

INTERNAL BULLETIN NO.113

APRIL 1984

Branch circular

NC minutes April 14 1984

'The problem of poison gas', by Carolan

'"The servility of a theoretician" - Cunliffe on imperialism',
by Kinnell

Please ignore the contents lists at the end of the
branch circular and at the head of the article,
'The Problem of Poison Gas'. The contents of this
bulletin and no.114 have been reshuffled following
an error in duplicating.

BRANCH CIRCULAR

SEE PAGE 3 FOR LIST OF
CONTENTS OF THIS BULLETIN1. MINERS' STRIKE

The main political lines of our work round the miners' strike were laid down in a resolution at the March 31 NC which was written up in expanded form as an editorial for the paper.

Our main work round the strike has been in Nottingham and Sheffield. In Sheffield we organised a fringe meeting at the NUM special conference on April 19 which was a considerable success, with 52 miners present.

In Nottingham we made a major contribution by initiating the 'police out of the coalfields' demonstration: it started from our initiative, and within a few days we were able to get national NUM backing for a demonstration which brought support for the strike into the heart of Nottinghamshire.

We have also developed good contacts with the unofficial rank and file strike committee in Nottinghamshire (see report in the paper).

We should look into the possibility of organising activity round the issue of the police elsewhere (there has been discussion about doing something in South Wales).

In areas outside the main coalfields our chief activity has to be support committees. Such committees now exist in most areas. The Basingstoke comrades have coined a useful idea which could be taken up elsewhere: writing to the nearest NUM area and suggesting that individual workplaces in the area of the support committee should 'adopt' individual pits, taking collections for them, etc.

Taking collections is a very important activity. The miners are not receiving strike pay, and in Nottinghamshire there has not even been any hardship money.

We should not just take collections among the 'activists' at labour movement meetings, but also in the workplaces. We can raise more money by broader collections, and, just as important, it gives us a chance (and forces us) to discuss the issues round the strike with a broader range of working class people. It can also bring us new contacts.

In the O. we should argue for organising (or organise ourselves, if need be) door-to-door collections on the same principle. In appropriate areas these can be combined with activity for the local elections. Obviously we have to argue against people who want to subordinate activity round the strike to routine electioneering.

It is best to try to get the money collected to the NUM as near to rank and file level as you can. If you can, adopt a pit (as above). If you can't, take collections for the Nottingham rank and file strike committee (details in next paper), and send the money to our comrades in Nottingham to hand over.

We have some possibilities of getting strikers (especially from Nottinghamshire) to speak at public meetings organised by us (though that presupposes we can raise the money for fares - see 'Levy' above!) Comrade Hill is coordinating organisation for such meetings, and activity around the strike generally. Branches should contact him c/o the centre.

LEVY

The OSC on April 19 decided to ask for a financial levy of the membership to support our work round the miners' strike.

We have already spent something like £250 on petrol etc., and £160 on a car repair. Any expansion of our work is going to need more money.

Some comrades, of course, have already put a lot of money into this work; we need contributions from others to keep it up.

We suggest £5 from employed comrades and £1 for unemployed.

Please also use this opportunity to approach contacts for substantial donations.

2. COMING EVENTS

- April 28 ... Labour CND AGM (contact the centre if you have a possibility of going)
- April 28 ... Yorkshire area meeting, in York
- April 29 ... CPSA fraction meeting
- May 5 ... NC
- May 6 ... SO councillors' meeting
- May 11-14 ... LP women's conference
(contact the centre if you know sympathisers who are delegates)
- May 12 ... LP workplace branches meeting.
(As many sympathetic comrades as possible who are involved in such work, or have the possibility of becoming involved, should come. Contact Weightman c/o the centre).
- May 19 ... Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine conference (contact Keith c/o the centre).
- May 19 ... National demonstration against the Police Bill
- June 9 ... CND demonstration against Reagan: national mobilisation!
- June 8-11 ... Lutte Ouvriere fete (see paper)
- June 23 ... Women's Fightback conference on local government cuts
- June 30-July 1 (probably) ... WSL conference.

