

The differences summed up

by Kinnell

page 1	Introduction
1	The job of Marxists
2	Orientation to the labour movement
3	Women
3	Class politics vs. 'anti-imperialist camp' politics
4	Afghanistan
5	The EEC
5	Ireland
6	'Orthodoxy' and 'revisionism'
7	Which 'orthodoxy'?
7	'Trotskyist public opinion'

INTRODUCTION

The following article outlines the main political differences, as I see them, between the EC majority and the Smith faction.

The present movement towards a split does not derive directly from these differences as such, but rather from the Smith faction's inability to operate constructively and responsibly as a minority - their spirit of blind revolt against the League.

"Every little difference may become a big difference if it is insisted on, if it is put in the foreground... Every little difference may assume tremendous importance if it serves as a starting point for a turn towards definite mistaken views".

(Lenin)

But the inability to cooperate is itself a political, not just a psychological, question. And the politics are, or at least should be, crucial for comrades in deciding which side they take in the split.

It should not be necessary to say this, but - contrary to the Smith faction's denunciations - the aim of the EC majority is not to construct a monolithic organisation tolerating no dissent! We do cherish ideological homogeneity - but such homogeneity can only be properly achieved by discussion and convincing people. Our political history has been one of lively debate and controversy, and we have no wish to change that. On the contrary: one advantage of ending the present factional impasse is that we will be able to clear the debris of recriminations and bickering from the internal channels of the organisation, and open up some real political debate and discussion.

THE JOB OF MARXISTS

Our principle is: "Flexible and 'diplomatic' on questions of organisation and tactics in relation to the labour movement and oppressed groups, at the same time we make no concessions on questions of principle, definition, programme or political analysis, to them or to pseudo-Marxists and kitsch Trotskyists" (IB 45).

Two sorts of differences between us and the Smith group follow from this.

"No wonder [the Smith group] get angry and confused: both when the majority criticise the most basic ideas of the broad left, and when we try to relate to that broad left through dialogue rather than denunciations and self-proclamations, we appear to be slipping away from the bedrock essentials of revolutionary politics". (IB 77)

ORIENTATION TO THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Despite our insistence on ideological independence from the broad left, we seek to minimise the organisational, stylistic, and technical obstacles to integrating ourselves into the labour movement.

The Smith faction, in contrast, is influenced much more by 'left public opinion', but places a high value on the formalities of 'party profile'. They have a recurrent tendency to revert to Healyite bedrock.

The major issue on which this has come out recently is the magazine. We proposed producing a magazine through the broad groups - this would involve no loss of political content, but could increase sales, and, by involving non-members, increase the appeal and resonance of the magazine. Faction members objected that this meant "a move away from Trotskyism" and "junking the specifically Leninist component of our politics".

This identification of Trotskyism and Leninism with labels seems to us false.

At the April 1983 conference there was also a difference over a tendency by the Smith group to counterpose trade union work and work among the specially oppressed to O. work. If you tried to pin them down, the practical differences were not huge: nonetheless, the Smith group chose to pose them as huge differences and thus to conciliate sectarian elements within the League such as the RWL faction.

The result of a victory of the Smith group perspective would thus probably have been to blunder us into sectarian self-isolation - and to reduce and cut down our politics to syndicalist militancy plus arid self-proclamation.

We advocate an integrated approach. We see the job of revolutionary Marxists as that of organising our 'party' in a fight to transform the whole labour movement, O. and trade unions. To counterpose TU work and O. work, given the realities of the British labour movement, means making TU work semi-syndicalist (cutting off a major political dimension) and reducing O. work to municipalism and resolution-passing.

The un-integrated approach of the Smith group has some apparently paradoxical results. In recent discussions we have argued for a sharp critique of the local government left, and for a clear statement that the role of socialists in local government is to use it as a forum to advance working class claims, not to try to administer the 'local state' within its given budget limits, granting the most 'deserving' working class claims and opposing others. (See document by Kinnell, also section 6D in 'Some Immediate Tasks', IB 83 or 86).

