

INTERNAL BULLETIN 126

'CONVERGENCE'

The following is the resolution passed unanimously at the National Committee on August 19. It will be further discussed at an Extended National Committee (i.e. an NC which all members are encouraged to attend as observers) on

Sun Oct 14

(This NC will also discuss tactics in student work - see material in this IB)

Also included in this bulletin are articles on the issue by Kinnell, by Scott, and by Swing.

NC RESOLUTION (AS AMENDED)

1. The present situation is that the 'broad groups' are not broad groups, but identified as a hard Trotskyist current. There is no rational division of labour between the 'broad groups' and the League. This is unsatisfactory in many ways.
2. Therefore we should 'converge' - i.e. merge the 'broad groups' and the League.
3. The end result will be an organisation of essentially the same structure and politics as the present League, but, we hope, bigger and with a better profile.
4. The process of reaching that end result will be as follows. First, discuss and establish a majority view within the League. Second, convince as many as possible of the 'hard core' S* supporters.

Documents should be circulated to the branches immediately, and they should be asked to discuss before the final League decision, to be at an extended NC in September or October.

It should however be possible to use the August weekend school to discuss the general idea of a 'harder' organisation with S* supporters present.

5. The S* Secretariat would be replaced by the existing EC. We should not give up on the idea of a broader, consultative, occasionally-meeting S* Editorial Board. We should refer the technicalities of changing other S* structures to the EC.
6. There would inescapably have to be a two-tier structure for S* - members (supporters? activists?) and sellers. And inescapably we could not be entirely open and candid about it. We should, however, make it a mystery, M-style - we can and should be fairly candid at the local day-to-day level.
7. The operation should not be carried out in such a way as to push the 'sellers' away from us. Some demarcation is essential: we cannot have an organisation with no sharp distinction between committed militants and half-committed sympathisers without abandoning the whole project of a Leninist party. But 'sellers' should feel and know that their involvement and their say in S* affairs is limited only by the degree of their personal commitment, not by any clannish exclusiveness on our part.
8. Local groups could be flexible in how they operated, but a normal format could be weekly meetings alternating between open sellers' meetings and closed business meetings of hard supporters.

(The draft resolution, before amendment, will be found on the next page, followed by brief minutes of the NC discussion).

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2. Therefore we should 'converge' - i.e. merge the 'broad groups' and the League.
3. The end result will be an organisation of essentially the same structure and politics as the present League, but, we hope, bigger and with a better profile.
4. The process of reaching that end result will be as follows. First, discuss and establish a majority view within the League. Second, convince as many as possible of the 'hard-core' S* supporters. Third, call a conference at which those 'hard-core' supporters and the present League members would jointly establish an organisation.

Documents should be circulated to the branches immediately, and they should be asked to discuss before the August 19 NC. The August 19 NC should have a full discussion, but the final League decision ought to be at an extended NC in September or October, leading to a conference in October.

It should however be possible to use the August weekend school to discuss the general idea of a 'harder' organisation with SO supporters present.

5. The S* Secretariat would be replaced by the existing EC. We should not give up on the idea of a broader, consultative, occasionally-meeting S* editorial board. The S* delegate meetings should continue as organisers' meetings. Generally, we should continue to maintain an open and visible structure for S* as much as we can - and that should be to quite a large extent.

6. There would inescapably have to be a two-tier structure for S* - members (supporters? activists?) and sellers. And inescapably we could not be entirely open and candid about it. We should not, however, make it a mystery, M-style - we can and should be fairly candid at the local day-to-day level.

7. The operation should not be carried out in such a way as to push the 'sellers' away from us. Some demarcation is essential: we cannot have an organisation with no sharp distinction between committed militants and half-committed sympathisers without abandoning the whole project of a Leninist party. But 'sellers' should feel and know that their involvement and their say in S* affairs is limited only by the degree of their personal commitment, not by any clannish exclusiveness on our part.

8. Local groups could be flexible in how they operated, but a normal format could be weekly meetings alternating between open sellers' meetings and closed business meetings of hard supporters. Sometimes, for example, the narrower meetings could be just once a month, if that seemed best locally.

9. Simultaneously, we should (though within the parameters of our conference resolution on this point) launch a drive to build B. groups locally as broader left caucuses. Obviously there will be places where by way of exception this is unwise e.g. where we already dominate the O. Left directly.

10. Unresolved problems in the above: (a) Finance - how to avoid frightening off S* people without reducing our demands on members and crippling ourselves; (b) S* constitution - would it be worth doing limited revisions on it? (c) The present League name - should we formally drop it? I think not.