3. OXFORD FACTION

At the April 14 NC meeting the Oxford faction was expelled. For details see the enclosed brief NC minutes.

The reasons for this action by the NC were outlined in the March 31 NC resolution (IB 99) and in the EC circular, IB 105.

Smith, speaking to the NC on behalf of the faction, said that he was not sure whether the faction would use their right to appeal to conference.

On the same day as the NC there was the Labour Committee on Ireland AGM. A substantial group of faction members was present. They not only voted differently from the WSL on political issues, but also voted for the Socialist Action candidate against the Socialist Organiser candidate for youth officer.

Comrades should also be informed that a large proportion of the faction membership turned up to the NC and disrupted the start of the NC by occupying the meeting room and refusing to leave.

Smith has an article in the current B. One maverick sympathiser of the faction, Markham in Sheffield, has jumped over their heads and joined the Castroite wing of Socialist Action. Exactly what the faction as a group will do now, we don't know.

But in any case, for now, subject to what the forthcoming WSL conference may decide, the faction is a formally separate organisation from the WSL. Comrades in the WSL may of course agree with the faction's political views on one, or many, political questions, and if so they are entirely at liberty to argue those views

within the WSL. There is no question of anyone being victimised for political ideas. But relations with the faction as an organisation are a different question.

Collaboration with it against the WSL is out of order; collaboration with it in the broad labour movement on particular issues (on the same sort of basis as we collaborate on particular issues with SA, SWP, Militant, etc.) must be under the control of the relevant bodies of the WSL.

Next NC

May 5, 10.30am to 7.30pm, in London.

Agenda;

1. Political report: miners' strike.
2. 'General strike to kick the Tories out'.
3. Report on Liverpool and the local government situation generally.
4. Pre-conference discussion: the 'Document of the Eight' and 'Building the WSL' (IB 50)
5. Conference arrangements.
6. NC minutes/matters arising. EC minutes/Matters arising.

Conference
probably

June 30-
July 1

In line with the NC resolution the EC has written to the faction leadership proposing discussion on possible practical collaboration.

The NC resolution also provides for faction representatives to speak at WSL area meetings. We will be contacting area organisers in the next few days to arrange these meetings: we would suggest that they put the miners' strike on their agenda as well as the situation with the faction.

We are making plans for a WSL conference on the weekend of June 30-July 1. If the miners' strike ends soon, then (in line with the March 31 NC resolution) the conference date will be moved earlier: but that does not look very likely now.

The April 14 NC also received a petition signed by 32 comrades: "We, the undersigned, oppose the suspension pending expulsion of over 30 members of the former Faction by the NC on March 31 and call on the NC to lift the suspensions at its meeting on April 14. We further demand the convening of a Special Conference (or the allocation of a whole day of any other conference otherwise convened by the NC in the next two months) to discuss (1) the internal situation and IB 92; (2) the reinstatement of any members still suspended/expelled".

The NC rejected the petition's proposal to reinstate the faction - feeling that this would be an abdication by the NC from its responsibilities and would lead at best to two months of chaos in the organisation without any real central authority, possibly to a serious disintegration of the organisation.

The NC did however adopt the petition's proposal that a whole day of the forthcoming conference be given over to the organisational questions. The 'Document of the Eight' (IB 92) will obviously be part of the agenda on that day.

The next NC on May 5 (see above) will decide the details of the conference agenda and start the pre-conference discussion.

In the meantime we have to turn our resources, as much as possible, towards the miners' strike.

Kinnell. 22.4.84.

Contents of this bulletin

Branch circular

NC April 14 1984: brief minutes

'Gunther and Oliver - who know not what they want', by Carolan

'How Smith was "denied access to the public press" - the illuminating story of the "suppression" of the faction', by Carolan

NC April 14 1984

Absent: Matthews, Strummer.

MOTION TO EXPEL FACTION

EC proposal that we adopt same procedure as with 'Internationalist Faction', i.e. one speaker on behalf of faction, with proviso that any individual wishing to dissociate from general line of faction can be heard separately.

Gunther: proposal to hear each individual separately.

EC recommendation carried by 12 votes to 5.