The faction leaders have said nothing much on this issue, but they have voted against our resolutions. Other prominent faction members have argued against the critique of the local government left, and have even argued for supporting some rate rises, for possibly supporting rent rises, and for not automatically supporting council workers' demands.

Hotchkiss puts it most startlingly when he argues that local government work is good preparation for socialism because it can give us practice in running big bureaucracies!

"Some of the problems, such as being a 'boss', being part of a huge bureaucratic machine, are difficulties we have to solve if we are

going to get a socialist society. We should welcome the opportunities /of local government involvement/ to learn..."
(Paper no.165)

It is clear here that an insistence on 'party profile' and more shrill denunciations of labour leaders does not guarantee real ideological irreconcilability with reformism. On the contrary: it is easy to fall into the belief that the most opportunist practices are OK as long as they have the cover of the 'party profile' and the denunciations.

In my view there are few real differences on trade union and industrial work. The disputes in this area have been blown up out of all proportion and/or largely invented on the basis of the Smith group caricaturing our views - and their own! (Cf dispute on the TUC, see IB 90).

WOMEN

We believe that a non-sectarian orientation to the women's movement can and should be combined with an orientation to women workers in industrial direct action struggle, without either being counterposed to the other. The Smith faction, however, did counterpose "working class women in struggle" to the other elements of our orientation. The result was to drive them into an economistic or syndicalist attitude on women's liberation.

CLASS POLITICS VS. 'ANTI-IMPERIALIST CAMP' POLITICS

We fight imperialism - on a working class basis and with a workingclass programme. Against colonial, semi-colonial, or military domination, we advocate the self-determination of nations. Against exploitation and pauperisation, we advocate class struggle and international socialist revolution.

What Trotsky wrote in relation to the USSR applies more generally.

"We are not a government party; we are the party of irreconcilable opposition, not only in capitalist countries but also in the USSR. Our tasks... we realise not through the medium of bourgeois governments and not even through the government of the USSR, but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow... We must formulate our slogans in such a way that the workers see clearly just what we are defending... and against whom we are conducting a ruthless struggle...."

('In Defence of Marxism', p.21,26).

On this basis we assessed the Falklands/Malvinas war as reactionary on both sides. In Britain we argued, 'The enemy is at home': but that did not mean endorsing the greed and ambitions of the Argentine bourgeoisie.

Galtieri's mini-colonial advent ure - the seizure of islands 400 miles off the Argentine coast, occupied by a distinct people and in no way oppressing the Argentine people - had nothing to do with the 'national liberation' or 'defence' of Argentina. It certainly had nothing to do with fighting the exploitation of Argentine workers by the multinationals and international banks.

For the Argentine workers, too, the main enemy was 'at home'.

The consequences of the war - strengthening of the Tories and of militarism in Britain, shattering of the military regime in Argentina - confirm that for the workers on both sides, the defeat of their own bourgeoisie was the better outcome. (Our programme was the defeat of both bourgeoisies by class action).

The Smith group did see their fight against imperialism as being "realised through the medium of bourgeois governments". They argued that the Argentine bourgeoisie was in some way an oppressed class and in some way in our camp.

"We have to determine our position according to the basic class

camps... the class camp into which Argentina fits in a war against imperialism" (IB 7, p.4).

They later made a muffled statement to the effect that 'class camp' was not the best choice of words, but would not repudiate the basic idea of 'camps'.

They said that the interests of the 'anti-imperialist camp' stood higher than those of the working class.

"Whatever the implications of that for the Argentinian or British proletariat, we have to base our position on the implications for the international struggle against imperialism first... It is the balance of forces which gives the struggle its real importance..."

(IB 7, p.7,9)

[The war] "cannot... be judged on the basis of its conjunctural effects on the British or Argentine working class... It was a major world event..." (Smith in paper no.162).

