working class bourgeois politics. The fact that the working class participates in the political struggle, and even in the political revolution, does not in itself make its politics Social Democratic politics" (i.e. Communist) - p. 94.

You can get an idea of what Lenin was preparing his arguments against in the minutes of the 1903 Congress. For example, in the conflict over programme on p.141, Martynov (or Merrheuil) argues about the "inevitable tendency of the proletariat to fight for socialism".



In replying, Lenin makes the point that he "bent the stick in the other direction" as regards his arguments, but endorses What is to be Done, and clarifies that "the working class movement is drawn towards the bourgeois outlook with the benevolent assistance of the Schulze-Delitsches and 'their like'." (p.169) In other words, he does relate the struggle against bourgeois ideologies to the struggle for leadership.

### What is politics?

You will notice that Lenin uses the term "working class movement". I would argue this is the same as "labour movement", and that all that applies to the one, with regard to being drawn to the bourgeois outlook, applies to the other too.

At another point in What is to be Done, Lenin speaks about the way the "educated radicals or liberal constitutionalists" see their role: "It is our task, the task of the progressive representatives of bourgeois democracy, to lend the workers' economic struggle itself a political character" (p.83). This obviously is very little different from the leadership of the Labour Party. As Lenin argues, "There are politics and politics" - reformist trade unionism, which merely separates out the workers from the employer in a defensive sense within the system is no different politically from reformist parliamentary politics which does the same within the system. Spontaneity cannot be compartmentalised into the trade unions, it is there in reformist 'politics'.

It is a step forward that workers think in general trade union terms, and also in general 'political' terms. But this does not make the politics of either right. They are both within the system and have to be fought. And it is the same political fight against reforming the system.

How did Lenin see fighting for his politics in the trade unions? The Mensheviks accused the Bolsheviks of "setting up their programme against the movement, like a spirit hovering over the formless chaos". "But what else is the formation of social democracy, if not to be a 'spirit' that not only hovers over the spontaneous movement, but also raises this movement to the level of its programme? Surely, it is not its function to drag at the tail of the movement" (p.52). In other words, this is a "political" struggle for programme in a revolutionary sense.

When we are talking about political struggles, we have to be careful about not using this in an abstract, and thus bourgeois, sense. When Trotsky, for example, argued for a Labour party in the U.S., he argued that it would give greater opportunity to present our programme. Notice he said that in a mass meeting, 5 workers would accept what we said directly as the S.W.P., but 500 in the form of the Labour Party. "The first slogan prepares and helps the workers to advance, and prepares the path for our party" (p.134, TP).

But he did not differentiate between the fights - it was all for our "politics" or "our programme". The fight for our programme is our "politics". If a reformist fights for a Labour Party in the U.S., although we support and urge him or her to do it, their reasoning is because they want to limit the politics of the U.S. working class to reformism. We do it because it gives us greater opportunities to develop the U.S. working class to our programme. This is the struggle for socialist consciousness.

It is obvious that we cannot work how how we act in the Labour Party from 1903, but it does help to work out the basis of our actions.

### Trade Unionism

When we describe the struggle in the trade unions as 'political', we are arguing that this is not just our practice. I.e., it is not just the actions of revolutionaries that make it so. The 'economists' argued that this spontaneous action of the working class was 'political' - we argue something else.



First of all, it is quite obvious that from what I have said about programme above I am in opposition to the 'economists' method. But the point I want to make here is that it is obvious from what they say that Carolan/Kinnell take their assessment of work in the trade unions from the economists' viewpoint. They separate them out as 'economist' struggles and don't show that to fight for programme is to politicise these struggles. From this, they downplay the struggles in the trade unions. Having not understood Lenin's difference with the economists, they then go on to use Lenin's arguments with regard to "trade unionists struggles" against us.

We should base ourselves on Lenin's actual fight to 'politicise' the trade union struggles and work through how this has developed to today.

### The change in trade unions

Not only has there been a change with regard to the working class political parties, but also a dramatic change in the trade union movement - something that the comrades seem not to have noticed.

