

INTERNAL BULLETIN NO.58

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~~DISCUSSION DOCUMENTS~~

The Age of Consent Gay caucus

A reply to IB 48 Carolan

Our proposals for unity Kinnell

Stalinism misunderstood: a reply to IB 37 Jones

What's wrong with IB 48 Carolan

The Age of Consent - Gay Caucus

This document is written in support of the section of the resolution in IB27 which refers to the age of consent. The position of the gay caucus is:

- (a) We support the abolition of the age of consent.
- (b) In the meantime, where the issue arises separately, we support equality between gay men and nongays and we support lowering of the present ages of consent.

From the discussions there have been it seems that (b) is generally agreed. (a) has been opposed by several comrades. This document presents some arguments in favour of (a) and answers those we have heard against it.

Our main reason for opposing the age of consent is that we are opposed to state limitation on consensual sex - sexual activity to which both (or all) parties involved consent. It should be stressed that we are discussing consensual sex. We are not in favour of nonconsensual sex, whatever the ages of the parties involved. We would support a tightening up of laws relating to nonconsensual sex, eg extending the legal definition of rape to cover sexual violence not involving penetration, making rape within marriage an offence.

The main arguments against our position relate to sex between adults and children. Some comrades argue that it is impossible for a child to freely give or refuse consent, given the power our society gives adults over children. Establishing consent may not be easy, but we believe it is possible and that each case where there is dispute should be judged separately, not covered by a blanket rule.

The argument against "adult-child" sex on the grounds of the power of adults over children making free consent for children impossible apply by analogy (though perhaps not to the same degree) to heterosexual sex because of the power men have over women. Noone (we hope) argues for limiting further consensual heterosexual sex. Instead we argue for stringent laws against nonconsensual sex and fight for an increase in the power of women and try to make women aware of their rights so that saying "no" to sex is an effective choice. We should adopt the same approach to "adult-child" sex.

The age of consent is a very ineffective way of combatting the inequality of power between adults and children. Several psychological tests have shown that the application of the age of consent law, with the consequent court appearances to give evidence, is far more damaging for the child than the sexual acts which occurred.

It has been argued that children have a sexuality but that it is "different" from the sexuality of adults. Hardly surprising in itself: gay sexuality is different from straight sexuality, women's sexuality is different from men's. This is used to justify support for a law which forbids children and young adults to express their sexuality in whatever ways they choose with other children and with adults.

It is recognised that any age of consent is arbitrary, that it reflects no real change. Some comrades seem to argue for an age of consent that approximates to the age of puberty. This seems to be a form of the argument against homosexuality often encountered: that it is "unnatural" because it has no reproductive potential. Thus children's sex is invalid and only after puberty is sex to be sanctioned.

The existence of an age of consent, whatever particular age it is, causes untold misery by making access to medical (eg contraception) or counselling services impossible or extremely dangerous for anyone participating in sexual activities which are illegal because of the age of one or more of the participants.

Age of consent 2

A lot of confusion arises because of our artificial separation of sexual activity from other forms of human contact. Much of the contact between a mother and her child - contact which is pleasurable for both and is seen as a part of "good mothering" - is undoubtedly sexual in nature; it would probably be condemned as "child molesting" if another adult did the same to the child.

Most of the arguments against "adult-child" sex see it solely from the point of view of the adult's pleasure and the child's consent. They ignore the fact that consensual sex can be pleasurable for the child involved. We are in favour of everyone, including children, enjoying their sexuality free from the guilt that comes from being told that consensual sex is wrong.

Noone seems to consider the sexuality of children apart from the sexuality of adults. Children do have a sexuality and find ways to express it. For example, the three people involved in the writing of this document had their first sexual experiences at the ages of 5, 8 and 9. We doubt if we are unusual in this.

The final argument to take up is that the introduction of the age of consent was a ~~progressive~~ ^{procurable} act designed to protect children from exploitation, a law reform with laws restricting the amount of paid labour children were allowed to do and one that socialists should support. On examination this appears to be only partially true.

Jeffrey Weeks ^{explains} in a recent historical book on sexuality that the age of consent was first introduced in 1885. It came as part of a reactionary, profamily response to a growth in child prostitution. The act introducing it also outlawed male homosexual behaviour in public and private. Many socialists supported these measures because of their concern over child prostitution. As a way of stopping child prostitution it was pretty ineffective since nothing was done to alter the social and economic conditions forcing children to take to prostitution. It simply made the prostitutes criminals.

The "progressive" nature of a law reform is not a timeless question. In 1885 almost everyone, including most socialists, was unable to conceive of nonconsensual sex as anything but a sin. So socialists at the time saw limiting sex for children as an advance on the previous position. We doubt if any WSL member would express the view that sex is sinful, yet some seem determined to perpetuate attitudes of this sort,

Would the comrades who see the age of consent as progressive have argued against the Bolshevik government abolishing all laws in Russia which related to consensual sex? Would they argue for the introduction of an age of consent in Norway, Italy or Portugal (none of which have one at present)?

It is difficult to believe that we are having a dispute in the organisation about whether or not there is a useful distinction to be made between trade unionism and politics. Yet that seems to be what the discussion on the LP is mainly focused on now.

Involved here is a basic and most elementary question. Yet our common stock of ideas does not seem to be large enough to allow us to discuss it in the terms in which it should be discussed, namely - what has been the classic or traditional view of our movement on this question? What has changed since?

Instead of discussing it in this comradely way, we have unbalanced, primitive, and sometimes scandalous misrepresentations and demagoguery, in IB 48 and orally.

