

THE TRIBE OF THE MUGWUMPS

Carolan

"One must not allow oneself to be misled by the cry for 'unity'. Those who have this word most often on their lips are the ones whose cause most of the discord, just as at present the Jura Bakuninists in Switzerland, who have provoked all the splits, clamour for nothing so much as for unity. These unity fanatics are either narrow-minded people who want to stir everything into one nondescript brew, which, the moment it is left to settle, throws up the differences again but in much sharper contrast because they will then be all in one pot... or else they are people who unconsciously... or consciously want to adulterate the movement. It is for this reason that the biggest sectarians and the biggest brawlers and rogues shout loudest for unity at certain times. Nobody in our lifetime has given us more trouble and has caused more quarrels than the shouters for unity."

FRIEDRICH ENGELS: LETTER TO BEBEL, JUNE 20 1873. Marx/Engels Selected Correspondence p.266.

"The revolutionary Marxian party rejects not only the arbitrariness and bureaucratism of the Communist Party, but also the spurious and deceptive 'all-inclusiveness' of the Thomas-Tyler-Hoan Socialist Party, which is a sham and a fraud. Experience has proved conclusively that this 'all-inclusiveness' paralyses the party in general and the revolutionary left wing in particular, suppressing and bureaucratically hounding the latter while giving free rein to the right wing to commit the greatest crimes in the name of socialism and the party. The SWP seeks to be inclusive only in this sense: that it accepts into its ranks those who accept its programme and denies admission to those who reject its programme".

JAMES P CANNON: RESOLUTION ON ORGANISATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE APRIL 1940 CONVENTION OF THE SWP-USA. 'The Struggle for a Proletarian Party', p.230.

"I have never put a low value on small organisations merely because they are small... The mass organisations have value precisely because they are mass organisations. Even when they are under patriotic reformist leadership one cannot discount them. One must win the masses who are in their clutches: whether from outside or from inside depends on the circumstance. Small organisations which regard themselves as selective, as pioneers, can only have value on the strength of their programme and of the schooling and steeling of their cadres. A small organisation which has no unified programme and no really revolutionary will is less than nothing, is a negative quantity."

LEON TROTSKY: OPEN LETTER TO AN ENGLISH COMRADE, April 3 1936.

"Without plumbing the gist of programmatic differences, he repeats commonplaces on the 'impossibility' of any one tendency 'claiming to incorporate in itself all truth'. Ergo? Live and let live. Aphorisms of this type cannot teach an advanced worker anything worthwhile; instead of courage and a sense of responsibility they can only instill indifference and weakness. Revolutionary ardour in the struggle for socialism is inseparable from intellectual ardour in the struggle for truth".

LEON TROTSKY: 'TROTSKYISM' AND THE PSOP. 'Trotsky on France', p.245.

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<u>Part 5: Neither sectarianism, nor philistinism, but Marxist politics</u>	The DCF leaders have retreated from any aspirations to Marxist clarity, to a notion that "there is a world Trotskyist movement with lots of rich and varied traditions, nearly all differences are misunderstandings, and one day it will all combine in one powerful movement, if only the sectarians will stop worrying
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INTRODUCTION: THE NEW FACTION IS A SPLINTER OF THE OXFORD FACTION

It happens that I am reading 'Alice in Wonderland' right now, for the first time. Reading through the DCF's platform, and re-reading IB 92, at the same time, more than once I have had to pull myself up short and remember that Lewis Carroll is dead and not a member of the WSL - and that the DCF want us to take them seriously.

Nevertheless the situation in the WSL now gets "curiouser and curiouser", as Alice might have said if Carroll and not Cunliffe, Levy, Parsons and Oliver were writing documents for the DCF.

* We have a faction which calls itself democratic centralist and yet it explicitly advocates a sort of federalism in which minorities in the WSL have almost the same rights in the public press as the organisation as a whole. There would be a constant stream of conferences/national aggregates every three or four months, so that no strong centralised leadership would be possible.

* We have a faction which calls itself democratic centralist, and yet it enshrines in its resolution for WSL conference an explicit recognition of a special position for Smith. The big majority of the organisation, including Cunliffe, Parsons, Oliver, and Gunther, is for Russian troops out of Afghanistan. But the DCF wants to ban even discussion in our press on this out of deference to Smith, who is against calling for Russian withdrawal. The DCF say at the same time that access to the public press for Smith's minority point of view is "a complex issue falling outside the historic norms of democratic centralism". For Smith is the measure of all things. (See part 9)

A faction like that has as little right to call itself democratic as to call itself centralist.