11. The balance sheet of the S* turn also needs to be discussed. In my view the basic reason for it yielding much less than it could have done is simple: with the 1981 fusion and the S* turn we tried to do two incompatible things simultaneously, and ended up doing neither properly.

Kinnell.

Carolan: The view that we could organise the broad O. left proved fundamentally false. 1979 was the turning point. The 'broad left' split when people went into local government to take 'a bit of the power' locally. It was a new school of reformism. The prospects for S* were blighted early on, and the fusion worsened the situation, as we were drawn into internal arguments.

The balance sheet?

a) A major taming of the O. Left;

b) A certain discrediting of the O. Left;

S* groups remained very small. We lacked a high profile for the League, had loosely organised broad groups, but they were small.

Convergence now is an attempt to rationalise our structures. It means having one democratic-centralist group. We need to integrate those we can of our periphery into such a democratic-centralist group, and separate them out from those who do not share that degree of commitment.

Scott: How many people are we talking about 'converging' with? We didn't implement the S* turn properly. We intended a broad group, which meant political differences, but as soon as the rate rise issue came out into the open we concluded we could not live in one organisation with the rate-raisers.

Hill: A lot of possibilities were missed. Even when B. had scooped us in London it was possible to have broad groups in other parts of the country.

Our activity will inevitably be more clandestine after 'convergence'. It won't be business as usual. We'll be a bit more open than M.

Keith: Convergence is not the successful conclusion of a tactic, but the winding-up of an unsuccessful attempt. M's formula isn't such a bad one after all - readers' groups, etc.

Matthews: Convergence should be based on a changed conception of our work. New people in the O. have taken a political position, and it's often hostile to us. The document doesn't deal with who we include and who we don't. I'm not in favour of windingup broad groups and re-launching them as B. groups. I'm very sceptical of the whole B. experience. Most B. groups are moribund.

Joplin: Convergence won't make much difference to our day-to-day practical work, it's a technical question of rationalising structures. It's not a cure-all. We should tie it in with a recruitment drive to the League so that fewer non-L. hard S* supporters are around at convergence. We should use it to overhaul the whole organisation.

Ellis: The present set-up is very clumsy. People have very different ideas of what S* is - some see it as a preparatory organisation before joining the League. We have to be very honest now about people we are recruiting.

Carolan/Hill: proposed amendments to delete sections 9, 10, 11, last sentence of 8, and part of 4. Sections 9,10,11 bring in separate questions which should be discussed separately. Section 4: conference not necessary. Also to delete part of section 5: Hill felt proposal about delegate meetings might not be feasible.

All amendments accepted, and resolution as amended carried unanimously.

OTHER MATTERS FROM NC AND EC

Apologies for the lack of minutes, circulars, etc in the last two months - due to holidays, exhaustion, pressure of work. Following is a summary of major NC/EC decisions and discussions.

Kinnell

O. conference (EC 14.9.84): Hill organising. We will have a fringe meeting on miners' strike plus daily bulletin (in competition with B. bulletin). Have 4 delegates but little success with resolutions/amendments. Main political focus - miners' strike/police.

B. (EC 14.9.84): SA adopting heavy-handed tactics, seem to be trying to get control, have alarmed C. minority and independents. We should keep sufficiently involved to block them.

Notts (EC 14.9.84): Two S* groups set up, mostly miners and miners' wives. Hill working with them, also trying to organise help from Nottm and Sheffield.

Dockers (EC 14.9.84, OSC 7.9.84 and 31.8.84, EC 22.8.84): Political line discussed as per open letter in paper. Kinnell to coordinate work.

Lairds occupation: (OSC 7.9.84 & 31.8.84): Kinnell to liaise. Joplin to try to organise extra comrades to go to Merseyside.

Muir resolution on miners' support conference (EC 23.8.84): Hill reported that crucial contacts in Notts were not sufficiently convinced despite repeated efforts. Agreed to leave matter on the table for now.

National Committee August 19 - issues other than convergence

Minutes: Decision re: trying to exclude Christel from WF to read 'other than as a rank and file supporter'.

Miners' strike: (Lengthy discussion. Detailed minutes not included here since content has largely been reflected in the paper).

There were also brief discussions on finance/premises, on the plans for the weekend school, and on the paper.

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COMING EVENTS

Sat. Sep. 22 - Turkey solidarity conference, from 10.30am, at NUR, Unity House, Euston Rd, London NW1. For delegates - contact centre if you can go.

Sun. Oct. 7 - Conference on privatisation in the NHS, 10am-4pm, County Hall, London SE1. Contact centre if you can go.

