

THE GENERAL STRIKE

Discussion articles from the pre-fusion joint discussion bulletin,
by Cunliffe and Kinnell.

(Also available on this question are a few copies of articles
from Internal Bulletin no. 1 by Morrow and Kinnell, and copies
of a paper by Morrow and Kinnell, who reported a general strike.)

'IB 105 - descent to the pits', by Gunther

The ICL opposition to the demand "General Strike to Kick out the Tories" is coupled with the advocacy of a General Strike - to achieve limited, specific goals, such as repeal of anti-union laws or the defeat of a pay freeze.

So while arguing that a call to remove the government "limits" the outcome of a General Strike in advance, the ICL in effect impose a far more restricted perspective on the very campaign for a General Strike.

Yet experience even in recent years (France in May-June 1968; the confrontation over the Pantonville dockers in 1972; the Labour government's repeal of the Industrial Relations act, in the face of a national strike call by the AUEW) has shown that governments will - under certain conditions - make concessions on precisely such limited questions as wages or particular pieces of legislation in order to head off a General Strike and remain in office to regroup and wage further attacks.

These struggles have also confirmed that the trade union bureaucracy itself goes to great lengths to restrict the demands of the general strike movement to specific, limited demands on economic questions or on particular anti-union legislation. This was the case for instance during the miners' pay struggle of winter 1973-4. The solidity of the action and the growing mass solidarity of the workers' movement were the factors that forced Heath to seek a General Election to prepare the ground for a full-scale confrontation. The miners refused to call off their strike during the election campaign, and eventually concluded their deal with the newly-elected Wilson government. But throughout the action, it has now been confirmed, Gormley and the NUM leaders were shamelessly in collaboration with the Heath government, seeking at all costs a far on pay which would have enabled the Tories to settle and remain in office. We can see a similar case in the steel strike of 1980. While union leaders in BL and other public sector pay reviews struggled to prevent any simultaneous strikes that might extend towards a general strike, and the TUC moved in to knife the General Strike call of the Welsh TUC, the ISTC leaders themselves battled to separate the issue of wages and jobs. They knew all too well that certain concessions could be secured on the pay issue - but to stem the slaughter of jobs meant to reverse the Tory strategy for the industry - effectively defeat the government.

Such conscious moves to limit workers' struggles to issues which can be tactically conceded by a capitalist government form the consistent tradition of the British (and every other) labour bureaucracy. The crucial weakness of the 1926 General Strike was precisely the determination of the TUC leaders to confine the struggle to economic demands; their refusal to put forward any call for the removal of the Baldwin government; and the failure of the Communist Party and left bureaucracy to offer any political alternative to the treachery of the General Council. The ICL point out in their pamphlet (p13) that the 1926 strike committees in County Durham "effectively took control of their area" - but leave out the fact that the limited demands and leadership of that strike led to its defeat.

In our view it is the obstruction of political development by the labour bureaucracy which is a primary obstacle to the development of mass struggle on a scale sufficient to bring down the Tories. We accept that in real terms a General Strike will arise not from some abstract and arbitrary decision by the whole working class, but from the extension of a particular struggle or wave of struggles (with their own specific and limited demands). But we consider it essential to raise - in the context of our struggle to spread and generalise such action - the need to bring down the

It is necessary also to raise propaganda for the kind of organisation needed by the working class to force not only the defeat of the Tory government, but also prepare for the necessary struggles against an incoming Labour government; to spell out the kind of socialist policies needed by the working class, and to draw from these a series of demands to be raised under a Labour government. It is necessary also in this context to counterpose the slogan of a workers' government, rooted in the movement of the masses, to a further repetition of the Wilson/Callaghan governments.

But unless we spell out a perspective for extra-parliamentary mass action by the working class to bring down the Tory government, begin to feel their independent strength as a class, and press home the fight for their demands, such socialist propaganda becomes simply empty rhetoric, or abstract prescriptions for action after the 1984 election.

Indeed it is appropriate to turn the question around. The ICL use the slogan "Boot Out the Tories". Do they not have an obligation to explain to the workers' movement just who is to do the booting, by what means, under what conditions, and exactly what we propose to replace the booted out capitalists? Surely the answer cannot be very different from the one embodied in the WSL's slogans.