This, despite the comrades' undoubted good intentions, is an international version of the 'anti-monopoly alliance' - support for small capital against big capital.

The Smith group is swayed by an un-Marxist way of thinking which has dominated the would-be Trotskyist movement and wider sections of the Left for many years. This way of thinking was initially generated by, and promoted by Stalinist forces in, the situation of the early '50s: Cold War, colonial revolutions, revolutions like China's and Vietnam's allied to the USSR. The world is seen as divided up into two 'camps' - Imperialism (seen in an un-Marxist way as a single blob); and the Revolution, which includes the working class together with all sorts of Stalinist and petty (or not so petty) bourgeois nationalist forces.

Both 'Pabloite' and 'anti-Pabloite' would-be Trotskyists have shared this vision. The 'Pabloites' have usually seen themselves as helpful advisers in the camp of the Revolution. The 'anti-Pabloites', in contrast, have condemned as traitors many of those seen by the 'Pabloites' as leaders of the Revolution (Ho Chi Minh, Castro, Ben Bella), and stridently proclaimed their own 'alternative leadership' instead. But the basic picture of the 'camps' and the issues has been common.

It is a view of the world which simply blots out some important facts: that Stalinist forces can be revolutionary against capitalism, but at the same time are counter-revolutionary against the working class; that petty bourgeois nationalist forces can be revolutionary against colonial or semi-colonial rule, but at the same time not anti-capitalist; that Third World bourgeoisies can clash with the bourgeoisies of the big capitalist powers without being in any serious way anti-imperialist.

AFGHANISTAN

The difference over Afghanistan is connected.

We support the withdrawal of Russian troops from Afghanistan (while also opposing imperialist intervention and imperialist hypocrisy).

The nationalised property relations of the USSR are not at risk in the affair: defence of those property relations against imperialism cannot be translated into defence of the murderous Russian army against the resistance of almost the entire Afghan people.

Is Russian occupation - despite the napalm bombing, the maybe four million refugees, and the military dictatorship - nevertheless a 'lesser evil' than the victory of the backward-looking, feudalistic Afghan rebeles? To support such a 'lesser evil' is implicitly to say that Stalinism has a progressive role in world politics. But, as Trotsky put it:

"Thus, we must first and foremost establish that the extension of the territory dominated by bureaucratic autocracy and parasitism,

cloaked by 'socialist' measures, can augment the prestige of the Kremlin, engender illusions concerning the possibility of replacing the proletarian revolution by bureaucratic manoeuvres, and so on. This evil by far outweighs the progressive content of Stalinist reforms in Poland... We were and remain against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin".

('In Defence of Marxism', p.23-4. And in Afghanistan there are not even the 'socialist' measures...)

"What characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude towards oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics..."

('What Next?', in 'The Struggle against Fascism in Germany').

We are for the liberation of the people of Afghanistan from feudalistic backwardness - by their own self-liberating struggle, not by the bayonets of the reactionary Kremlin bureaucracy, which will suppress any possibility of a real working class movement in Afghanistan. We are for the self-determination of the people of Afghanistan. We cannot subordinate such principles to considerations of the world power-politics balance between the imperialist powers and the USSR.

There was a series of bitter disputes over Poland. But it is not clear whether there is a real difference on Poland. We are for the self-determination of Poland. Under no circumstances, and not even on the pretext of 'defending nationalised property', could we support the Russian bureaucracy against the Polish people. The possibility of a free development of the Polish working class is the highest principle here.

There is a strange twist to the Afghanistan dispute, too. A debate on the issue was fixed up for the youth school on March 24, and the faction leaders were asked to send a speaker. They nominated Cunliffe. But halfway through the debate it emerged that Cunliffe now supports withdrawal of Russian troops. Jones, who still opposes the call for withdrawal, explained the nomination of Cunliffe to speak with the comment, "We have the same method".