Sat. Oct. 13 - Women's commission, 11am to 4pm, London

Sun. Oct. 15 - NC, 11am to 4pm, London

Wed. Oct. 24 - CND one-day strike against nuclear weapons

Sat. Oct. 27 - CND demonstration against Trident, in Barrow

Sat. Nov. 17 - Youth commission	} In Manchester. All youth/student comrades to attend as appropriate. If you have financial problems about travel, ask your branch, or, failing that, the centre. There will be a pooled fare.
Sun. Nov. 18 - Student commission	

ARGUMENTS FOR CONVERGENCE

Kinnell.

1. 'Convergence' means, essentially, fusing the broad groups and the League. The advantages of doing this are:

- a) It would rationalise the way we organise;
- b) It would give us a better profile;
- c) It would put us in a better position to launch broader left regroupments in the O.

2. The initial idea of the broad groups 'turn' in 1980 was as follows. The then League had a sizeable periphery of people who sympathised with us and would work with us on many issues, but whom it was difficult to recruit to what appeared to be a conspiratorial, ultra-strict organisation. We would reorganise so that most of our day-to-day work was done through open, broad groups in which that periphery could participate without first having to make the big step of joining the League. In the process of common work we could draw the periphery towards stronger commitment, and at the same time rid the League of its sectarian tone and style.

An eventual 'convergence' between the broad groups and the League was an essential part of the idea. If the broad groups were going to organise the bulk of the day-to-day work, then in time they had to become in essence politically identical to the League.

The timetable of 'convergence' was postponed somewhat with the July 1981 fusion. At the time I argued personally that we should combine the fusion with 'convergence' - to have, if you like, a three-way fusion between the two Leagues and the broad groups. Most comrades, however, disagreed: they thought the fusion would give scope for a new expansion of the broad groups, and that to 'converge' immediately would abort those possibilities.

3. The initial 'broad groups' turn was very successful. The circulation of the new paper was double that of the old paper produced by the League. The number of non-League broad group members was as large again as the League membership. Through the broad groups we were able to make large-scale initiatives - like the Mob. Ctee. - that would have been impossible with the League alone.

The July 1981 fusion, however, inevitably implied a certain turn inwards and a loss of momentum. Following the fusion, new broad groups did develop in certain areas - Accrington, Brighton, Hull - but the League's internal difficulties have had a bad effect over the last year and a half. The number of non-League broad group members is no larger than it was in autumn 1980, and the circulation of the paper is probably slightly lower than it was then.

4. Maybe if we had proceeded better we could have made more out of the broad groups in the last 3 years. But we have to start from where we are now.

To any outside observer, the broad groups are now politically identical to the League. The broad groups are identified as a hard Trotskyist organisation. If people are dissatisfied with the politics of the broad group and the paper, it is because they disagree with the politics of the League, not because the broad groups and the paper represent something politically different from the League.

The 'broad groups' are an ideologically defined tendency - not broad left groups.

Moreover, the present situation is chaotic. In some areas a new recruit to our tendency will join the broad groups. In others s/he will join the League. What makes the difference is not the recruit's level of commitment, but the local variations in the way we organise.

Always, and quite logically, localities have found it very difficult to maintain proper life in both the League branch and the broad group. Sometimes the broad group functions regularly, organising the work, and the League branch has little life. Sometimes it is the League branch that organises all the work and the broad group reduces itself to little more than a name for occasional

public meetings.

This sort of problem was tolerable as a transitional problem in a process of 'convergence'. It makes no sense as a stable, long-term set-up.

Now - in contrast to 1980 and a period afterwards - the broad group/League division is irrational and probably a hindrance rather than a help to recruitment. Where the broad group is the main functional body locally, it is difficult to recruit people to the League. The only argument is the need for disciplined Leninist organisation: but when the local broad group is visibly just as disciplined as the League, and its politics are the same, that has little weight, especially given that the internal life of the League is not very pleasant these days.

Contrariwise, where there is no functioning broad group locally, then comrades have the peculiar task of recruiting people to one organisation (the League) on the basis, not of work carried out in its name, but of work carried out in a completely different name.

5. Local situations break down, to my knowledge, roughly as follows:

Localities where almost all activity is through a broad group which contains significantly more members than the League: Halifax, Stockport, Rochdale, Wallasey, Stoke, Northampton, Basingstoke.

Localities where both broad group and League have some life: Manchester, Nottingham, Hounslow/Richmond, Sheffield.