We must combat the reformist delusion that the Tories can simply be pressured into a change of line, or that reforms can be won for the working class without mass action to defeat this government. This is now being advanced as a perspective by Peoples March leaders, Heffer-style lefts and wide layers of the labour bureaucracy. We must spell out that when we call for mass action to defeat the Tories we are not simply calling for another 100,000-strong one-off demonstration, for petitions or for protest stoppages, but for all-out General Strike action with the firm objective of sweeping this government from office.

If the Tories under such conditions were to call an election, they would do so not from a position of strength but of weakness. We do not call for a General Election; but we would not oppose one if it were called. We would press for the class action to continue during the election, redouble our efforts to develop the independent strength and organisation of the working class (councils of action, occupation committees, etc), seek means to drive the wedge between the forward-moving working class and its reluctant "leaders" in the unions and the Labour Party, build our own revolutionary forces, and seek to create the most favourable conditions to press home the struggle under whatever government emerged from the election.

We see no reason to be afraid of the possibility that a General Election may be called to defuse our General Strike. We see rather a danger in failing to put forward an adequate political perspective in a potential General Strike situation; the government could once again be handed an extended lease of life by the union bureaucracy with us playing the role of the CP in 1926 - offering no serious political alternative to the limited demands of the reformists.

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THE GENERAL STRIKE

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After a discussion on the joint NC about the general strike, I wrote a brief note outlining the differences as I saw them. BS did a reply for the liaison committee. The notes are published here as they are. This article summarises the argument and replies to BS's points.

Further reading: Workers' Action pamphlet, Why We Need a General Strike; Rosa Luxemburg, The Mass Strike.

1. MARXISM AND THE GENERAL STRIKE

In the 19th century, the general strike was the slogan of anarchists and utopians, and the Marxists were sceptical. Engels wrote:

"In the Bakuninist [anarchist] programme, a general strike is the lever for unleashing social revolution. One fine morning, the workers in all the industries of a country, even of the whole world, stop work and, in four weeks at the maximum, oblige the ruling classes to surrender, or to attack the workers, thereby giving the latter the right to defend themselves and use this opportunity to tear down the whole of the old society... [But] it was recognised by all that a complete organisation of the working class and a full kitty were necessary. This indeed was the problem. On the one hand, the government, especially if encouraged by political abstentionism, will never allow the organisation or the funds of the workers to go so far; and on the other hand the political actions and abuses of the ruling classes will promote the emancipation of the workers long before the proletariat manages to achieve this ideal organisation and this vast reserve fund. And if it did have them, then it would not need to resort to the general strike to achieve its purpose"

('The Bakuninists At Work')

In the early 20th century, Rosa Luxemburg, basing herself on the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905 and also the Belgian general strikes for voting rights, argued that Engels' assessment was now out-of-date and one-sided. Engels was right as against the anarchists, she said; but the real development of the mass strike movements outstrips both the anarchists' conceptions and Engels' objections.

"In a word, the mass strike, as shown to us by the Russian Revolution, is not a crafty method discovered by subtle reasoning for the purpose of making the proletarian struggle more effective, but the method of action of the proletarian mass, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution."

Consequently the task of Marxists was not "to put the mass strike on the calendar on an appointed day", but:

"To give the cue for, and the direction to, the fight; to so regulate the tactics of the political struggle in its every phase and at its every moment that the entire sum of the available power of the proletariat which is already released and active, will find expression in the battle array of the party; to see that the tactics of the social democrats [i.e. Marxists] are decided according to their resoluteness and acuteness and that

they never fall below the level demanded by the actual relations of forces, but rather rise above it - that is the most important task of the directing body in period of mass strikes".

('The Mass Strike')

Instead of the general strike being the product of an all-at-once working-class rejection of capitalism, it could be the means by which working-class consciousness developed from limited aims according to the laws and logic of the class struggle.