Comrades Jones, Smith and Cunliffe say the following in IB 48, about the views of their opponents:

"(Our) approach puts general 'political' discussion in LP wards and in GNGs and parliament (sic!) above the class struggle" - p.5

They say (by calling for it to be "firmly rejected") that we hold the "notion that we (WSL) do TU work only through the LP" - p.4

They denounce us for thinking that:

"There are two wings of the indivisible labour movement - a trade union wing which is basically economic and the LP wing which in contrast is the political wing of the movement".

They say that the view that the LP is the political wing of the labour movement - the generalisation of the politics (reformist politics) of that movement -

"leads to a serious playing down of the class struggle which is the real pivot of mass working class politics... The most widespread expression of the class struggle is the daily struggle of workers against employers in defence of jobs and living standards, under conditions where they have to confront the reformist politics of their leaders".

The authors seem to see politics as single combat between the revolutionary group and the existing leadership. That economic struggles bring workers into conflict with reformist leaders means that those struggles are political. This is similar to the argument that strikes which involve clashes with the police are political - an argument on which Trotsky commented:

"An astonishing argument! The beating-up of strikers by the police is called - a revolutionary advance of the workers... In the United States, a bloody settlement with strikers is the rule. Does this mean that the workers in the US are leading the most revolutionary struggle?"

- 'The Third Period of the Comintern's Errors'.

Further IB 48 states:

"The LP was created by the TUs in order to be its voice in parliament. That does not make it 'more political' than the class struggle actions of the working class and the struggle they have to confront within the unions" (my emphasis).

"We should say dogmatically that the trade unions are not only political but highly political organisations... Their political role during the Thatcher period has been crucial to her success - both in terms of their relationship to direct struggle against the government and in terms of their role in industry".

Now all of the views and formulations quoted here, and much else in IB 48, starkly contradicts the views of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and both the early Third and Trotskyist Fourth Internationals.

Given that we do not seem to have a common political and theoretical language in which to reason it out, and that the comrades say these things in a document which is plainly concocted to act as a rallying point for a section of the organisation, the best thing to do is to appeal to 'authority' on these matters. We

ask the comrades to bear with us in a long string of quotations.

The idea that trade unionism is something less than fully political in normal circumstances is a most basic notion for us. Engels long ago defined the class struggle as existing on three fronts: the economic, political, and ideological.

IB 48 plainly defines the class struggle as only the economic struggle; other fronts of the class struggle are important only as reflections and refractions of economic struggle.

"... the class struggle", they insist, "... is the real pivot of mass working class politics".

The statement reads like a truism: class struggle is the pivot of political class struggle... In fact the comrades insist on the point because they interpret "class struggle" as "the daily struggle in defence of jobs and living standards".

Now the political struggle is not necessarily our politics - it can be liberal politics grafted onto the trade union struggle for economic self-betterment, or reformist politics which generalises onto the level of society, into parliament, the economic bargaining done at plant level by the unions. This is determined by the struggle on the ideological front, which is irreplaceably the work of the Marxist party. The contradiction between trade unionism and politics resolves itself not in a hollow pretence that they are more or less identical, or that the political struggle of revolutionaries such as ourselves for our politics makes the unions political, or that clashes between unions and the government or workers and bureaucrats do - but in the whole work of the revolutionary party.

Trade unions have a natural tendency, in a situation like Britain where the ideas of the ruling class are dominant in the working class, to become political in the liberal reformist sense.

MARX ON TRADE UNIONS:

"The working class ought not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerilla fights incessantly springing up from the never-ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes on them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economical reconstruction of society. Instead of the conservative motto, 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!', they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wages system!'..."

"Trades Unions work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system..."

- 'Wages, Price and Profit'

LENIN ON ECONOMIC STRUGGLE:

"For the socialist, the economic struggle serves as a basis for the organisation of the workers into a revolutionary party, for the strengthening and development of their class struggle against the whole capitalist system. If the economic struggle is taken as something complete in itself there will be nothing socialist in it; the experience of all European countries shows us many examples, not only of socialist, but also of anti-socialist trade unions".

- 'Apropos of the Profession de Foi'

"The only choice is - either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course... Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology... For the spontaneous working class movement is trade-unionism... and trade-unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence our task, the task of Social Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under

the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy".

- 'What is to be done'

"The question of the class struggle is one of the fundamental questions of Marxism. It is, therefore, worth while dealing with the concept of class struggle in greater detail.

"Every class struggle is a political struggle. We know that the opportunists, slaves to the ideas of liberalism, understood these profound words of Marx incorrectly and tried to put a distorted interpretation on them. Among the opportunists there were, for instance, the Economists...

"The Economists believed that any clash between classes was a political struggle. The Economists therefore recognised as 'class struggle' the struggle for a wage increase of five kopeks on the ruble, and refused to recognise a higher, more developed, nation-wide class struggle, the struggle for political aims [n.b. Lenin, here, writing about Russia, is referring to bourgeois-democratic political aims].

"The Economists, therefore, recognised the embryonic class struggle but did not recognise it in its developed form. The Economists recognised, in other words, only that part of the class struggle that was more tolerable to the liberal bourgeoisie, they refused to go farther than the liberals, they refused to recognise the higher form of class struggle that is unacceptable to the liberals. By so doing, the Economists became liberal workers' politicians. By so doing, the Economists rejected the Marxist, revolutionary conception of the class struggle.

"To continue. It was not enough that the class struggle becomes real, consistent and developed only when it embraces the sphere of politics. In politics, too, it is possible to restrict oneself to minor matters, and it is possible to go deeper, to the very foundations. Marxism recognises a class struggle as fully developed, 'nation wide', only if it does not merely embrace politics but takes in the most significant thing in politics - the organisation of state power.