Localities where the broad group has some feeble existence, but almost all activity is organised through the League: Harrogate/York; Durham; Islington; Brent; S.E. London; Haringey

Localities where the broad group does not exist: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leicester, Birmingham, Coventry, Cardiff, Oxford, Hackney, Camden, Putney, East London.

6. We have, in effect, two names and two parallel structures for essentially only one set of activities. This is good neither for the League, nor, for that matter, for the non-League broad group members.

We should merge the structures. Given problems with O. Legality, we cannot avoid a certain element of 'double structures'; we would have to differentiate between an inner core of broad group members, who would adopt a constitution similar to the present League constitution, and an outer fringe of people who will sell a few papers and contribute a few pounds. We would have both closed business meetings for the inner core, and (perhaps alternating) more open meetings which the outer fringe might also, irregularly, attend.

But we would gain great advantages:

We would appear with the same name and the same profile in every area.

We could give greater prominence to the revolutionary organisation, as the organisation actually responsible, by aname, for our public work.

We would eliminate duplications and ensure a single, simple method of organising everywhere.

The public profile of the broad groups would correspond to what they actually are - a hard Trotskyist grouping.

We would thus be freed to consider all the options for creating broader left groupings within which we would operate as a hard Trotskyist element.

For example B. We need to discuss B. further: I'm still not convinced that the B. network has big possibilities of expansion. But if it does, then carrying through 'convergence' would give us an excellent basis for developing B. groups as broad left caucuses within which our 'broad group' would be the Trotskyist minority.

'Convergence' would not solve the problems of our work. It would, however, I think, create a better framework for solving them.

We could also solve the problem of the magazine. There are real problems of production, but the basic problem with the magazine is that it is not sold in anywhere near adequate numbers to make it viable. And this is not through lack of pushing and chasing from the centre.

Comrade Christel has done a survey, and found that the major reason cited by

branches for poor sales of the magazine was O. legality. Yet everything in the three magazines we have published, and all of the articles we have in stock for the magazine, could be published in the name of the broad groups. It is not the political content of the magazine that makes it O-illegal, but simply the label. So for the sake of one name rather than another - not any consideration of political content - we are denying ourselves the possibility of a viable magazine. With 'convergence' we could have a viable magazine, integrated with the paper, and in the name of the organisation.

7. There are two major arguments against 'convergence': that it will abort the broad groups, and that it will abort the League.

The argument that it will abort the League is the more widespread and strongly-argued. But I think it is based on simple misunderstanding.

The 'converged broad groups' would be a revolutionary organisation with just the same politics and organisational structure as the League. It would differ only in name, in having a larger membership, and in not having a 'parallel' structure surrounding it.

But the 'converged broad groups' could not openly declare itself a democratic-centralist organisation, or openly proclaim international affiliations? True.

I'm not sure how often we should rationally want to advertise our constitution; and for the moment we have no very impressive-sounding international affiliations to proclaim. The broad groups can argue the need for a coherent, organised, politically clear hard core to play a leadership role in the labour movement - i.e. for a revolutionary party - and have argued it. They can argue the case for Leninism and democratic centralism. (In the old League's O-legal magazine, we carried a detailed discussion of the ideas of the Second Congress of the Communist International. You don't get expelled from the O. for theoretical articles!)

They can advertise links with the US and Australian comrades, and publish joint statements with them.

But if all that is not enough, then there is a very simple answer. We have one organisation with two names, and use the existing League name (e.g. in credits for articles in the magazine) where we need to make a declaration that explicitly identifies us as democratic-centralist.

Comrade Jones has argued that 'convergence' would completely change our politics, and reduce us to the status of a faction within social democracy. But in fact 'convergence' would not change our programme, our activities, or our democratic-centralist organisation one jot, except to rationalise them and to put us in a better position to consider expanded activities.

Politically we are not a faction within social democracy. We have a different programme; we argue sharply and plainly against social democracy; we make it clear (while avoiding stupidly provocative statements) that in the fight for our politics we will not hesitate at a break with the social democratic organisation. It is true that we are not an openly proclaimed revolutionary party. We could become that by pulling our forces out of the O. and putting them into open League activity. But after long debate we have decided that such an approach would be tokenism - sacrificing the substance of party-building to empty proclamation.

Short of such a sacrifice, there is no way to get a qualitatively higher profile for the League - in contrast to and as separate from our activities in the O. and the unions. You can't make bricks without straw. You can't construct a high outside-the-O. profile without having a large chunk of your forces actually outside the O.

But we can have a high profile for a definite Trotskyist organisation within the O. by the 'convergence' tactic. Minor adjustments like the 'two names' arrangement can ensure that we lose no possibility that we have at present. On the level of principle, we can lose nothing by 'convergence'.