In the Transitional Programme, Trotsky writes:

"Sit-down strikes, the latest expression of this kind of initiative, go beyond the limits of 'normal' capitalist procedure. Independently of the demands of the strikers, the temporary seizure of factories deals a blow to the idol, capitalist property. Every sit-down strike poses in a practical manner the question of who is boss of the factory; the capitalist or the worker?"

And, in the same way, when any industrial action spreads beyond purely sectional limits, and begins to become class action (solidarity strikes, flying pickets, etc.), then, even if the initial demands are very limited, workers gain confidence of their strength and solidarity as a class against the capitalists.

In this way the development of a struggle starting from limited demands can lead towards revolutionary conclusions. We aim to maximise that development and to make it conscious through our demands for transitional demands.

The development from limited demands to revolutionary conclusions does not always take place bit-by-bit. A general strike is a tremendous qualitative leap in such development. Even starting from very limited demands (e.g. scrap a particular law), it rapidly raises the question of workers taking control of law and order, essential supplies and services, etc. It "poses in a practical manner the question of who is boss" of the society. It also poses an answer: the workers must take power and operate the means of production under collective control.

So we must be able to fight for the use of the general strike at relevant times as a weapon for immediate limited demands; and at the same time equip ourselves to fight for workers' victory in a general strike, once started.

That is why the I-CL has argued for raising the General Strike for specific demands (Smash the Industrial Relations Act in 1972, Stop the Cuts and Closures more recently), and not for 'Kick the Tories Out'.

2. 'GENERAL STRIKE TO KICK THE TORIES OUT'

The slogan 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' links industrial militancy with politics in, apparently, a very clear, positive way. And it is popular with militants. But - I would argue - it is attractive partly because it is ambiguous. And Marxists need precision.

As a deliberate strategy proposed to the whole labour movement for dealing with the Tories, 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' has problems parallel to those Engels mentions. If the labour movement were conscious and well-organised enough to oust the Tories

through a general strike, then it would long previously have been strong enough to oust them by lesser means (obstruction, non-cooperation, etc.)

But BS proposes 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' rather differently. A General Strike, he argues, would most likely begin round "a very specific aim"; we should then intervene to "demand that the aim of the general strike is not merely to reverse a particular policy of the Tories but to kick them out". We do not envisage the TUC taking a deliberate decision to launch a general strike from a particular day to oust the Tories; rather, we base ourselves on an explosion of class solidarity round an immediate issue, and seek to direct that explosion towards kicking out the Tories.

This misses the nature of the general strike as a qualitative leap. Normally, even the most advanced industrial action mobilises only sections of the working class and comes to grip with only sectional issues. The labour movement relates to the general administration of society through parliamentary politics. And Trotskyists relate to the labour movement - by fighting to kick the Tories out and for demands on Labour, etc.

Once a general strike is underway, the working class has the immediate possibility of coming to grips with general politics directly. That does not mean that parliamentary politics fades away immediately. (E.g. in July 1972, when we were raising General Strike as an immediate agitational slogan, we also raised 'Kick the Tories out'). But relating to parliamentary politics becomes for us secondary compared to relating to the direct revolutionary possibilities of the general strike (workers' councils, workers' defence, etc.) The 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' slogan could only cut short those possibilities by directing the movement back towards relating to the general running of society only through parliamentary politics.

Either 'General Strike to Kick the Tories out' means: General Strike to replace Tories by Labour, i.e. general strike for a general election. In that case it is irresponsible trifling, a huge mobilisation for a comparatively minimal aim. Or it means: general strike to replace the Tories by a revolutionary government, i.e. general strike for revolution. But that is just the Bakuninist version.

3. GENERAL STRIKE FOR A GENERAL ELECTION?

But BS writes:

"I cannot understand why A asserts that the General Strike to kick out Tories demand here and now can only mean 'general strike for a general election'. If the Tories call a general election they haven't yet been kicked out; they're still in power, trying to be confirmed in power by an election".

Now the SLL used to raise 'General Strike to Kick the Tories out' explicitly as 'General Strike for a General Election':

"The general strike must not be lifted until the General Election when a Labour government pledged to socialist policies can be elected."

(SLL 'Daily Political Letter', July 26, 1972)

I guess most workers who would support the slogan 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' see it that way too. It makes some sense.