"On the other hand, the liberals, when the working-class movement has grown a little stronger, dare not deny the class struggle but attempt to narrow down, to curtail and emasculate the concept of class struggle. Liberals are prepared to recognise the class struggle in the sphere of politics, too, but on one condition - that the organisation of state power should not enter into that sphere".

- 'Liberal and Marxist Conceptions of the Class Struggle'.

"The fact that economic interests play a decisive role does not in the least imply that the economic (i.e. trade union) struggle is of prime importance; for the most essential, the 'decisive' interests of classes can be satisfied only by radical political changes in general".

- 'What is to be done'

"We are all agreed that our task is that of the organisation of the proletarian class struggle. But what is this class struggle? When the workers of a single factory or of a single branch of industry engage in struggle against their employer or employers, is this class struggle? No, this is only a weak embryo of it.

"The struggle of the workers becomes a class struggle only when all the foremost representatives of the entire working class of the whole country are conscious of themselves as a single working class and launch a struggle that is directed, not against individual employers, but against the entire class of capitalists and against the government that supports that class. Only when the individual worker realises that he is a member of the entire working class, only when he recognises the fact that his petty day-to-day struggle against individual employers and individual government officials is a struggle against the entire bourgeoisie and the entire government, does his struggle become a class struggle.

"Every class struggle is a political struggle" - these famous words of Marx are not to be understood to mean that any struggle of workers against

employers must always be a political struggle. They must be understood to mean that the struggle of workers against the capitalists inevitably becomes a political struggle insofar as it becomes a class struggle.

"It is the task of the Social Democrats, by organising the workers, by conducting propaganda and agitation among them, to turn their spontaneous struggle against their oppressors into the struggle of the whole class, into the struggle of a definite political party for definite political and socialist ideals. This is something that cannot be achieved by local activity alone".

-- 'Our Immediate Task'

MARX AND ENGELS ON ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE

"... every movement in which the working class comes out as a class against the ruling classes and attempts to force them by pressure from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempt in a particular factory or even a particular trade to force a shorter working week out of the individual capitalists by strikes, etc., is a purely economic movement. On the other hand, the movement to force an eight-hour day, etc., law is a political movement.

"And in this way, out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a political movement, that is to say, a movement of the class, with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing the virtue of being compulsory for society as a whole. If these movements presuppose a certain degree of previous organisation, they are themselves in like measure a means for the development of this organisation".

-- Letter to Bolte from Marx, 23.11.1871.

"The bulk of the workers are waking up more and more to the fact that their salvation depends less on wresting higher wages and shorter hours from individual industrialists, and much more on winning political rights and the Parliament by the working class organised into a political party".

-- Engels, 'To the German Workers on 1 May 1893'

TROTSKY ON TRADE UNIONISM

"The trade unions have as their object the struggle for the improvement of the working and living conditions of wage earners. To this end trade union members make certain financial contributions. As for political activity the trade unions used to be formally regarded as neutral while in practice they most often followed at the tail of the Liberal Party... The position changed from the moment that the workers, through the medium of the trade unions, created the Labour Party. Having once brought it to life the trade unions then found themselves compelled to finance it..."

-- 'Where is Britain Going?'

"The trade unions... represent the class association of wage labourers for the struggle against the greedy and avaricious capitalists. One of the principal instruments of the trade union is the strike. Members' dues go to support the strike... During any major strike the union requires political support and is compelled to turn to the press, the parties, and parliament. The hostile attitude of the Liberals towards the struggle of the trade unions was indeed one of the causes that forced them to form the LP. If you go into the history of the origins of the LP it becomes clear that from a trade union standpoint the party in a sense forms its political section. It needs a strike fund, a network of officials, a newspaper, and a trusted member of parliament..."

-- 'Where is Britain Going?'

LENIN ON 'ORGANISATION OF WORKERS AND ORGANISATION OF REVOLUTIONARIES'

"It is only natural to expect that for a social democrat whose conception of the political struggle coincides with the concept of the 'economic struggle against the employers and the government', the 'organisation of revolutionaries' will more or less coincide with the 'organisation of workers'... The

political struggle of social democracy is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government. Similarly (indeed for that reason), the organisation of the RSDLP must inevitably be of a kind different from the organisation of workers designed for their struggle. The workers' organisation must in the first place be a trade union organisation; secondly, it must be as broad as possible... On the other hand, the organisation of revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who make revolutionary activity their profession... In view of this common characteristic of the members of such an organisation, all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals, not to speak of distinction of trades and professions, in both categories, must be effaced".

- Collected Works vol.5 p.451

In the March 1906 Unity Congress of the RSDLP, when the revolution was raging, mass political strikes reverberated through Russia, where every movement in society brought political conflict with the government, this is how the resolution Lenin wrote for the conference posed the issue of the trade unions.

"Whereas:

1. The social democratic party has always regarded the economic struggle as a component of the proletarian class struggle [my emphasis];
2. The experience of all capitalist countries shows that the most advanced form of organisation of the working class for the economic struggle is that of broad trade unions;
3. At the present time a general stirring is observed amongst the masses of the workers in Russia to associate in trade unions;
4. The economic struggle can bring about a lasting improvement in the condition of the masses of workers, and a strengthening of their truly class organisation, only if this struggle is properly combined with the political struggle of the proletariat;

"We are of the opinion and propose that the Congress should agree:

1. That all party organisations must promote the formation of non-party trade unions, and induce all party members to join trade unions in their respective trades;
2. That the party must exert every effort to educate the workers who belong to trade unions in the spirit of the broad understanding of the class struggle and the socialist aim of the proletariat; by its activities, to win a virtually leading position in these unions; and lastly, to ensure that these unions, under certain conditions, come into direct association with the party - however, without at all expelling non party members from their ranks".