Carolán
Parkinson: proposal to invite a witness from the faction in addition.

Agreed unanimously.

Smith and Jones then attended the meeting as representatives of the faction.

Smith made a statement and Smith and Jones answered various questions from the NC members.

After they had withdrawn, Levy presented a petition with 32 signatures.

"We, the undersigned, oppose the suspension pending expulsion of over 30 members of the former Faction by the NC on March 31 and call on the NC to lift the suspensions at its meeting on April 14.

We further demand the convening of a Special Conference (or the allocation of a whole day of any other conference otherwise convened by the NC in the next two months) to discuss:

1. the internal situation and IB 92
2. the reinstatement of any members still suspended/xexpelled".

After discussion, the following votes were taken:

To expel the members of the faction (as in resolution of March 31 NC, IB 99):

Carried, 12 for, 5 against.

To call a special conference (i.e. in contrast to the decision of the March 31 NC integrating the special conference with a brought-forward annual conference).

a) Amendment from Birmingham branch that this be within 4 weeks.

Lost, overwhelmingly.

b) Resolution without amendment.

Lost, 5 votes to 12.

To allocate a whole day to the internal situation, etc.

Carried, 4 against, 2 abstentions.

Keith: That the NC undertakes to place on the agenda of the conference a review of the crisis in the organisation and the question of organisational structure, norms, etc.

Carried unanimously.

Carolán: Normal League constitutional provisions on relations with other tendencies now apply to relations with the expelled faction.

Clause 6:ix of the Constitution states that: "Relations with other tendencies as such or with members of other tendencies shall be entirely under the control of the NC and those bodies and individuals appointed by the NC to conduct those relations".

Carried unanimously.

Carolán: The details of the area meetings to discuss the expulsions, etc., to which a representative of the Oxford faction will be invited, are entirely in the hands of the OSC and EC (in consultation, of course, with the areas).

Carried unanimously.

APRIL 1984

'The problem of poison gas', by Carolan

"The servility of a theoretician" - Cunliffe on imperialism', by Kinnell

'A question of strategy', by McInnis

THE PROBLEM OF POISON GAS

Carolan.

"A lie will have travelled halfway round the world while the truth is putting his shoes on".

Mark Twain.

Until about mid-March, when we began to reply to them, the leaders of the Oxford faction, and Cunliffe, had things pretty much their own way inside the organisation. They had progressively retired from all their League responsibilities, and spent their time and energies producing poison gas which they circulated inside the organisation under the label of Internal Bulletins.

A vast volume of straight lies and malicious factionally-motivated 'interpretations' of 'incidents' on the leading committees etc. has been put into circulation in this way.

The vicious misrepresentations and distortions were not unavoidable misunderstandings or the usual conflicting interpretations which are always incidental to serious political disputes. Since last summer the faction has devoted itself almost entirely to "exposure politics" inside the League. It has sought, seized upon, misconstrued and invented suitable 'incidents' to expose and scandalise the "bureaucracy" of the WSL. It has used as its model the methods of the 1960s SLL against the TUC and LP bureaucracy - and against competing left-wing groups.

Smith, Cunliffe, and their group have brought to their campaign inside the League the complete lack of scruple the SLL brought to its campaigns of "exposure" against its Marxist opponents in the labour movement at large. Except that the SLL did not pretend that it wanted unity with those whom it defamed, maligned and libelled, whereas the Smith group was inside the WSL until March 31.

The elected leadership of the organisation has had an acute problem in this situation. We have the heavy responsibility of running the organisation and the paper - made heavier by the internal secession of the faction. There has been the additional weight of the protracted financial crisis. We could not just let the organisation, and the class struggle to which it has to respond, go hang while we answered the poison gas IBs and cleared up the mess that the faction had made of the internal life of the League. Now, belatedly and reluctantly, we have had to make the time to answer at least some of the main lies and distortions put into circulation by the faction.

But in doing this we run into another problem. It is a lot easier casually to spawn lies, allegations and misrepresentations than it is to answer them. It takes space to analyse an assertion or to put an alleged incident or a distorted report in its proper context. It is, in the circumstances, impossible for us to follow after Smith, Jones and Cunliffe picking up and analysing all the petty and big lies they spawn so casually.