Short of revolution, the way to get the Tories out is to force an election. How to force an election? By making the government unable to govern. The only means of doing that open to rank and file workers is industrial action. So why not the maximum industrial action, i.e. general strike?

It's a profoundly reformist argument, because it sees the general strike purely as a pressure on parliamentary politics. It is also unrealistic. But it makes more sense than 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' as a slogan under which to continue a general strike once an election has been called.

Why is the General Strike being continued? To get more votes for Labour? General Strike to win the election? How? To get a more left-wing Labour government? How? Or because we do not accept parliamentary elections? Then why are we saying 'kick the Tories out' rather than 'kick the bosses out'? Or do we think that we can push Labour into organising a revolutionary uprising?

No: once an election is on, the way to kick the Tories out is to vote Labour. A 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' may make sense to workers as a way to force an election, but not as a way to win votes! The slogan 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' would completely disarm us when trying to argue against use of an election call by the bourgeoisie to demobilise a general strike.

4. 'LIMITED DEMANDS'

"A's position is further illogical since it conceives of raising the general strike slogan for objectives which are surely more limited than forcing the elected government out of office - i.e. to reverse particular policies (e.g. to kill the bill). All the arguments against our position apply with greater force to his own".

No. The initial demands for a general strike will be limited; that's a fact that we have to relate to and can't change at will.

The government may take fright and grant the demands immediately. If it does, it makes no more sense to bemoan the fact that the general strike has not led further than it does routinely each evening to bemoan the fact that the workers have not taken power that day.

If the general strike does not "prove victorious immediately by the threat alone" (Engels), then it rapidly transcends its initial demands and poses the question of who rules: workers or bosses. We have to propose a strategy for victory, i.e. an appropriate chain of transitional demands. The problem with 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' is that it shies away from a strategy for victory. It evades the question of which class will rule, and looks instead at which party will govern. It directs the working class towards sucking the question of power.

Demands like 'Smash the Industrial Relations Act' or '35 hour week now' or 'Work-sharing without loss of pay' are limited but not limiting. 'Kick the Tories out' is not only limited but also (in a general strike) limiting.

5. 'MINDLESS MILITANCY'

"The alternative is just to say 'General Strike' without at this stage setting an objective. That A will surely agree is real mindless militancy".

Not quite. Obviously when we raise General Strike as an

immediate agitational call to action, we have to be precise about immediate demands. But in making propaganda (i.e. relatively full explanations to a relatively limited audience), I don't see why we can't explain the General Strike as a valuable weapon in the working class arsenal which can be appropriate in struggles arising out of limited demands but which has revolutionary potential. In the same way, we make propaganda, e.g. for occupations and flying pickets, without always specifying exactly what positive demands they may be linked to.

The I-CL has explained the General Strike in this way over the last 18 months, also raising it more agitationally at time. So far as I can understand, the French Trotskyists raised it in this way in 1935-6, for example. And Rosa Luxemburg argued for the German Social Democracy to raise the mass strike in this way, specifically opposing the idea that it should be tied precisely to just one possible issue - defence of the workers' right to vote.

"To fix beforehand the cause and the moment from and in which the mass strikes in Germany will break out is not in the power of social democracy, because it is not in its power to bring about historical situations by resolutions at party congresses".

('The Mass Strike')

6. "THE MILLION DIFFERENT POSSIBILITIES"

"A's note seems to exclude anything between the demand for a revolutionary government on the one hand and an ordinary old peaceful general election on the other. But if a general strike did force a general election the situation would be one of the million different possibilities between these two extremes. It would be certainly unlike any general election ever seen before".

Yes, a general election following a general strike would be out of the ordinary. Even with my "mind-boggling lack of imagination" (BS again), I can think of a few possibilities.

* An election like France 1968 or Australia 1975 (after the Governor-General 'sacked' the elected Labour government), when the Right wins heavily by being a more convincing Party of Order than the workers' parties. The workers' parties lose because they seem to have nothing to offer but protests - no positive solutions, and/or no ability or will to fight for their solutions.