What about practical arguments against 'convergence'? One such would be

the argument that we would recruit better and work better if we pulled out of the O. (all but, perhaps, some subsidiary fraction work there), and focused our activity round an openly-proclaimed alternative to the O. We rejected that argument in the debate with the IF/WIL.

Conversely it can be argued that there is still room for expansion for the broad groups as broad groups, and that to 'converge' would cut us off from those possibilities. But no-one sees the broad groups as broad. If people want to avoid ideological commitment and join something broad, they will choose B.

Our groups can and do still have important local spurts of recruitment - but that is a different matter.

8. How would we carry out 'convergence'? What about the practical details?

First we would have to convince the hard-core non-League broad group members.

That done, the details would be simple. We would call a special meeting at which those members and the League would together adopt the present League constitution and ratify leading committees (the simplest formula would be the existing committees plus a few extra members from the non-League element). A The broad groups secretariat and the League NC would be merged. A new financial structure would be adopted.

We could continue to hold broad group delegate meetings - as organisers' meetings - or not, as we decided.

At a guess, I would expect about one third of present 100 or so non-League broad group members to come into the 'converged' organisation, and about two-thirds to remain as loose supporters. For those loose supporters very little would change.

9. 'Convergence' would lose us little in terms of O. legality. Everyone sees the broad groups as a hard organisation: it is in the inner details, not the outward impression, that it is not.

But it would put us in a better position if the broad groups are proscribed - which is unlikely in the next year or so, but quite likely in the longer future. At the April conference we decided our approach is that eventuality: to continue the paper (for a period, at least) 'illegally' while also seeking 'legal' channels. If we had 'converged', we would be better able to present the 'illegal' broad groups as an open revolutionary organisation, while also continuing work through groups like B within the O.

THE ~~SW~~ Sx, AND, R

Sx arose out of the S... , and was conceived as a broad organisation comprising both revolutionaries, and left reformists within which the I -CL would fight for its ideas. As a result a process of 'convergence' would take place. It was conceived as a tactic. After 5 years of the tactic we ought to draw a balance sheet, and take stock of where we are now.

BALANCE SHEET

- 1) It seems to me that the tactic was never really put into practice. A broad group implies that it has comrades within it who disagree with us (e.g. the comrades who disagreed over rate rises, and ultimately left to set up LEB). In my opinion we have never accepted this implication.
- 2) The tactic, however, has been successful from another perspective. Along with the tactic went a move away from sectarianism. As a result we became more absorbed into the labour movement, our credibility with the 'O' Left increased, and put us in a pivotal position which enabled us to initiate campaigns like the R... etc.
- 3) We failed, however, to recruit, even into Sx, from these initiatives at least partly because of (1) above.
- 4) Sx is not a broad organisation. It, even before the fusion, became more or less a replacement for W. Yes there are many members of Sx who are not WSL members, but many of these either (a) would join if Sx and WSL were converged, (b) would have been candidate members or sympathisers anyway, or (c) would never join the WSL in which case the tactic as far as these comrades is concerned would have failed.

Sx is a fiction. The last AGM was a fiasco, and the Delegate Meetings have always been poorly attended.

- 5) We should recognise this reality, and begin a process of rapid convergence. Such a process would rationalise expenditure of time and resources, and firm up the organisation the better to intervene in other areas.

".....Actually what Comrade Johnson seems to be advocating is that we assemble a rag bag of people on a minimum level programme so that we(?) can do a sort of entry in 'our own' Party!! (The 'pearl' creating the oyster shell!). That, of course, is cracked. Organisations like the Labour Parties and CP's already exist which are on a generally higher plane than the rest of society - and we of course do entry there when we are not strong enough to come out under our own banner. Our objective is to go beyond these and build a Leninist party. To build our own group like these would be to preclude a cadre party - to exclude finally the possibility of revolutionary working class politics. Labour type, and even left Labour and confused socialist-type organisations arise spontaneously. The job of Leninists is to raise this spontaneous movement by fighting the bourgeois ideology with which it is imbued. The Leninists must build a homogenous party which draws a line between itself and class society by basing itself firmly on science as the

BASIS OF THE SERIOUS REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE to eliminate the capitalists. The key sector of the bourgeois domination of the workers is the ideological one, the key front is to fight that domination and to break it." (International Communist p.32)

The above statement is not in my opinion an argument against the idea behind the Sx tactic, but it is an argument against what that tactic has become. It is not an argument against the tactic because the original conception was that Sx would be a broad organisation in which the I-CL would operate as an organised revolutionary force. It is an argument against what exists because there is no clear distinction between the WSL and Sx. As a result we suffer both the disadvantage of not being able to recruit to Sx because it is not seen as genuinely broad, and the disadvantage of operating through an organisation which suffers organisational and ideological sloppiness because it is not a democratic centralist organisation.