The answer is, in part, to take a representative sample of their lies about things which most members can easily check up on for themselves and ask comrades to draw the obvious conclusion: you can't take their word for anything, and you certainly should not take their word on anything you can't check for yourself.

So we took the example of what Smith and Cunliffe said the paper had said about the TUC last December. Nobody need take anyone else's word for anything on this:

you can check what they say we said against what was printed in the paper (see IB 90). Every serious member of the organisation should draw the obvious conclusions about Smith, Jones and Cunliffe, and those who have learned the SLL's political "method" from them.

A PLAGUE ON BOTH HOUSES?

But, unfortunately, while their lies about what our press was saying about the TUC last December may shatter their general credibility, they do not necessarily or automatically wipe off all the other mud they have thrown, or mud thrown by such as Parsons.

Sage philistine maxims, like "where there's smoke, there's fire" do sum up the attitude some comrades take on these matters - comrades who, for whatever reason, want to avoid facing the facts about Smith and Jones, or who don't like the elected members of the WSL leading committees, etc... the sort of comrades, in fact, who were Parsons' 'constituency' at last August's conference. The comrades who have responded to the deepening crisis of the organisation over the last year or 18 months by wilfully refusing to draw the politically indicated conclusions about the Smith group and the role it was playing in the organisation; and who wilfully refuse to draw the politically indicated conclusions about the role the elected leadership was playing in the organisation. The comrades who opted instead for the position of "a plague on both their houses, and don't be too nasty to comrade Smith".

There is little one can do about such comrades in the short term except to present them with a representative selection of the facts and a detailed analysis of some of the lies of Smith, Jones, Cunliffe and Parsons - and appeal to their reason against their prejudices.

Over time we must create - or rather repair - the political culture of the organisation so that, while there is tolerance of a very broad range of political differences within the organisation and every comrade is expected to think for her and himself, League public opinion is utterly intolerant of the a-political and irresponsible philistinism cultivated in the organisation over the past 18 months by circumstances and by Parsons.

PARSONS' RESOLUTIONS

There is yet another problem. It is very difficult to know exactly which of the lies and nonsense has had impact and needs to be replied to. I have been more than once astonished to find that some piece of transparent factional dishonesty or nonsense has lodged itself in some comrades' minds.

Two examples.

At the March 10 NC Parsons put out an IB (no.84) containing an invitation from McKelvie (who by then had been 2 months out of the WSL) to members of the League to leave it; a wonderful and valuable self-portrait by Parsons written to prove that he is "not an a-political shit" (it does the opposite); and a hysterical couple of pages by Parsons asking why the resolution from Coventry calling for a special conference had been left off the circulated NC agenda.

I found that this had stuck in the mind of a comrade who joined WF as long as nine years ago, and is neither friendly to the opposition nor inclined to see the elected leadership as a gang of villains. It troubled her.

In fact Parsons' resolution was left off the agenda by oversight, and its not being on the circulated agenda did not mean that it would not be discussed. Nobody had alleged that it arrived too late or anything like that. Before the NC, and probably before he did his IB, Parsons rang the centre and was told by me that there was no opposition on our side to its being on the agenda, and that its omission was an oversight. I reminded him that an almost identical resolution from the Oxford faction was on the agenda as circulated (in fact, at the NC, the

two resolutions were amalgamated).

Nobody with any sense could have even imagined that the villainous EC had anything to gain politically from trying to exclude Coventry's resolution. The exclusion of a slightly varying version of a resolution which was already on the circulated agenda could have no possible political significance.

In addition to all that, the EC would have little chance of commanding an NC majority to exclude a resolution which nobody denied was in on time, simply because somebody omitted it from a circular letter. So the IB piece by Parsons was a silly blast of self-important hot air.

The problem is that most comrades would not necessarily know what I've written in the last paragraph above.

SMITH AND THE PAPER

The second example concerns Smith's introduction to the 6000 word article which he chose to put uncult in the IB rather than in the paper cut down to two full pages. This is a transparently and deliberately dishonest piece of work.