* An election where a 'centrist' bloc wins by presenting itself as the only force capable of 're-writing the nation'. In Britain we might get a SDP/Liberal/Tory 'wet' bloc. Active strikers might well vote for such a bloc: don't workers often say that they strike not out of choice but because the harsh confrontation policies of the management leave them no option? We had this sort of development, in a small way, in February 1974, with the big Liberal and SNP vote, and a low Labour vote.

* An election like April 1975 in Portugal (after the defeat of Sinola's coup attempt on March 11) - with the workers' parties winning a majority but unable and unwilling to do anything with that majority to solve the social crisis.

* An election like 1919 in Germany when a conservative workers' party wins, with the votes of newly-aroused workers who identify that party with socialism, and uses its victory to organise counter-revolution.

Whatever the variant, revolutionaries could be active to good effect. We might even have some weight in determining which variant emerged. But in a general strike, achieving workers' power is an immediate possibility, and our task is to try to develop towards making it a reality.

All these variants are variants of what might happen after the general strike fails to achieve that immediate task.

The working class that ducks the immediate task (or allots it to its parliamentary misleaders) must expect a backlash from the bourgeoisie. The revolutionary organisation that ducks it proves itself unworthy. And for the revolutionaries to console themselves with the thought that the ensuing election will present millions of possibilities, is also unworthy.

7. "GENERAL STRIKE FOR A WORKERS' GOVERNMENT"

Some comrades in the I-CL have posed the question: doesn't our call for a Workers' Government change the terms of the argument, as compared to 1972-4? Can't we now pose GSKTO in terms of 'General Strike for a Workers' Government'?

This might be valid if the transformation of the Labour Party were much further advanced than in fact it is. But in reality a Labour Government elected now in the aftermath of a General Strike would be a conservative Labour Government. It would have Foot as Leader and Healey as Deputy. It would have policies firmly tied to capitalism.

It might prove unstable over the years, as the labour movement used its right to re-select MPs and re-elect the Leader and Deputy. But the Labour Party apparatus has enough 'dead weight' to act as an effective conservative force in the weeks and months following a general strike. It could even - with the assistance of the trade union bureaucracy - use that period to purge the militants and make sure the Labour Government was not destabilised later.

In any case, to opt for a minimal outcome from a General Strike (i.e. such a Labour Government), on the calculation that it would allow revolutionary possibilities later, is not a Trotskyist approach. And would we get even that minimal outcome? A general strike is not the way to get a general election. And the Tories could well win a general election forced on them by a general strike.

In the early 1970s, a favourite argument of Gerry Healy's was: 'The working class which has dealt with the Tory masters will know how to deal with the Labour servants'. Or:

"Once the working class has been mobilised in a general strike to force the Tories to resign, it will be able to deal with the traitors inside the Labour Party and the trade unions. It would have the strength to force socialist policies on a Labour government returned by direct class action.... With such policies forced on it by the strength of the working class, a Labour government could not be the same as previous Labour governments"

('Workers Press', 1972).

It sounds good, but it's pure bluster. The lesson of the 1970s is that the working class knew fairly well how to deal with the Tories, but was crippled by the fact that its best political slogan

was just 'kick the Tories out'. It did not know at all so well how to deal with the Labour leaders. And the Labour leaders then, by their inability to deal with capitalism's crisis, helped the Tories back into power.

It's easy to give a revolutionary gloss to 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' by saying, "A general election after a general strike could never be the same as an ordinary general election", "A Labour government brought to power by a general strike could never be the same as an ordinary Labour government". But these are consolations, not useful strategic information.

8. THE BEST WE CAN HOPE FOR?

In the joint NC discussion on the General Strike, KW argued that the fundamental error of the I-CL position was that we believed a revolutionary insurrection was possible in Britain in the near future. In reality, he said, no such outcome is possible. Therefore the best we can hope for from a general strike is the general election which is like no previous general election, the Labour government which is like no previous Labour government, etc - and we relate to that.

Other WSL comrades have said they disagree with KW. But I think KW's argument sharply expresses the logic of, for example, BS's presentation, or PL's contributions in the joint NC.

A general election like no previous general election, or a Labour government like no previous Labour government, is perhaps a desirable goal as compared to today's situation. But it is not a desirable goal during a general strike or for a general strike - unless that general strike actually has no revolutionary possibilities.