6) This is not, I want to make it absolutely clear, a call to plaster WSL all over Sx. The paper should remain essentially as it is, at least as far as that side of things is concerned. It is rather a call to firm up and rationalise the organisation behind the paper.

B

At the same time as attempting to cling on to the fiction that Sx is a broad organisation, we are, it seems to me, making the same sectarian mistake in our orientation to B as we made with the Sx tactic. That sectarianism is summed up in this. Throughout last year we made repeated calls for the establishment of a campaign of left unity - support for Labour Liaison 82 etc. With the move to the right of groups like the LCC, CLPD EC we have ourselves, rightly, stated that much of our political work will consist of challenging the politics of such groups.

Yet when a genuinely broad group of the hard left, which shares our desire to challenge the politics of Kinnock and the soft left, is established in the National network, we pour cold water on it.

In a letter to me last year Kinnell makes the following statement, "B is not just any old broad group. It was launched as a split from S on the rates issue. It is effectively run by a Trotskyists ~~sect~~ or neo-Trotskyist sect of a peculiar character. In line with the way it was launched it has failed every crucial political test. In my document I mentioned its attitude on the GLC's vote for the fare rise budget - and it could be added that the B editorial approving the GLC vote was in direct contradiction to a B EB decision that the vote should be condemned.

Likewise the last national B EB decided to reject the LC's Kinnockite open letter. J B, as commissioned by the EB, wrote an editorial along these lines ... and now we've been told that there is "no space for it."

This statement illustrates a number of points. Firstly, it shows we

are making the same sectarian error as was made with the Sx tactic of wanting a broad group made up of people who already have our politics i.e. not a broad group at all. In my opinion Sx would have stood far more chance of becoming a genuine broad group if the comrades who left to set up B had not done so. Nor do I see any reason why their differences with us should have prevented them from staying inside the broad group whether their position was a minority or majority. On one occasion when the idea of the Sx tactic was first being discussed, I asked what would happen in such a situation, for example where T...ites joined and became a majority. The answer was that we would continue to fight inside the broad group for our politics, demand to put our minority position in factory leaflets etc., and supplement Sx propoganda with W. propoganda. That is how we should do broad group work.

The second aspect of Kinnell's letter is that it seems to me very subjective. It takes some political assessment of the leading comrades involved in F... and generalises that into an impressionistic view of Briefing as a whole. Take for example the question of the article by JB. The implication of the letter is that the article was not printed because the B comrades are really soft on the L.C. In fact in the next edition of the NLB Supplement not only did JB's article appear, but a Programme for Left Unity also appeared written by 4 people including JB, and with which he only disagreed with one point (on the EEC).

What is true is that leading comrades in B like GB are soft on Livingstone, but at the last National EB there was a split with comrades from LLB like CK arguing against GB, and agreeing with those who argued that Livingstone had failed to fight, and there was no reason to believe that he would next year. Similarly, GB was severely criticised by the EB for the balance in the Supplement between its support for Liverpool, and the interview with Blunkett. It is only possible to violate the decisions of the EB for so long. Our job is to ensure that we intervene as strongly as possible to ensure that the political conclusions are drawn from such actions.

When the NLB network was established the article in Sx reporting it was almost none existent, whereas a few months before we had quite a good article on the conference of local B groups. Finally, the article in the paper on the B slogan seemed to me tactically inept. The political objections to the slogan are absolutely correct (though the generalisation of these into an attack on the political stance of B is something else), but it would have been far better to have raised these objections through the NLB Supplement rather than in Sx, which appeared simply as a sectarian attack.

We ought to learn from the mistakes made in Sx. There is no guarantee that the NLBN will be successful, but as opposed to Sx it is a genuine broad organisation, and through it we have the opportunity to implement the tactic

we botched up with Sx.

Such an orientation, based on building B groups in every area is another reason why we should rationalise our organisational structure, because it means effective 'broad group' work would be done through B rather than flogging a dead horse with Sx groups, and because in order to intervene effectively in the B groups we need to firm up the organisation, and spend more time preparing our comrades for the 'ideological struggle'.

The sense of this can be seen if we look at the present possible route of a militant into the WSL - (1) get them into the 'O', (2) get them involved in Broad Left (B) work, (3) recruit them into Sx, (4) recruit them into the WSL.