For example, it says that there was a decision to exclude the faction from the public press taken at an EC meeting (he gives no date). This allegedly happened when Carolan announced it to the EC.

So what did the EC do when I made the supposed announcement? Everyone who believes Smith knows that Kinnell, Joplin, Hill, and Parkinson do exactly what I tell them! But what about Smith?

Smith has spent months arguing about an introductory blurb which Cunliffe and I put on his factional article on the invasion of Grenada (and how it proved Smith was right on the Falklands war), and about the secondary details of the way his speech at the September 17 conference was printed in full in the weekly paper. He took it as far as the NC on both occasions. His only concern in the organisation for many months has been agitation against "the regime".

And this self-same Smith didn't challenge my newly announced policy for the paper when I announced it at the EC? He didn't force it to a vote and then take it to the NC?

Well, as a matter of fact, no he didn't. Why not? Because the whole affair never happened!

The whole story, if you examine it, is transparently nonsensical. It couldn't have happened like that, and in fact it didn't happen at all.

Yet I found a relatively new comrade troubled by this nonsense. The same comrade believed another stupid and no less transparent lie in the same introduction: that the EC agreed to Smith's 6000-word article going in the paper and despite that I rejected it.

This is a direct lie. Smith at the EC that the article was coming. The EC obviously didn't then and there, without knowing what was in the article, forbid him to do it! It said to Smith: go ahead and write. And because of that Smith says the EC "agreed" to the article's inclusion exactly as he wrote it.

Again, the lie is obvious if you think about the affair in context. If what Smith says happened, really happened, then he would have gone back to the next EC and demanded that I be hung, drawn and quartered. And if the EC changed its attitude he would then have had a cause celebre for the NC. He would have had a more substantial case than he has had for any of his agitation over the last 9 months. If it were true...

But how could any EC/EB give Smith such blanket endorsement for a four page article, in advance of seeing it, and (a) knowing only vaguely what its subject was - no more than that it was on the recent developments in the unions; (b) knowing what he had been saying in the EC in December; (c) knowing that he was likely

to write what he did write, a piece of blinkered factional self-justification.

Despite all that we did not rule out in advance giving Smith four pages, and when we got the article and found it worse than hoped, we only asked him to reduce it from four pages to two. And these are "bureaucratic methods", "similar to the WRP" (IB X101)?

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

The above are the main problems we face in clearing away the corrosive poison gas manufactured by Smith, Jones, Cunliffe and Parsons. It is a very big and important job. Nevertheless, there has to be an end and a limit somewhere. IB 95 has been published on Cunliffe and the paper, IB 90 on the dispute over the TUC, and an article in IB 113 on Smith and the paper. After this we do not plan to reply to that sort of thing in any detail. Here too, enough is enough.

There is probably a case for us to do what the wartime Trotskyist RCP did when the Stalinists published a lying pamphlet about them. They offered a reward to anyone who could prove that there were less than half a dozen lies in the pamphlet. We could safely make such an offer about each of the recent efforts of Smith, Jones and Cunliffe.

The prize? A copy of 'The Battle for Trotskyism', perhaps, signed by Smith and Jones, "with love and best wishes to the new post-April-14 WSL". I'd find it easier to provide you with the prize than you would winning it!

WHAT IS THE ARGUMENT ABOUT?

One basic technique of Cunliffe's is to misrepresent what the argument is about. You would get the impression from his articles that the argument is about whether the economic domination of the Third World by the big capitalist powers, and its devastating effects, will continue. But that is not what the argument is about, either within the WSL or on the left in general.

I put it like this in IB 117:

"... The primary and dominating of the work by the state in the world economy... certainly continues. It has continued for centuries. But Lenin's theory had something more precise to say about imperialism in the day. And Marxists today should have something more precise to say about imperialism in our day. Only by analysing the concrete class relations, the concrete economic, the points where change is taking place, can we make our politics above the level of a general theory against imperialism."