THE LABOUR PARTY

The Labour Party cannot be simply taken over, in my opinion. Nevertheless the problem of reorganising the existing British labour movement has to be answered partly in terms of what is to be done with the Labour Party.

In the 1920s Trotsky put forward the perspective of the communists taking over the Labour Party. We cannot go to texts 50 or 60 years old for exact recipes for now. The way Trotsky approached it is however an indictment of all the pedants in our own ranks. And the basic point Trotsky made in the 1920s is absolutely true now: the mass revolutionary party will not grow by the adherence of small groups; we will have to find a way of taking over much of the political capital that the Labour Party squanders, or there will be no chance of us answering the Tory and ruling class offensive in the period ahead.

TROTSKY ON COMMUNISTS AND THE LABOUR PARTY

"It is a fact that Marx wrote in 1868 that the workers' party would emerge from the trade unions. When writing this he was thinking mainly of Britain, at the time the only developed capitalist country that already possessed extensive labour organisations.

"Half a century has passed since then. Historical experience has in general confirmed Marx's prophesies in so far as Britain is concerned. The

British Labour Party has actually been built up on the foundation of the trade unions. But does Comrade Louzon really think that the British Labour Party, as it is today, led by Henderson and Clynes, can be looked upon as representative of the proletariat as a whole? Most decidedly not. The British Labour Party betrays the cause of the proletariat just as the trade union bureaucracy betrays it, although in Britain the trade unions appear nearer to comprising the working class as a whole than anywhere else. On the other hand we cannot doubt but that our communist influence will grow in this British Labour Party which emerged from the trade unions, and that will contribute to sharpening the struggle of masses and leaders within the unions until the treacherous bureaucrats are ultimately driven out and the party is completely reformed and renewed..." (emphasis added).

- 'A Necessary Discussion...' , Pravda 21.3.23.

"But when deep changes in the international situation and in the inner structure of British society gave birth to the Labour Party there at once arose an unexpected demand for the leadership of the Independents [i.e. the Independent Labour Party, then largely representing the 'soft left' of the LP]. The same course of political development is preparing at the next stage an even heavier 'demand' for communism. At the present time the CP is numerically very small. At the last election it collected only 53,000 votes -- a figure which by comparison to the 5½ million Labour votes may create a dispiriting impression if the logic of Britain's political development is not ^{fully} understood. To think that the communists will grow over the decades step by step, acquiring at each new parliamentary election a few tens or hundreds of thousands of new votes, would be to have a fundamentally false concept of the future. Of course for a certain relatively prolonged period communism will develop comparatively slowly, but then an unavoidable and sudden change will occur: the CP will occupy the place in the LP that is at present occupied by the Independents". (Emphasis added)

- 'Where is Britain Going?'

TROTSKY ON WORK INSIDE THE LABOUR PARTY

To the question from a British comrade, "How shall we enter the LP and how shall we work within it?", Trotsky answered in summer 1936:

"... The important thing is to get in. Once in, opportunities will rapidly unfold. It is understood that regardless of how we enter, we will have a secret faction from the very beginning..."

"It is very important that we do not lay ourselves open at the beginning to attacks from the LP bureaucracy, which will result in our expulsion without having gained any appreciable strength..."

"Obviously we will not be able to raise the issue of the Fourth International immediately. History will provide the opportunity for raising that issue. The question of the Fourth International is not a burning issue to the masses of Great Britain today. If we take a revolutionary position on the popular issues that concern the masses today, then inevitably we will be able to develop towards the question of the Fourth International. At all costs we must be very careful to avoid either sectarianism or opportunism -- we must continually have our fingers on the pulse of the masses..."

"When we enter the LP a situation may rapidly arise requiring one or two of our best speakers to bring forth our complete revolutionary position thus deliberately inviting expulsion for themselves, as martyrs are useful to every movement. Such expelled comrades will find useful avenues of work..."

Further he was asked: "Should the paper... be run as an independent organ of the acknowledged Trotskyists within the political organisations such as the LP or as the organ of the Lenin Club without party affiliation?"

"That is difficult to say, as it must obviously depend on objective conditions..."

To me the question is not of first rate importance, as in any case the Stalinists would expose our connection with a Lenin Club paper..."

On the ILP, which had split from the LP in 1932, Trotsky commented in 1935:

"... for every revolutionary organisation in England its attitude to the masses and to the class is almost coincident with its attitude toward the Labour Party, which bases itself upon the trade unions. At this time the question whether to function inside the Labour Party or outside it/^{is} not a principled question, but a question of actual possibilities. In any case, without a strong faction in the trade unions, and, consequently, in the Labour Party itself, the ILP is doomed to impotence even today.

"Yet, for a long period, the ILP attached much greater importance to the 'united front' with the insignificant Communist party than to work in mass organisations. The leaders of the ILP consider the policy of the Opposition wing in the Labour Party incorrect out of considerations which are absolutely unexpected: although 'they (the Opposition) criticise the leadership and policy of the Party but, owing to the block vote and form of organisation of the Party, they cannot change the personnel and policy of the Executive and Parliamentary Party within the period necessary to resist Capitalist Reaction, Fascism and War'.

"The policy of the Opposition in the Labour Party is unspeakably bad. But this only means that it is necessary to counterpose to it inside the Labour Party another, a correct Marxist policy.

"That isn't so easy? Of course not! But one must know how to hide one's activities from the police vigilance of Sir Walter Citrine and his agents, until the proper time.