We should not see B as a panacea as A do, but nor should we allow them a free hand to work in it and recruit as they have done in campaigns like CND/YCND. We should see it as an arena for ideological struggle from which we can recruit direct to the WSL. Just as importantly we should see it as a genuine attempt to build a broad organisation of the hard left. We should build it:-

(a) because it is a means of organising a counter attack against the move to the right in the 'O'

(b) it offers a serious alternative to the sterile sectarianism of M,

(c) it is a way of breaking their stranglehold on the YM.

Scott.

February 1984

In recent years the British working class, its labour movement and the revolutionaries within that movement have been faced with the deepest and longest economic and political crisis presented to them since the 1930's. It's in this sort of crisis that revolutionary organisations are supposed to be able to find an ear in the working class most readily.

We've got the crisis but far from growing, our organisation, in common with all with any serious pretension to being revolutionary Marxist, has managed to miss the boat of growth completely. In fact, we've declined in size - why ?

Is it because the working class has not been ready for our ideas ? No it isn't ! The working class brought down Heath then Callaghan. It has fought a whole string of tremendously courageous battles against Thatcherism - within the limits of its 'home grown' consciousness, the same consciousness that it won't ever surpass without the influence of a mass revolutionary party. The class is very open to discovering & learning new methods of struggle at present. It's impossible to blame some sort of objective blockage in the working class which will always make the necessary sacrifices to maintain its tradition of anticapitalist struggle.

Is it because our organisation has adopted specially sectarian, public positions in the class struggle and thus isolated itself ? --L/S- alone has actually tried to answer some of the most important questions facing revolutionaries in the class struggle in Britain today. How do we effectively operate as revolutionaries in the MO ? How do we relate to the confused Broad Lefts in the unions ? How do we walk the tightrope of getting into the heart of local government struggles without getting absorbed by the left reformists ? On these questions and others we've come up with the correct answers. There can be no doubt that we are both the least sectarian and most principled organisation on the British left.

Is it because our comrades are not serious people ? That they don't get into the class struggle and/or are unable to relate to newly developing militants ? Certainly in the branch/S-group that I work in the last five years have seen it transformed from the old rag-bag to 100% proletarian. I'm told that this is repeated nationally. One of the energy sources in our organisation, unlike the IMG which I was in for two years in the 70's, is that nationally or locally our comrades are always 'there' wherever it happens to be.

Is it because our national leadership is incapable of charting a course through the politics of the class struggle ? Most of the political initiatives which have given us the tactics which we work on have come from the top. Over the years I've been against one or two of them at the time of their introduction and have been proved wrong in practice each time.

Is it because we have not found the individuals to recruit so that we can build our organisation ? Even without access to the figures it's pretty obvious that since 1979 (for sake of argument) the number of people who have flowed through our organisation represents SEVERAL HUNDRED PERCENT of those who are now in it. We suffer from what I seem to remember from the days of the I-- was said to be one of the sure signs of an unstable organisation - high turnover or inability to hold members. The people are being found, and are coming to us, and we are not holding them.

The problem of our continuing irrelevance as a political force of any strength probably lies in a wrong interpretation by us of what is the right way to organise ourselves. I believe that this originates from a misapplication of one of the lessons of the struggles of the pioneer Trotskyists, particularly in the 1930's and 40's when the movement was under the most extreme political pressure that it has ever experienced. These comrades were truly remarkable people who carried forward for us the live legacies of, Bolshevism, the early years of the Comintern and their own battles against fascism, stalinism, reformism and bureaucracy in the workers movement.

movement/

With almost everything against them they managed to build small organisations under intense, close range fire from all sides.

Because of the nature of the political environment that they were forced to work in they interpreted democratic centralism very narrowly or they would not have survived. Splits and expulsions took place, quite correctly, over issues that pale into insignificance in comparison, for example, to the actions of Zinoviev and Kamenev before the Bolshevik Revolution, which did not result in expulsion or even anything near it.

Different horses for different courses. As far as my very limited political insight can see the comrades of the 30's and 40's had to organise themselves as they did (though I've never been totally convinced that Kamenev and Zinoviev shouldn't have been taken out and shot). In short, different internal political brackets are applicable in a revolutionary organisation under different objective circumstances.