"... There are features in common between 18th/19th century Spanish colonies of South America, and modern US imperialism in the region. Both the Spanish conquistadores working the local people to death at sword-point in the silver mines, and the US miners, partly going through the same process, partly air-conditioned offices, have plundered the people... But... the present economic mechanisms, political forms and class relations

"THE SERVILITY OF A THEORETICIAN" - CUNLIFFE AND IMPERIALISM

Kinnell

Karl Kautsky, argued Lenin, was guilty of "the servility of a theoretician". He made it his job to give Marxist-sounding rationalisations of the opportunist politics of the leadership of the German socialist movement before World War 1.

What was then enacted as tragedy is now being repeated as farce in the services supplied by Cunliffe to the Oxford faction.

When Cunliffe's IB 78 appeared, following his walk-out from the paper, I drafted a brief response to a dozen or so of the most important lies in it. With the usual pressure of work, the draft lay on one side for a bit. By the time I looked at it again, such a stream of further scandal-mongering had come out from Cunliffe and the Smith group that I just put the draft back in the file and left it there.

To try to deal with even the worst lies one by one would submerge the organisation in a flood of allegations and counter-allegations from which no-one could learn very much apart from the already evident fact that Cunliffe learned his trade too well in the WRP school of reckless disregard for the truth. We had to explain the basic political issues. Anyone disoriented enough to be affected by Cunliffe's stuff needed, not a painstaking discussion of all the fairy tales and nonsense, but a re-education in basic Marxist politics.

Cunliffe's recent material on imperialism (IBs 81 and 109) seems more reasonable than the organisational stuff. In many ways, however, I think it is more polluting and worse.

A dishonest tale about an organisational incident will not have much lasting effect. A dishonest way of dealing with basic Marxist ideas can spread confusion much further.

The Smith group has argued, fairly explicitly, for "anti-imperialist camp" politics in contrast to working-class politics. What Cunliffe does is to spin a web of rationalisations, false alternatives, and oily evasions in order to make the Smith group's politics look like Marxism.

(IB 100) (IB 107)
Ellis and Scott have already dealt with some of Cunliffe's material. Pressure of time obliges me to be very brief in the points added in this present article.

WHAT IS THE ARGUMENT ABOUT?

One basic technique of Cunliffe's is to misrepresent what the argument is about. You would get the impression from his articles that the argument is about whether the economic domination of the Third World by the big capitalist powers, and its devastating effects, still continue. But that is not what the argument is about, either within the WSL or on the Left in general.

I put it like this in IB 77:

"... The plunder and domination of the weak by the strong in the world economy... certainly continues. It has continued for centuries. But Lenin's theory had something more precise to say about imperialism in his day. And Marxists today should have something more precise to say about imperialism in our day. Only by analysing the concrete class relations, the contradictions, the points where change is taking place, can we raise our politics above the level of a general outcry against injustice..."

"... There are features in common between 16th/18th century Spanish pillage of South America, and modern US imperialism in the region. Both the Spanish conquistadores working the local people to death at sword-point in the silver mines, and the US bankers, quietly going through figures in their air-conditioned offices, have plundered the people..."

"But... the precise economic mechanisms, political forms and class relations

have changed seriously between the 16th century and now. Unless we analyse those changes, our political conclusions will not be geared to the concrete class relations, but only to a bland, abstract nationalist populism - a general expression of sympathy with the 'people' against the exploiters...

"Adding a sentence to the end of our proclamations: 'The reformists betray, and these aims can only be won under the leadership of a Trotskyist party', would be no substitute for a proper revised definition of the camps and the issues..."

THE CAMPS AND THE ISSUES

Since World War 2, most Third World countries have become politically independent; most have seen some serious capitalist development, giving real flesh and muscle to their capitalist ruling classes. Also, the USSR has emerged as the second pillar of world reaction and as an alternative pole for Third World bourgeoisies to relate to.

Despite this the economic domination of the weak by the strong continues, as it must do under capitalism. Also, capitalist development in the Third World is an even more brutal and inhumane process than it was in 19th century Europe.

Middle-class Third World politicians respond by demanding 'real' development and 'real' independence. A whole body of neo-Marxist theory has been developed which sees the basic divisions in the world not as between classes but as between 'centre' and 'periphery'.

