

The differences summed up

by Kinnell

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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 rebels? 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,