Trotsky drew out the main changes in his work on the trade unions. He tied the changes in to the development of monopoly capitalism. He describes the trade unions being drawn into the state:

"Monopoly capitalism does not rest on competition and free private initiative, but on centralised command. The capitalist cliques at the head of mighty trusts, syndicates, banking consortiums etc. view economic life from the very same heights as does state power; and they require at every step the collaboration of the latter. In their turn, the trade unions in the most important branches of industry find themselves deprived of the possibility of profiting by the competition among the different enterprises. They have to confront a centralised capitalist adversary, intimately bound up with state power. Hence flows the need of the trade unions - insofar as they remain on reformist positions, i.e. on positions of adapting themselves to private property - to adapt themselves to the capitalist state and to contend for its cooperation" (p.69, On the Trade Unions).

This is why he argues for our first trade union slogan being "independence from the state". But for the reasons he gives, this is a 'political' slogan - it is fought for against the bureaucracy.

This general tendency of the bureaucracy to be drawn in towards the state also creates greater attacks on democracy in the unions. So he sees the second slogan as "trade union democracy", which can only be implemented if the trade unions are free from the state. In explaining the need for this second slogan, he explains the differences since Lenin's time:

"In other words, the trade unions in the present epoch cannot simply be the organs of democracy as they were in the epoch of free capitalism, and they cannot any longer remain politically neutral, that is, limit themselves to serving the daily needs of the working class. They cannot any longer be anarchistic, i.e. ignore the decisive influence of the state on the life of the people and classes. They can no longer be reformist, because the objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms. The trade unions of our time either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. The neutrality of trade unions is completely and irretrievably a thing of the past - gone, together with free bourgeois democracy" (p.71).

For this reason, he argues the "greater" importance of work in the trade unions than in the past. He argues this because people are pulling away from them, because of the bureaucratic control making it a difficult place to work in. He calls the trade union bureaucracy the "political police" of the capitalists, and presents what to fight them with.



"In the epoch of imperialist decay, the trade unions can be really independent only to the extent that they are conscious of being, in action, the organs of proletarian revolution. In this sense, the programme of transitional demands adopted by the last congress of the Fourth International is not only the programme for the activity of the party, but in its fundamental features it is the programme for activists of the trade unions" (p.72).

This struggle to revolutionise the trade unions is 'political' - it is the fight for the programme in the trade unions. It is driven to be more and more 'political' by the centralising nature of monopoly capital. Is it just chance that government ministers make statements about greater productivity as the fight in all the factories becomes similar? No, I think Trotsky is describing the trend that we see being worked through.

It is not just the work of revolutionaries. Ours is the struggle for socialist consciousness within this movement. As workers fight for democracy in the trade unions, then we are best able to explain politically how their struggle ties in with the fight against the capitalist state and thus the need to overthrow it. Workers trained in this way, as opposed to distinct propaganda, are the life-blood of a revolutionary movement. Then we can be real communist workers.

### Within the movement

Trotsky attacks the role of the C.P. in the 'Minority Movement'. "They considered by means of personal influence upon Purnell, Hicks, Cook and the others (conversations behind the scenes, correspondence, banquets, friendly backslapping, gentle exhortations), they would gradually and imperceptibly draw the leftist opposition ("the broad current") into the bed of the Communist International" (p.36 On the Trade Unions).

This meant they subordinated the C.P. to that movement. They said that if they pushed the C.P. itself, it would mean splitting with 'Purnell and company'. To this, Trotsky replied that this shows they are not friends but 'masked enemies'. "The quicker they show their real nature, the better for the masses". All of this whilst he argued the importance of the Minority Movement, and of working within it. The Minority Movement was a mass rank and file organisation that later disappeared because of the betrayals of the CP. Yet although it was a mass movement, Trotsky argued the role of the CP betrayed the General Strike.

### 3. Sociological content

To move back to the party. One of the points Carolan/Kinnell make regarding the party is: "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" (p.4). Why is this in the document? It is followed by the description of a mass proletarian party needing a "mass working class membership". Clearly then this does not apply to us.