"But isn't it a fact that a Marxist faction would not succeed in changing the structure and policy of the Labour Party? With this we are entirely in accord: the bureaucracy will not surrender. But the revolutionists, functioning outside and inside, can and must succeed in winning over tens and hundreds of thousands of workers. The criticism directed by the ILP against the left wing faction in the Labour Party is of an obviously artificial character".

Finally, Trotsky's response to the question in the summer 1936 interview, "Is it even possible to consider at this stage an independent existence outside the mass organisations": "The fact that Lenin was not afraid to split from Plekhanov in 1905 and to remain as a small isolated group bears no weight because the same Lenin remained inside the Social Democracy until 1912 and in 1920 urged the affiliation of the British CP to the LP. While it is necessary for the revolutionary party to maintain its independence at all times, a revolutionary group of a few hundred comrades is not a revolutionary party and can work most effectively at present by opposition to the social patriots within the mass parties. In view of the increasing acuteness of the international situation, it is absolutely essential to be within the mass organisations while there is the possibility of doing revolutionary work within them. Any such sectarian, sterile and formalistic interpretation of Marxism in the present situation would disgrace an intelligent child of ten".

OUR PROPOSALS FOR UNITY

Kinnell

Our fusion is a bold experiment. It was predictable that we would have difficulties, and certainly we've had them. But it would be a terrible concession to the pressures of sectarianism and factionalism to give up in the face of those difficulties.

Many comrades are rightly concerned by the polarisation within the organisation, because the political issues are not clear, the factional heat is out of all proportion to the apparent real differences, and the division runs dangerously close to the 'seam' where the two previous organisations were joined together.

I am therefore writing these notes to explain the proposals that we - Carolan, Collins, Gardiner, Hill, Parkinson, Fraser, myself, and sometimes Levy - have made for maintaining the developing this unity.

1. THE LABOUR PARTY

Are there big differences on the Labour Party? Yes and no. At the time of the first session of the conference, when comrade Smith and others wished to push the Labour Party issue to a vote, the only expression of their differences was Smith's amendments (IB 46). Those amendments do express differences - we disagree with the idea that a particular level of 'party profile' (as opposed to political content) can be a fixed dogma irrespective of circumstances and necessary tactical manoeuvres - but, on the face of it, not dramatic differences.

Smith's big concern, as expressed in that amendment, was for industrial work. We made proposals to deal with that concern. We proposed that Smith should coordinate a series of articles on the unions for the paper. We proposed that he should become industrial editor. Comrade Levy indicated that he would be willing for Smith to take over as industrial organiser. None of these proposals got any response. And, while still making an outcry about the bad effects of our orientation on industrial work, Smith has still made no proposals himself for improving that industrial work. He has still not said what he proposes that we should do, and how an O. orientation prevents it.

He has concerned himself instead with muddying the issue still further. The position of J.McI. - a non-member of the League - in the discussion in the paper on the crisis of leadership and the unions today is being promoted to sections of the organisation as the latest manifestation of our alleged indifference to the 'fight for leadership' in the unions.(+)

So far as comrades are really concerned about real deficiencies in industrial work (and those real deficiencies certainly exist), we can make progress. If the comrades' real concern is to find sticks with which to beat our orientation on the LP, then we can't.

The new document (IB48) lists a long string of complaints against the organisation's work, and blames them all on our orientation on the LP. We cannot make progress on that basis. The basis for unity is for the comrades to make clear proposals for improving the areas of work that they think are suffering. If those proposals reveal a real clash between those areas of work and O. work, then we can debate it.

2. PROFILE

In IB 48 the comrades argue that there is a difference within the leadership on the question of 'profile' quite apart from issues of O. legality. That is certainly true. Anyone glancing over files of Workers' Fight/Workers' Action on the one hand, Socialist Press on the other, could see it. But why should this be an explosive issue?

There was a big row on the EC about WSR 1 because it did not have the words 'magazine of the WSL' in big enough type. We thought this complaint was wrongheaded. But we let it pass. WSRs 2 & 3 have had 'magazine of the WSL' in bigger type. No need for a faction fight!

The actual limit to 'party profile' for the paper is O. legality. The decisions on this have been taken on leading committees with Smith and others voting in favour of them. What's the basis for a faction fight here?

The problem, it seems to us, is that some comrades are clamouring for 'profile' as a magic solution. If only we shout louder, and wave our banner high enough, saying that we are the WSL, the new revolutionary leadership, we will grow. The Faction expresses this starkly: we should make 'TILC/reconstruct the Fourth International' a leading slogan in our paper - that will get us expelled from the O. and (in their view) a good thing too.++

Chris E. has put this view into practice with an article in the current M/side LB arguing that the O. left should respond to the

++ "We can function as Trotskyists... only on the basis of... openly declaring the need for a British section of an international tendency for the reconstruction of the FI... openly place TILC on the mast-head of our paper... Do we regard it as a principle to fight for internationalism... Or do we see this as secondary to remaining in the party knowing that the two are, at the time of a witch-hunt, incompatible?" (IB33, p.4, emphasis added. When asked by me, eds Evington and Morrow have confirmed that this document reflects the views of the Faction, ----- except on Stalinism.)

(+:from previous page). Yes, there are real theoretical differences on the crisis of leadership - which we should be able to discuss in the way proper for theoretical issues. Before the fusion Carolan wrote:

"With the explanation of the old WSL comrades in the discussion that our function is not ritual denunciation of the bureaucracy, but involvement in the struggle and attacks on the bureaucracy only in the context of the struggle and its needs, we have agreement.

"There are probably residual differences concerning the focus on 'the leadership', and it is likely that within a common organisation there might be differences of assessment and proposals in concrete circumstances. But there does not exist an abstract formula or super-precise perfect summary that would guard against this. It will be a matter of normal functioning according to majority rule in a joint organisation".