This 'centre/periphery' theory sounds almost like the theory of permanent revolution when it says that only socialism can bring the 'real' independence and 'real' development which it demands. Actually it runs counter to the programme of permanent revolution. It subordinates the working class to utopian bourgeois nationalist aims, rather than arming the working class to define its own independent aims even in the course of the struggle for bourgeois-democratic goals.

The 'centre/periphery' theory also disarms the working class by defining the Third World bourgeoisies as reactionary only in so far as they are agents of the 'centre'. When those bourgeoisies turn against the 'centre', they are seen as relatively progressive.

The 'centre/periphery' theory can also be made to sound like Leninism. Lenin stressed the revolutionary importance of the struggle for colonial liberation. But Lenin's programme against imperialism was working-class internationalism.

The Marxist response to the demands for 'real' development and 'real' independence is to seek clearer definitions. If harmonious development and freedom from the pressures of world capitalism are demanded, then they are impossible within capitalism and impossible on a national basis anyway. If, on the contrary, such development and independence as are possible within world capitalism are the issues at stake, then they are already underway.

A scientific programme for today cannot be got by trying to define 'real' national development, any more than the socialists in the 19th century could get a scientific programme by trying to define 'real' Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality. We have to fight imperialism on a class basis, not a 'periphery/centre', 'world balance of forces', 'anti-imperialist camp' basis.

THE DIFFERENCES WITH THE SMITH GROUP

This is our difference with the Smith group (and more generally with the vague Third-Worldist left public opinion which the Smith group reflects).

They argue that capitalist development in the Third World is in some way not real capitalist development: "The subordinate character of this so-called 'industrialisation', because of it being phoney, not developing from the organic process but being injected from outside" is stressed by Ali (IB 71).

Capitalist classes in the Third World are likewise not real capitalist classes.

They are oppressed classes. "The whole of Argentina, both capitalists and workers, are the victims of the big banks" (Hotchkiss, letter to the paper). If they repress workers and peasants, it is not for their own class interests but because of instructions from outside. "Military regimes in Third World countries... are the creatures of imperialism. When imperialism is strengthened, they are strengthened. When imperialism is weakened, they are weakened" (Smith, letter to the paper).

The 'international balance of forces' is thus the essence of the socialist revolution, and specific working-class interests are details in comparison.

"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).

This general differences are reflected in specific disputes about the South Atlantic war, Afghanistan, Ireland, etc. (See IB 106).

WHAT CUNLIFFE WRITES

The main purpose of Cunliffe's document is to cocoon the Smith group's politics in pages of reassuring stuff about internationalism and class politics.

His main positive argument (IB 109, pp.7-30) is that imperialist economic domination by big powers still exists, and one main way of enforcing it is the IMF and the international banks. True, but not the point in dispute.

Cunliffe stresses the need to draw positive conclusions about programmatic demands. However, he himself is vague.

In IB 81 (p.4) he slams me for criticising the Morenist slogan in Argentina of repudiation of the foreign debt. (I advocate instead such slogans as 'the workers won't pay' and 'open the books'). In IB 109 (p.38-9) he seems to agree that to make repudiation a principle is to go for national economic isolationism.

In IB 109, p.37, he seems to reject the slogan of the 'anti-imperialist united front'; on p.38, he seems to think it may be possible.

And everywhere he interweaves the Smith group's ideas into his article, alongside lots of stuff about internationalism and class politics which logically contradicts those ideas.

'Phoney' or 'deformed' capitalist development in the Third World: "the deformations which (multinational ownership has) brought about in economies such as Brazil" (IB 81, p.2); no "independent economic development" in the Third World (IB 81, p.3: the whole point is that independent economic development is a myth - Marx considered the US economically a 'colony' of Europe); "no 'autonomous development'" in Brazil (IB 109, p.23; the same point applies); etc.

No real capitalist classes in Third World: he asks "how have the imperialist powers tackled the problem" of keeping Third World countries "firmly within the norms and laws of capitalism?" (IB 109 p.28 - as if there was no class within those countries tied to capitalism). He speaks of the "Algerian road" of "rejecting the revolutionary socialist road leav(ing) only permutations of state capitalism and class collaboration on an international level" (IB 109 p.30: but the Algerian ruling class has pursued its own class interest in building up state capitalism and collaborating internationally. It is not a matter of collaboration between opposed classes when the Algerian bourgeoisie does deals with the French or US bourgeoisie).