Given the strength of reformism and the weakness of the Trotskyists, we might indeed very likely be defeated in fighting for a revolutionary development of a general strike in Britain in the near future. But we can't set a limit in advance. We have to fight for victory - so that if we are defeated, it is not because of our own weakness and slowness, and so that we can rally and educate the best militants. If we do not fight for victory, we remove ourselves as a factor in the struggle striving for victory (by way, initially, of putting appropriate political perspectives), and we make ourselves into a force striving for something less than victory.

9. A NOTE ON HISTORY

The recent history of the general strike slogan in Britain begins in the early '70s, when the SLL raised it in the movement against the Industrial Relations Bill. As noted above, they raised it in the form, 'General Strike to kick the Tories out', explicitly meaning 'General Strike for a general election'.

IS (now SWP) picked up the General Strike slogan casually from time to time between 1970 and 1974 - sometimes, for example, blazoning it as the front-page headline without a word of text explaining how, or why, or what it meant. Occasionally they used 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' without any further explanation. In July 1972, when a mass strike movement developed against the jailing of 5 dockers, they dithered and failed to call for a general strike until the TUC did...

During the period in 1972 when the General Strike was really

on the agenda, the IMG stubbornly opposed the slogan, arguing for 'rounded political explanations' rather than 'calls to action'. With magnificent ineptness, they changed their line just as the General Strike went off the immediate agenda.

They proposed 'General Strike to kick the Tories out'. At first they justified it in typical logic-chopping terms: we are for smashing the state, the government is part of the state, therefore we are for smashing the government, and we are for using all means necessary, therefore 'General Strike and all means necessary to kick the Tories out'...

This rigmarole was rationalised, during 1973, with the theory that the Tory government was the only possible government for the bourgeoisie. The Tory government's policies were described as the various arms of an octopus - the answer was to slay the octopus. (But, of course, most of those 'Tory' policies could be, and were, in essentials continued by a Labour government....)

During winter 1973-4, the IMG's agitation for 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' became hysterical. When an election was called, the General Strike agitation was continued with the argument that General Strike action would help beat the Tories at the polls. The climax was reached when the election results were announced and Heath hesitated a couple of days before resigning. The IMG issued a broadsheet calling for a General Strike and for the Labour Party to ignore Heath and seize power unilaterally.

In line with the theory that the Tory government was the only possible government for the bourgeoisie, for several months in 1974 the IMG compared the new Labour government to the Allende government in Chile.

A big minority inside the IMG opposed the hysterical headline-every-issue use of 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' - and also proposed a different rationalisation of it. They proposed a parallel agitation for councils of action. The General Strike should then be proposed to kick the Tories out and replace them by a government based on those councils of action.

This was, in Trotsky's words, "to try to appease the hunger of today with the dinner of tomorrow". How can we call on workers to strike all-out to give power to councils which don't yet exist?

However, this IMG minority position is, as far as I can see, the only alternative coherent version of 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' to the SLL 'General Strike for a general election' version. The WSL's present position, it seems to me, is a sort of mixture between the SLL and IMG minority positions.

ALAN.

IB 105 - Descent to the pits!

IB 105 is a wonderful example of the level of distortion to which Carolan (with, presumably, the endorsement of the EC, since the document is "by Carolan, for the EC") has now sunk.

Before the suspension of the faction over 50 members of the League signed a call for a special conference to discuss the internal situation - precisely because we foresaw expulsions being pushed through without any opportunity being given the membership to reach its own conclusion after full debate on whether the fusion was dead. At the special NC on 31st March I moved the resolution from S.W. London branch calling on the NC "not to expel, or start proceedings of expulsion against the faction without full consultation with the membership." (I moved the motion since the 2 NC members of that branch, Callaghan and Collins, declined to do so. Neither Callaghan, who originally supported the resolution, nor Collins - who abstained - have explained why they came round to voting for suspensions on 31st March. Collins has even written an IB which does not raise this question).

In addition, Parsons moved the resolution from Coventry branch along similar lines which included the clause "We call on the NC to oppose any expulsions before the special conference has discussed the internal situation".