In fact we have had remarkably few disagreements on concrete questions of trade union struggle over the last 19 months. To raise a great agitation now on the 'crisis of leadership' question is to divert from the concrete issues into lining people up on the basis of general prejudices, attitudes, and background.

witch-hunt by raising the call for the reconstruction of the 4th International.

Smith and others would not go so far. They want us to continue in the O. But their irrational yearning for 'profile', and the irrational way they blame the O. work for all problems, would surely (if given its head) blunder us into sectarian self-isolation.

Yes, there are differences on 'profile'. They need not be explosive if they are discussed rationally, in terms of specific proposals for specific purposes.

3. TRADE UNION WORK AND RECRUITING WORKERS

Comrade Smith and others are concerned with recruiting workers. We share this concern. They insist we lie about it. (Yet the fact is that the majority of the working class militants on the NC are from our wing of the organisation - so probably are the majority of the industrial workers in the organisation.)

We have made proposals about how to improve the work in this respect (IB 50). A sensible discussion can proceed on the basis of amendments or counter-proposals. It cannot proceed on the basis of what we have had so far - comrades raising the question of worker recruitment, not so as to make reasoned proposals, but purely as a polemical weapon.

The way comrade Smith and others have talked about industrial work might be reasonable if the record on the leading committees were of Smith, Jones and Cunliffe constantly being thwarted in proposals for better industrial work by a blocking majority of Carolan, Hill, Kinnell and Levy. It isn't. They have never made any practical proposals on these matters that have been voted down.

4. WOMEN

At the time of the fusion we recognised that women's work was the area of the most explosive differences. The situation has got worse since then.

Comrade Fraser has proposed that herself, Collins and Parkinson should get together with some of the authors of IB 34 to discuss the possibility of a joint resolution. The IB 34 comrades refused, and have insisted that they want a vote on their whole document. Collins, Fraser and Parkinson have replied by proposing a short resolution on immediate tasks and suggesting discussion on the basis of that.

In our view the differences on a general political/theoretical level are nowhere near so great as to justify the factional heat. Another suggestion some of us have made - equally rejected by the IB 34 comrades - is for something like two women's commissions, specialising in different areas of work.

5. THE NEW N.C.

Obviously electing the new NC is difficult, if only because we have to make such a drastic reduction in the size. The NC has urged the EC to prepare a recommended slate. We support this idea and had in fact proposed it on the EC before the NC decision. Comrades Smith, Cunliffe and Jones are not willing to join in such an enterprise. It is therefore not possible.

We will be putting forward a recommended slate of our own,

designed to produce a balanced new NC. We have also pressed to have the Single Transferable Vote system used in the NC election, because it gives more protection for minorities.

6. ACCUSATIONS

Some comrades are aggrieved at what we wrote in IB 35. We are aggrieved at the wild accusations against us in IB 36 (that we consider reformism sufficient, oppose all criticism of Benn, etc.) and the wilder accusations made in speeches (that we consider direct recruitment of workers to be sectarian and syndicalist, that we tell workers to go to O. wards rather than fighting the bosses, etc.)

We would point out that wild allegations against us (like 'capitulation to British imperialism') had been thrown around for months before IB 35 appeared.

Nonetheless we have proposed a 'ground-clearing session' of the EC to discuss IB35, IB36, and anything else anyone on either side feels aggrieved about. This was started at one EC meeting. We conceded that at the December TILC meeting Smith had said, "Leland is not entirely representative of the RWL", not "Leland is not representative", and that in the bulk of that meeting Smith had argued against the RWL. We conceded that Jones announced his proposal for splitting the conference into old WSL/old I-CL to do the NC elections not spontaneously but in response to a question. Whether these points affect the bulk of our argument, comrades must judge for themselves.

There were no such qualifications, or attempts to be more precise, from the other side, whose polemics include statements that we are "against recruiting workers", etc. Smith, Jones, etc declared only that they considered the exercise a waste of time. They did not even produce any other specific contested points in our document.

It would still be best if we could have a 'ground-clearing'.

A FINAL WORD

Some comrades deplore the factional heat and blame both groupings in the leadership equally.

This is a comfortable but philistine conclusion. On the LP, we put forward our ideas objectively, non-polemically, back in September/October, in response to real events in the outside world. All we have done since then is to defend and develop that position.

On the other side there have been wild accusations and extreme instability. The argument started off on the issue of the register; it continued with equal vehemence when the comrades changed their views on that. The Smith/Jones/Cunliffe position was not stated in writing at all until January. Then it was put forward (in a comparatively moderate and balanced way, compared with what had been said in the debates) in Cunliffe's British Perspectives. Their polemical zeal was unabated when the LP section of that document was abandoned.

Now their position (IB 48) is essentially a blunderbus denunciation of the organisation's work over 20 months - and a disavowal of all responsibility for it.

We could have avoided factional conflict if we had remained silent on our politics, if we had discreetly avoided mentioning Smith/Jones/Cunliffe's remarkable political shifts and turns, and if we had meekly accepted that all the deficiencies of the last 20

months are to be blamed on us, with Smith/Jones/Cunliffe having no part in it and no responsibility for it. Not otherwise.

It was the same on the South Atlantic war: who was responsible for the factional disruption, those who defended the original almost unanimous position of the WSL, or those who from April to September slewed from one position to another (though with the same basic impulse), never pausing to self-criticise but instead maintaining continuous polemical fire against us?