He describes military dictatorships in the Third World as if they were exclusively products of external pressure (as in Smith's line, above) - IB 109, p.28-9. But what about Algeria, Libya, Burma, Syria, Ethiopia, Ghana, etc. etc.? Military regimes are common in those Third World countries most in conflict with the big capitalist powers, as well as in the Chiles and El Salvadors.

He discusses at some length the Comintern's ideas on formally independent

semi-colonies (IB 109 p.7-10), apparently implying that these fit Third World countries to a y. But this is misleading. The Comintern considered Turkey, for example, to be a semi-colony, kept formally independent by inter-imperialist competition. The feeble Turkish bourgeoisie was legally powerless to impose tariffs without imperialist consent. After 1881 large chunks of its government revenue were directly collected by a consortium of the imperialist powers. The imperialist powers had (and regained by proxy invasion at the end of World War 1) whole areas of Turkey under their control where Turkish laws and taxes did not apply.

Most Third World bourgeoisies today have got much more elbow-room than that.

Yet the Comintern also warned against 'Turkish imperialism'. Obviously they did not consider Turkey a fully-fledged imperialist power. Nor are India, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, etc. today fully-fledged imperialist powers. Yet Cunliffe's attempts to disprove that they have imperialist impulses tell against him.

He says that the overthrow of the Shah proved Iran's "sub-imperialism" "skin-deep" (p.29). What about Khomeini's current war with Iraq? He argues that Mexico's role in Central America shows it is "far from being expansionist or 'imperialist'". Yet the fact that Mexico's bourgeoisie has a rival programme to the US's - and one linked with material interests (Mexico is now Nicaragua's biggest trading partner) - shows the opposite.

The programme of 'economic independence' is rejected by Cunliffe in some places then half-endorsed by reference to Trotsky's writings on Mexico (IB 109 p.14). But what was Trotsky writing about? The Mexican government ordered wage rises for oil workers. The US and UK oil companies refused to comply, saying that they owned the oilfields and were not subject to Mexican law. The Mexican government then expropriated the oil companies. Trotsky's support for Mexico in that situation would not imply support for Argentina in the South Atlantic (or Libya in Chad)...

Class or camp? Again and again Cunliffe refers to Third World countries as "exploited" by "imperialism". True, Lenin and Trotsky used similar terms. But today such language is used by those who see exploitation as fundamentally a matter of countries exploiting countries, not classes exploiting classes. Loose language is theoretically dangerous.

Cunliffe complains that I give figures for "undifferentiated abstractions such as 'Mexico', 'Brazil' and of course 'Argentina'" (IB 81 p.2). What does he mean? Partly that I don't give details of how much of Mexican, or Brazilian, or Argentine capital is foreign-owned (though in fact I do: and the political significance that Cunliffe wants to give to foreign ownership of capital is misconceived and implicitly nationalist, as Ellis has shown very clearly in IB 100).

Apart from that presumably Cunliffe wants figures for income etc. for countries like Mexico broken down by classes. I try to make that breakdown in IB 49, too: and I show that "in the fastest-developing countries, vast areas of poverty remain - and even increase, since recent development in countries like Brazil and Mexico has gone together with a sharp increase in inequality" (IB 49 p.19).

So what is Cunliffe going on about? He is using the terrible facts about the suffering and poverty in even the most 'prosperous' Third World countries to support the vague populist, Third-Worldist picture of reality which guides the Smith group. He is using the facts about inequality in Mexico, for example, to licence a conciliatory attitude to those directly responsible for the inequality - the Mexican bourgeoisie.

For that's what the argument is about - class politics, or politics which subordinate the working class to an 'anti-imperialist camp' in which the Kremlin, the Mexican and other Third World bourgeoisies, the Argentine military, and the working class all join arms.

And don't let Cunliffe's oily evasions make you forget it.