THE EEC

The EEC is a capitalist alliance, displaying all the vices and irrationalities of capitalism. We are against it, We are equally against the alternative of 'independent' capitalist nation-states. Our alternative to both is the fight for a socialist united Europe (both east and west) - and, immediately, for international working class unity and for solidarity with workingclass movements in Eastern Europe.

This should include a fight for working class and democratic demands on an EEC scale, including the demand for control over the EEC bureaucracy by the EEC Parliament and democratic reform of the latter.

The Smith group shares the conventional left position of 'Britain out'. But 'against the EEC' is no more an adequate full policy here than 'against Britain' was over the South Atlantic war, or 'against imperialism' is over Afghanistan.

IRELAND

"Our slogan for Ireland is: self-determination for the people of Ireland as a whole. But within that we need a democratic policy on the minority question.

"There can be no socialist revolution in Ireland without the unity of large sections of the Catholic and Protestant workers. There can be no democratic solution in Ireland - that is, no solution offering the best,

clearest conditions for the free development of the class struggle - without democratic relations between the majority (Catholic) and minority (Protestant) community.

"We therefore support the maximum democratic rights for the Protestant minority within a united Ireland compatible with the rights of the majority.

"As a general principle Marxists favour regional or provincial autonomy for markedly distinct areas within a state, together with the most decentralised possible local government...

"This principle applies to the mainly-Protestant areas within a united Ireland....

"Formal democratic constitutional provisions can never in fact guarantee anything if the conflicts of real social forces dictate otherwise.

"The essential purpose of the proposals above is not as advice to the powers-that-be, but as part of a socialist programme around which Irish socialists and Republicans could assemble a real united working class force, capable of being a real material guarantee against sectarian discrimination."

(From the resolution of the August 1983 WSL conference, IB 73).

The Smith faction opposes the demand for local autonomy. The essence of the dispute is not so much attitudes to this specific demand, but the whole emphasis on class politics and on a consistently democratic programme within the socialist programme.

The Smith group slots Ireland into its general world picture of imperialist and anti-imperialist camps, so that the Catholics are the anti-imperialist camp and the Protestants are in the camp of imperialism. Specific issues of class politics are then swamped by this issue of anti-imperialism/imperialism (as they see it).

'ORTHODOXY' AND 'REVISIONISM'

The Smith faction has freely denounced us as 'revisionist'. This term 'revisionist' has been so abused for decades that it is now meaningless except as a sectarian catch-cry. But there is a serious point here.

The Trotskyist movement for some 35 years has been severely disoriented, and also impoverished, beleaguered, primitive and ignorant. A new 'orthodox Trotskyism' - with different variants, 'Pabloite', 'anti-Pabloite', etc. - has developed over that period. It includes many valuable and important ideas from the Trotskyism of Trotsky, but has corrupted or bowdlerised others, like permanent revolution for example (see IB 49).

That is the movement we come from; we respect its achievements despite all the confusion; we are aware of our own ignorance and limitations; and we have to start from where we are. But ideologically our job is to revise that 'orthodoxy' - to educate ourselves, to try to rediscover the uncorrupted meaning of basic Marxist ideas, and to analyse the important changes in the world over recent decades.

To talk about defending 'orthodoxy' against 'revisionism' in this situation is to go in the wrong direction - and to work against developing ourselves as an educated, intelligent organisation.

To have disagreements on the theory of imperialism is one thing, and to be expected in any live movement. To have a situation - as we have with the Smith faction - where any attempt to discuss new developments like sub-imperialism, the new international division of labour, or capitalist development in Ireland, provokes pious horror and ignorant denunciation, is another.

And the bible-thumping is made more ridiculous by the fact that the 'bible' which the Smith group thumps does not contain the basic Marxist texts, but the corrupted conventional versions of post-Trotsky pseudo-Trotskyism.