It is the same on Ireland: to judge by ed Jones's statements, you would think that federalism was a new notion ed Carolan had just come up with, not a position of WF/I-CL for 15 years. When we first discussed federalism in the new WSL, ed Jones clearly knew nothing about the whole debate. He seems not to have done much research since. It does not damp his factional zeal. He has not seriously participated in the discussion on federalism in the paper which he initiated.

Those who have deliberately adopted a 'middle' position, not entering the polemics but simply deploring them, are the worst friends of unity. They contribute to factional polarisation where they could have reduced it by taking a bold, vocal stand and thus undercutting the personalisation of the debate. They demoralise members by encouraging them, not to examine the political gist of the debates, but to rest content with philistine condemnations of the bad traits of this or that personality. Not as explicitly as Smith and Jones, but unmistakeably, they have disavowed responsibility. But shared responsibility is the best basis for unity.

STALINISM MISUNDERSTOOD: SOME POINTS ON IB 37

This IB is presented as an 'MP Perspectives and report' by Hill. In reality it is an entirely factional contribution in the discussion about the MP and is not an objective report. If it is asked for it to be voted on, it should be rejected as such.

For example, presenting branch circulars as being written by Kinnell and quoting from them as such. He writes all branch circulars and most of the political points are as a result of discussion at EC or OC level. So joint discussion that is written in branch circulars is presented as Kinnell's ideas. Selected branches are selected for special mention in attacks e.g. Oxford re estate sales, also Hackney. These are currently the branches that are out of favour; previously it was Leicester but they are obviously considered to be completely beyond the pale. The criticisms, while having some justification, have no relation to the overall work of those branches or of the other branches in the movement.

Certain developments are built up beyond all reason or belief to develop a point. A good example of this is on page 12. In discussing the MCDTUR campaign the moves to develop a broad anti-Tebbit campaign are discussed. He quotes from the Industrial Perspectives the instance of a 'successful meeting' called by Reg Race which included representatives of S. Wales NUM and some Broad Lefts. He then goes on to say 'in the meeting at least Race was decisive in stopping the Stalinists ditching the whole thing'.

It is not mentioned that Race himself then went on to ditch the campaign. Not a single other meeting was ever held, even though, at the behest of cde. Carolan, it was all left in Race's hands.

In fact the argument of a leading NUJ member to prepare a conference from that meeting was opposed by cde. Carolan and the Stalinists, thus leaving the position up in the air.

These are just some of the ways that the ~~xxx~~ actual work in relation to the MP is distorted by cde. Hill. His political positions are answered in the documents. Although the document on page 11 puts the argument about 'TU work being syndicalism' if it is only on wages and conditions very clearly. Aren't the government's attacks on the working class taking the form of speed-up and wage-cutting? Don't they have political potential?

STALINISM

The political position I want to take up because it is not dealt with elsewhere, is on Stalinism. There is a big danger of miseducation of what Stalinism is in relation to this document.

On page 7 Hill talks about the late 20s and the British CP. He describes a "growing intransigence" in propaganda and denunciation of the 'lefts' by the CP. He puts this in the context of the early history of the CP, ~~xx~~ as though the early mistakes led to this position. That of 3rd period Stalinism.

This obviously isn't a chance remark. He expresses it even more clearly on page 22, and shows why he is arguing this in relation to attacking comrades like myself:

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

I quote this extensively because it shows that Hill sees the 3rd period turn in Britain as a natural progression from the earlier undegenerated CP.

This is rubbish. In the early CP they made mistakes but in the CP of the late 20s they were part of a fast becoming Stalinised international.

The turn in the late 20s came from the outside and had nothing whatsoever to do with the previous position of the British CP. The same turn took place in all the world's CPs.

Or are we saying that the international Stalinist movement was OK until the call for the Fourth International?

Trotsky's position of calling for the 4th International was because of the lack of reaction in the Stalinist movement to the German events. He considered the CPs role in the British General Strike or the Chinese events as part of the betrayal of international Stalinism, not indigenous CPs.

Here is how Henry Pelling describes the late 1920s:

"With the union leadership abandoning its erstwhile militancy, it might have been supposed that the Communist Party would gain supporters among the rank and file, but in fact its success was very limited, although its backing of the miners in the latter months of 1926 won it 4000 temporary recruits. In 1928 its hard won gains in the National Left Wing movement and its influence on members of the Labour Party through other propaganda organisations was largely thrown away by a sudden switch of policy adopted on the orders of the Communist International (my emphasis). The new policy was one of complete sectarianism, involving an abandonment of the 'united front' methods of infiltrating the Labour Party, and resulting in a denunciation of both leaders and members of the Labour Party as 'social fascists'. Naturally this policy at once reduced Communist influence within the Labour Party to a negligible factor". (p.62: A short history of the Labour Party).

Pelling is not only a Labour Party historian but has also written a history of the CP.

To put my name and that of others in the same breath as that 3rd period Stalinism is a disgrace. This is not part of the record of 'our movement'. Trotskyists fought 3rd period Stalinism.

The only legitimate examples of 'our movement' would be the early CP and not that under the control of Stalin.

This bringing in of Stalinism is only meant to scare people off from looking at our basic ideas.

It is similar to the use of 'Left Wing Communism' as a name and not relating to what that struggle was about.

I hope comrades will learn about Stalinism in this debate and not just the wrong conceptions of C. de. Hill on the Labour Party.

Jones

1.

In the first place, it is a trick document. The comrades concentrate on plugging three or four points and belabouring us in the spirit of denouncing morally outrageous sinners from the pulpit.

One of their central 'issues' - the Labour Party as "the vehicle for transitional demands" - turns out to be a mistake in typing (see IB 56).