* We have a faction which calls itself the Democratic Centralist Faction, but properly speaking it does not even have the right to call itself a faction. It is an unprincipled combination.

It would be perfectly in order for people who disagree on the Labour Party to come together on an issue of democracy - provided that the issue was clearly defined, and they did not obscure the other political differences. It is utterly scandalous for them to come together on the question of the Labour Party. Yet the platform takes a position on the Labour Party.

"Sectarian regression... This degeneration of the regime runs hand in hand with (and itself compounds) a political degeneration of the League's leadership in a sectarian direction... our line in relation to the O. has increasingly dissolved into confusion and ambiguity, such as on our attitude towards B and our failure with regard to local government work".

* This faction platform which accuses the majority of "sectarian regression" on the Labour Party (because we are not prepared to merge the organisation uncritically into the left-reformist/centrist current around B, and we insist on a principled criticism of the 'local government left') at the same time denounces us for not running the paper as a 'party paper' and for carrying articles by labour movement dignitaries.

* The faction which accuses the majority of being sectarian on the Labour Party includes our sectarian opponents from last year (Cunliffe); the far 'right wing' of the organisation on the Labour Party question (Parsons); and people who have supported the majority line both on the Labour Party generally and on B and local government specifically! In short, representatives of every view in the whole political spectrum of the organisation have come together to denounce the politics of the majority (which some of them share!) as sectarian!

* We have a faction which thus talks out of both sides of its mouth on the Labour Party and yet remains completely silent about the strange antics of the Smith group on this question.

Half-sectarian himself on the LP (imprisoned by half-shed Healyite formulas from the '60s), and fronting for full sectarians, Smith spent much of 1982-3 denouncing us for being soft on the LP, "liquidating", etc. Now he leads a group which contains a hard opportunist right wing whose practice in local government would merit expulsion from any serious working class revolutionary organisation - Graham S and Hotchkiss.

Worse still, one of Smith's last acts in the WSL was to vote on the EC against expelling or publicly dissociating from Booth for crossing the class line by siding with the employer (the council) against the Islington building works department in a pay dispute. A few weeks earlier Smith had made overtures to Booth and convinced him that moves to ease him out of the organisation (without expelling him) were part of a factional drive against the Smith group.

When the Smith group accuse us of a "sectarian regression", is this the sort of thing they have in mind? And what can yesteryear's sectarian Cunliffe have in mind?

Parsons (in IB111) writes at length of the Booth affair. He has not a single word of disapproval for Booth crossing class lines, but bitter condemnations for Kinnell, Hill and me. He says we had an unprincipled sectarian plot to drive Booth out of the organisation, with Short "wheeled out" as our stooge. What do Gunther, Hedges, and Mellor, who demanded Booth's expulsion months ago, think about that?

How does the faction's charge that we represent a "sectarian regression" square with their denunciation of us in IB 92 for not having a party press which excludes articles by prominent reformists?

The explanation, of course, is that they all contributed their pet ideas and exchanged prejudices, and nobody had the wit to notice the contradictions or to try to iron them out.

* The faction also accuses us of being sectarian in relation to international work. This accusation is co-signed by the authors of both the diametrically opposing documents on 'The Crisis of the FI' at the February 1983 conference - Cunliffe (whose document we supported), and Parsons.

Parsons consistently argued that all the main strands of the 'world Trotskyist movement', Mandelites, Morenists, Lambertists and all, are basically revolutionary Marxist tendencies whose strengths outweigh their weaknesses. Cunliffe, it must be said, has moved closer to that view: in November last year he advocated we fuse with the USFI (though without any self-criticism of his previous position). A good many of the DCF signatories have never expressed any disagreement with the I-CL view that the USFI is centrist and currents like the Morenists and Lambertists are worse.

On this issue, too, the faction is an unprincipled combination.

* The faction's main rallying-cry is 'Democratise the WSL': its platform is written by Cunliffe, under whose regime in the old WSL Jo Q was denied access even to the IB!

The I-CL had a liberal attitude on minority access to its public press. The old WSL did not. Yet Cunliffe and Levy, who were central in the old WSL, make minority access to the public press one of their chief campaigning issues against people who were central in the I-CL.

* We have a situation in the WSL where the NC majority are branded as "splitters" for clearing out a faction that was paralysing the organisation and which had been operating a cold internal split, or internal secession, for nine months or a year. Those branded as splitters had made extravagant concessions to the minority to keep them in the organisation and integrate them into its work.

Who brands the majority as splitters and murderers of the fusion?