The outlook on imperialism which they defend, for example, has nothing in common with Lenin's but a few ringing phrases. It is in fact derived from post-World-War-2 'Third Worldist' theories of 'centre and periphery'. Those theories have had a strong influence on general 'left public opinion'; the Smith group, in turn, absorbs the ideas in a crude form from the 'left public opinion' round it.

WHICH 'ORTHODOXY'?

Another problem is which strand of 'orthodox Trotskyism' to relate to. There have been different orthodoxies.

We (ex-I-CL) see our roots as being in the 'orthodox Trotskyism' of James P Cannon in the '40s and '50s. But the base-line orthodoxy of Smith and Jones is the politics of Gerry Healy and the 'International Committee' after 1963, when they parted ways with Cannon.

That 'orthodoxy' had many special defects of its own, in addition to the general problems of post-war Trotskyism (all of which it shared). Its basic ideas were that economic catastrophe was round the corner; that the working class was forever on the boil, and held back only by a thin crust of leaders; and that the task was therefore to proclaim the 'alternative leadership' loudly enough, stridently enough, and energetically enough.

Specific politics were utterly secondary in this hectic view of the world, and in fact Healy's politics were utterly incoherent and often changed without any political accounting.

Smith and Jones have moved away from that 'orthodoxy' piecemeal, but mainly by way of adding bits and pieces from other strands (e.g. the USFI strand), creating an unstable hodge-podge.

'TROTSKYIST PUBLIC OPINION'

The Smith group, generally, is over-deferential to 'Trotskyist public opinion'. We have had a long-standing disagreement with the Smith group on the concept of the 'world Trotskyist movement'; to our mind this concept substitutes vague historical references for live political demarcations.

This disagreement seemed to be reduced to a small nuance with the document, 'The Crisis of the FI and our tasks', presented jointly to (but rejected by!) the February 1983 conference. But since then the Smith group seems to have retreated.

In November 1983 Cunliffe proposed that we go for fusion with the USFI; the Smith group leaders, while not yet ready to vote for this, indicated that they were moving in that direction.

Though we are entirely in favour of tactics to get a dialogue with the rank and file of the USFI, we believe that there is no basis for a fusion with the USFI.

We are open to any proposal for broader initiatives: but for the present, as far as we can see, our chief international work must be consolidating our existing contacts and winning new ones piecemeal. The opportunities are limited.

The Smith faction is also formally committed (by the Hunt youth document to the April 1983 conference, endorsed by the faction platform in IB 59) to fusion of our youth tendency with Socialist Action and the Lambertists.

We are in favour of revolutionary unity where possible: moreover, the practice of some of us over many years proves it. But vague yearnings for unity, without an adequate political basis or on the basis of shutting our eyes to politics, are no use to anyone.

THE PARTY

Underlying and connecting all these differences - and also explaining why

apparently minor differences generate envenomed conflict - is a difference on our conception of the revolutionary party.

"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". (IB 50).

In contrast, the Smith group started from the Healyite concept of the party as first and foremost a machine: an 'alternative leadership' for which scientific rigour in politics is secondary to machine-against-machine combat with the bureaucracy.

When they moved away from Healyism, they did not fully discard the basic idea of the party as an organisational machine, but (a) substituted a loose, semi-federal regime for the SLL/WRP's dictatorial system; and (b) substituted a 'worker leadership' (Smith/Jones) for the Healy autocracy.

The trouble is that this 'worker leadership' is supposed to be a leadership by virtue of who they are, rather than what they argue politically or what they do in the organisation. Politics are worked out on a consensus basis, with the 'worker leadership' as ultimate arbiter and baseline.

Such a method allows political positions to be switched and changed and smeared over without any rigorous accounting.

There are many examples of this in the history of the Smith faction inside the new WSL (see, for example, IB 14 on the South Atlantic war), but also in the history of the old WSL. Ireland, for one.