They say that now they don't dispute our existing type of O. orientation, the need to register in certain circumstances, the fact that we cannot have a party paper except at the cost of sterilising ourselves. They disputed all these things - explicitly or implicitly - at the beginning of the discussion last September. They talked as if registration were a matter of principle (Jones and Smith at the September NC and at various meetings of the OC and EC). They advocated passive acceptance of our own outlawing in O. terms and a 'party paper'.

Not so now. They have formally adopted our position on these questions. They express their factional drive and their sectarian bias now by way of denouncing their opponents. Now it is that we are attacking the balance of the paper. They suggest that we want to "liquidate even further" the party profile. They take our discussions about contingency plans for a situation where we were banned and proscribed as our desires, our hidden diabolical plans to subvert the movement.

They assert their sectarian bias relatively, not measured against our real positions, but against fabricated caricatures, distortions and misrepresentations of them.

2.

The authors appear in the organisation as an opposition. They try to gain votes and support by pointing to real and commonly admitted deficiencies and problems - as if they were the responsibility of just one section of the leadership. They attribute real problems to the ideas (alleged ideas) of their opponents.

This is an irresponsible opposition. If they had anything to float by way of solutions to our difficulties, they would have made proposals and suggestions. All they have to offer is demagogic exploitation of the organisation's difficulties.

3.

At the first part of the conference Smith's position on the LP was expressed in a special two page I.B (no.46) distributed at the conference. Cunliffe had a document produced jointly with Kinnell and Hill for that conference, and Jones kept his own counsel. The differences seemed to have been narrowed down so much that people were left wondering what all the heat had been about in the previous 4 or 5 months.

For the second part of the conference things are altogether different and much worse. IB 48 is a great step backwards. It rehashes the wilder polemics of the authors, only buried and dressed up in much that is common ground.

In IB 51 Cunliffe writes of the Faction:

"Though (the authors) and a number of (their) positions have been characterised as sectarian in their trajectory, the document... can best be understood as an opportunist text, in that it seeks to hold together comrades holding a wide

variety of political positions by adopting ambiguous formulations and implicitly hinting rather than forthrightly stating political positions.

"So vague and so diplomatic are the phrases... that (much of it is) at face value - effectively no more than restatements of the common positions of everyone in the League. They are not (the authors' special) positions at all. If they mean just what they say, nobody who disagreed with them should be in the WSL".

It fits IB 48 - exactly.

4.

The Jones, Smith, Cunliffe group have not declared a tendency or faction. They have nevertheless had at least one meeting called as a national meeting of supporters, with the agenda of a full factional conference. IB 48 - with its blatantly factional character - was produced soon afterwards.

5.

The document panders to the Faction on a number of important points. The authors' apparent conception is to buy off and win back the Faction by themselves stepping up the fight against the rest of the organisation. They turn their faces to only a section of the organisation - the 'old WSL' constituency, including the Faction - and present a hard-faced front to the rest of the organisation, to the extent that dialogue in the organisation becomes difficult to the point of impossibility.

IB 48 apes the Faction's methods with absurd statements such as: "(Our) approach puts general 'political' discussion in L P wards and GMCs and parliament (!) above the class struggle".

Or: "We must firmly reject any notion that we do TU work only through the LP or that we see LP work as 'superior' or 'political' work in contrast to 'economist' work in the unions".

Or: we allegedly believe that "the forces for building the revolutionary party exist mainly within the Labour Left".

This is dishonest. IB 45 talks about the left in the LP and the unions. And at the end of Gunliffe, Jones, Smith's vehement polemic against the proposition that "the present active core of the forces that will make the revolutionary party of the future is now mainly in the LP Left and the trade union left", we still do not know where the place is that they see the presently active core - apart from the hardly helpful assertion that it is within the working class.

6.

IB 48's perspectives are radically false and more than tinged with SWP-style pessimism.

"A new election defeat to Labour - with the prospect of the wholesale destruction of still more basic industries and public services, not to mention new anti-union laws... - would of itself in this situation weaken the struggle of the left and demoralise sections of workers".

But if the Tory attacks will demoralise 'sections', they will force the rest to fight. It was the 'Osborne Judgment' of 1909, forbidding the political levy, that put the finishing touches on the shift of the unions from the Liberals to the Labour Party. The Tory attacks are going to interact with the labour movement's reshaping of its political philosophy, which has been the real political content of the struggle for democracy.

It should be remembered that the fusion was based on a platform and a perspec-

tives document. We adopted the March 1981 WSL conference perspectives document, which included just one amendment from the I-CL: to insist on a less euphoric and 'optimistic' account of the developments in the LP. The comrades were impressionists then, and they are now. And in their present attitude there is a strong tinge of: 'As for the Labour Left, thank god all that's over and we can get back to "normal".'

*

The document proposes an undifferentiated - propagandist - orientation to the whole working class (including the 40 per cent who vote Tory!) "Our primary orientation therefore must be towards that mass of workers" (the trade union membership).

*

They timidly polemicise against 'organising the left', adding, "It is not a programme"!! They agree that we should 'stay with the left', then add: (this formula) "can and does have a liquidationist content depending on what we mean by it". Does have? Slanderous nonsense!

Then on page 8 they seem to be arguing against organising the left: "In every area of work our central orientation must be not to the 'existing left' but to the winning of fresh proletarian forces..." The approach they advocate here - apart from being an absurd misjudgment of our real possibilities and relation to the working class - would have ruled out, for example, the old SCLV and the RFMC!

This sort of clumsy mauling of the political that have shaped the paper - wanting to tear them apart but not daring to - is the evidence that if of what the comrades would do to that work if they had their way. As we have said before: they would blunder us into sectarian isolation.