The WSL's "historical relation to the proletariat" is difficult to gauge, so this is meaningless. We know our programme, but does that alone make us a proletarian party? This leaves us with the question of whether we are in one of the 'epochs' within which it is not possible to have "a proletarian character in the crude sociological sense". The comrades don't answer this. But the mere fact that they put it in without answering it means that they direct away from the major problem of the WSL, and of many of those who consider themselves Trotskyist throughout the world. The lack of a working class base.

The reality is that we have lost many worker members. Similarly we have very few workers in leadership in the organisation. Add to this the attack on page 5, on the idea of having a looser structure for workers, then there is a clear trend in what they are saying. Notice, incidentally, that they use the term 'party' throughout and so they are not arguing this case solely



because of our very small size.

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In 1903, Lenin talked about "the greatest shortcoming in our movement" as "a shortage of fully conscious workers, worker leaders and worker revolutionaries" (p.169 Minutes). This at a time when he was fighting the Economists.

In regard to the rules, Lenin did separate out workers: "As regards the individuals - all those professors, high-school students etc - I would least of all have agreed to make concessions; but if doubts had been aroused as to the workers' organisations, I would have agreed (despite the utter groundlessness of such doubts, as I have proved above)" (p.70, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back).

It is clear that Lenin is not arguing for changing the rules because he doesn't think it necessary, but he would be willing to for workers. He thinks that workers are strong enough for discipline, but to him the important thing is having them in the organisation. The life blood of a revolutionary party is the working class. We do need to develop workers into the organisation and into every level of leadership. If we have to positively discriminate to do this, then we should. If the organisation is not livable in for workers, then it will be just a talking shop.

Far from directing away from the importance of the sociological nature of the organisation, we should direct towards it, and the need to change it.

The comrades like to quote from Cannon. Here is a section of the April 1940 Convention Resolution on "Organisational Conclusions of the present discussion" (pp. 235-7, Struggle for a Proletarian Party). The revolutionary party "must be composed predominantly of workers... A party of non-workers is necessarily subject to all the reactionary influences of scepticism, cynics, soul-sickness and capitulatory despair transmitted to it through its petty bourgeois environment. " "To transform the SWP into a proletarian party of action, it is not enough to continue propagandistic activities in the hope that by an automatic process workers will flock to the banner of the party."

The resolution then argues for rooting the organisation in the working class, in its "neighbourhoods" etc, and recruiting "worker militants into the ranks of the party". It then lists a series of steps. Arguing for the organisation to root itself in the factories etc. Members who can't do this should be made sympathisers.

I think comrades should read these pages to see how strong this resolution is, which came at the end of the long struggle inside the SWP. It clearly does not say that sociological content is irrelevant.

### The organisational proposals

I think that most of these present an organisational solution to a political problem. The problem of political direction of the organisation is the key to its present state.

If through the conference this can be cleared up, then in the process of struggling for our perspective, the kind of education necessary for the movement is developed, i.e. it is not just a question of a formal education. So basic reading, names of organisations and even forms of organisation do not solve the problem. If we put one comrade in charge of the women's work, for example, then that doesn't solve the problem. It is a political problem and must be sorted out politically by the movement.

It surely is not a question of calling people to account, but politically convincing them. Classes for new members are all well and good, but this is only a part of what should be the life of the organisation anyway. Many of the comrades we are talking about are not new members. They have read a lot, they know how a party organises. They are not convinced that our organisation is going in the right direction.



Two resolutions on work amongst women:

(A) This conference reasserts that democratic centralism in the WSL applies to all areas of work, including work amongst women. Consequently, all aspects of work amongst women, including WX must be controlled and conducted through the appropriate party bodies of the WSL - i.e. the women's commission (open to all women members and meeting regularly), acting under the political control of the NC, the EC and the OC.

(B) In view of the way in which the WX EGM was convened, resulting in an insufficiently representative attendance, our comrades will work in WX towards convening in the next few months of a recall EGM, AGM or similarly authoritative conference, publicly to relaunch WX on a broader and more adequate basis.

Within that conference we will seek as far as possible to establish a political balance of representation of the various views among WSL women on the various leading bodies and committees of WX.

Smith.