The WRP in the early '70s had a crude line which included much anti-imperialist rhetoric, but loudly denounced the IRA as 'terrorists' and made its main slogan for Ireland 'Kick the Tories out'. (SLL supporters in Derry had refused to defend the barricades in '69, saying that they were instead going off 'to build a revolutionary leadership in the trade unions'). The old WSL initially dissented from parts of this policy, but made its main positive proposal... work in the Northern Ireland Labour Party, then already a tiny Orange sect. (See 'The Battle for Trotskyism').

Then the old WSL shifted to a policy which made "workers' defence squads" central. And then to the current Smith faction policy, essentially green nationalist and similar to Socialist Action's (though Jones bizarrely retains the "workers' defence squads" slogan alongside this).

All these shifts took place in response to pressures, without any rigorous political accounting.

At the time of the fusion we saw these shifts as a confused but essentially positive move towards an appreciation of the Irish national question. They were that. What we did not fully register was they were also examples of a method which makes it impossible for the revolutionary organisation to do its job of scientific analysis and being the 'memory of the class'.

The consensus/'worker leadership' method also gives free rein to subjectivism; it leaves the organisation blown this way and that by the winds of 'Trotskyist public opinion' or left public opinion generally; it destroys the organisation as a coherent ideological whole, and means that it is kept together primarily, or only, by the prestige of the leadership; and, despite appearances and demagogic pretences, it is not democratic.

The Smith faction argues that the issue within the new WSL is internal democracy. This argument is a fraud as well as a device to evade and smear over

the programmatic issues. Both logic and the actual history show that our conception of a revolutionary party is not only more centralist but also yields a more objective and liberal democracy than theirs.

The real problems is elsewhere. The 'worker leadership' were not able to integrate into a collective leadership: on issues like Ireland, the Falklands/Malvinas, and the Labour Party, they felt that they had to represent their 'constituency'. It was not possible to have a real ideological dialogue in the leadership, because that would have meant Smith and Jones abandoning their position as the pre-ordained 'worker leaders', ideological arbiters, and representatives of a 'constituency' - and instead putting trust in the outcome of rational argument. Thus we found Smith and Jones rallying their 'constituency' into a faction over the Falklands/Malvinas issue and then over the Labour Party. Having done that, they have been unable to accept being a minority - even a privileged and very liberally treated minority. Their entire concept of the revolutionary party is tied up with their own personal prestige and status as the 'worker leadership'.

Consequently they felt trapped in an organisation politically alien to them - unable to integrate, equally unable to subordinate themselves to the majority.

Smith declared at the March 10 NC: "There is not a single major question on which we do not have fundamental differences". A calm examination of stated political positions would yield a less exaggerated picture. Nevertheless, Smith was without doubt accurately describing his own political perception of the situation. And that perception is an important political fact.

Politically, in recent months, the faction has been in a state where it lashes out more or less blindly against the majority. It feels oppressed and bamboozled, and cannot see where to go. Reacting against the majority, it picks up bits of old Healyism and of current 'Trotskyist public opinion'.

It would have been best if the Smith faction could have stopped and reflected - and decided to be integrated into the WSL. Since it did not, the only question is how a split will happen.

If the Smith faction and their allies go their own way, it is difficult to see what that way will be. In their present politics there are elements of a retreat to Healyite sectarianism; elements of a move towards B.; impulses towards the USFI. It is difficult to say which will dominate.

P.S. In the middle of duplicating this bulletin, I received the copy for the next 'B' (which we typeset on a commercial basis). Included was an article by Smith! So it certainly looks as if the "elements of a move towards B" are there.

That move could, of course, be combined with the other elements: the Smith group could maintain a ritualistic 'party profile' while remaining in practice a political subsidiary of B, and it could choose to collaborate with Socialist Action in B. I don't know.

But this latest move should give some food for thought to those comrades who in late '82/early '83 were grouped around Smith and Jones on the basis of their wild denunciations of us as 'liquidationists' because we advocated exploring B as a possible political vehicle inside the O. if our paper was proscribed...