As well as proceeding with suspensions, rejecting these resolutions, the NC majority also ignored the call for a special conference signed by well over the requisite 25% of the membership. The resolution passed says:

"The constitution stipulates that when 25% of the members want a special conference it shall be held. This NC believes that the spirit of the constitution - the spirit of the class struggle and of revolutionary Bolshevism - allows the NC a certain leeway in interpreting the constitution to take account of major events in the class struggle like the miners' strike.

On the question of a conference, the NC therefore resolves to bring forward the date of the regular conference (at which any resolution, documents etc. can be put, and a new NC will be elected), The 1984 conference of the WSL will be held not more than 6 weeks after the end of the miners' strike, or not later than 3 months after March 31st, whichever falls the soonest."

The red herring of the miners' strike, continually brought in as a 'reason' for not holding a conference is sheer demagoguery. The history of our movement (or at least, the healthy side of it) includes holding a founding conference during a revolution (Germany 1918-19) and during a world war (SWP USA 1940, at which, incidentally, the opposition were not expelled, even though they opposed defence of the Soviet Union in an imperialist war). The implication (a lie!) is that those calling for a special conference are not interested in working around the miners' strike. The point has been made several times that if the NC majority were so keen on working around the miners' strike they should choose such a time to tear the organisation apart.

Lets return to IB 105. After rejecting resolutions calling for no expulsions before conference, after rejecting the call for a special conference, Carolan then attempts to use Trotsky against those who are still attempting to prevent the wrecking of the WSL as if we wanted WSL policy decided by referendum! Carolan has the audacity to quote 'In Defence of Marxism':

"Instead of a convention it is sufficient to introduce a counting of local votes!"

Comrades, WE called for a convention, this was rejected by the NC majority, Trotsky quotes cannot be used to tell us that black is white! Carolan has accused the faction and others of lies and distortions, doesn't such a blatant and gross distortion of events stick in the collective gullet of the EC?

April 14th - A Waste of Time?

The resolution passed March 31st says that the suspended members will be "given due constitutional notice that a motion for their expulsion will be brought to the NC on April 14th." IB 105 now says something completely different. This document, endorsed by the EC, states quite clearly:

"Until the conference, the NC decision stands".

Not 'the EC recommends', no it is quite explicit - 'the decision stands! Carolan abolishes the role of the NC at the stroke of a pen.

When Omission becomes Distortion.

In the extremely cynical 'building the WSL' section of IB 105 Carolan writes "The second part of the March 31 NC, discussing the miners' strike, was the most fruitful political discussion we had had for a very long time."

What Carolan 'accidentally' fails to mention is that Cunliffe, who has been attacked at least as much as the faction, is called a satellite of the faction, and whom Carolan hopes will eventually leave with the faction; Levy, who is described as the Fenner Brockway of the League; and myself (broad-church Trotskyist, plebiscite mongerer, wholemeal lifestylist?) were present for that discussion and took an active part in that discussion. The impression is given that once the troublemakers had gone we could get down to 'fruitful political discussion'. How is this so if some of the 'troublemakers' were still present?

Postscript to March 31st

Two events related to the special NC of March 31st should make some members think about just how righteous and honest the NC majority has really been in this whole affair.

1) It was arranged in advance that the locks would be changed at the centre and for various comrades to be present 'for security' before any decision was taken by the NC.

2) Objections were made at the NC that, on arrival, we were handed a document (IB 99) containing a 2000 word resolution on the suspensions. Jones challenged it on the basis that the EC of Thursday 29th March had been told that 'a resolution may arise during the course of discussion at the NC', and that none was yet written. This was not denied. IB 99 hardly arose during the course of discussion! Hill told me after the NC that the resolution was written on the Friday. In fact there are two witnesses to the fact that this resolution was being produced (not merely written!) at the centre on Thursday 29th before the EC took place. Who are the liars and deceivers? The only possible explanation for this underhand way of operating is that Carolan and others were scared of the members (including EC and NC members entitled to see resolutions in advance of the NC) being aware of their plans before the NC.

Gunther, Brent 12/4/84