We are not under the intensity of political pressure that the comrades in the 30's and 40's were, but which of the two modes of operation more closely parallels the way in which we are working today? It has to be conceded that it is that of the 30's where differences that don't get within a hundred miles of being class betrayal are pushed, usually by both sides, to short term show downs and end, as a matter of course, in the separation of comrades from the organisation whether singly or in groups. This has gone on for years and is not limited to us. In fact it's endemic on the far left. The 'solutions' found by the larger groups ie. Militant and the SWP are no more than different combinations of bureaucratism, sectarianism and opportunism - stifling internal debate, ignoring whole areas of class struggle and accommodating to reformism. They aren't solutions. However, we haven't found the answer either - or more accurately, we've found some of it and failed to implement some of what we've found.

In both of the historical situations mentioned above the comrades achieved what was possible under the prevailing objective conditions. One group led a seizure of state power while the other protected and built a programme and a living cadre. We are not succeeding in achieving what is possible in our objective circumstances. We are not growing without paying the totally unacceptable political prices that the SWP and Militant have been willing to pay.

We've got nothing to be afraid of in loosening the acceptable political brackets a bit inside our organisation. We've developed such unique modes of work and tactics that as long as democratic centralism is maintained around those main thrusts we stand no danger at all of becoming ill defined or woolly as a political tendency. There is a fundamental difference between honing a blade to put a good cutting edge on it and constantly hacking bloody great lumps off it so that in the end it can't cut anything.

To grow we must do four things,

1. Maintain and develop our present tactics in the struggle.
2. Take a few chances on who we recruit making the main measure of 'recruitability' commitment to our core orientation AND OUR WILL TO FIND AND USE EVERY POSSIBLE CHANNEL AND WEAPON TO FIGHT THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN A DETERMINED AND SPIRITED WAY.
3. Provide a little bit of warmth and comradeship in the organisation by employing our people sensitively - not pushing them prematurely or unnecessarily into situations in which they have to rely purely on reserves of nervous energy.
4. Maintain strong political education to build consensus among comrades who at first may have many differences but are held together by the initial political cement of 2 & 3 above.

None of this is clever or new. It's simply the S- tactic in action. The best building tactic we've ever come up with, and one which has incredibly been allowed to fall by the wayside to the point where it is openly admitted by leading comrades that the --A does not exist.

exist/

Could it be that this situation indicates that although we made a bold break with traditional sectarianism in conceiving the S- tactic that we weren't quite bold enough to be able to carry it through in practice ????

Having allowed the --A to rot to the point where it's completely impossible for functioning S- groups (how many are there ?) to get a sensible answer to the simplest questions we are in constant danger of throwing away the remaining live links with this tactic thus making it far harder for us to restart it later. There seems to be no urgency at the top to avoid this. In fact I'm increasingly convinced that the danger is not even recognised ! S- comrades who are serious, and that covers most that I know, are not going to put up forever with a situation in which they have no voice which has any effect in the running of their organisation. It's no good calling --L branches S- groups and artificially sending people to limp delegate meetings which for most are a sham as they know that real power lies elsewhere.

Convergence is vital immediately and to break out of our position on the margins it's got to be convergence around the successful development of the S- tactic. This includes the necessary rudiments of democratic centralism and takes a few more steps towards breaking with the residual sectarianism that we are still plagued by.

IMPORTANT NOTICE. THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING.

1. A tendency platform
2. A mighty contribution to socialist thought
3. Written by someone who wants to be a national leader.
4. A focus to attempt to replace the existing national leadership.
5. For voting at conference.
6. Anything very new.

It's a voice from one rank and file member of the only half decent political organisation in this country, who wants to stay a rank and file member, but of an organisation which isn't going to go on covering itself in layers of scar tissue so deep that eventually it won't be able to feel anything around itself.

For what little it's worth my position on the current internal situation is as follows,

1. It is a scandalous piece of sectarianism to have allowed ourselves to be in a preconference period during the miners strike - the most important effort against the Tories so far - when there is so much solidarity work that needs to be done around that strike.
2. I can't and never have supported the politics of the expelled group as I consider them to contain elements of both sectarianism (on S- tactic) and opportunism (attitudes of expelled people who are councillors) towards important areas of class struggle.
3. I don't support the grandly self christened 'Democratic Centralist Faction' as I'm certain that its main purpose is to act as a second wave for the expelled group. Although I hasten to add that no one in the faction has said this to me.
4. I critically support the current NC majority though I firmly believe that the carrying out of the expulsions by the NC (a) reflected an aspect of the type of endemic sectarianism I've tried to write about and (b) was done because the NC majority was not certain that a conference of the membership would carry through the expulsions that it wanted so badly.

Finally, I have very little confidence that this document will draw much support from the top. It is aimed at the rank and file in the first instance. In anticipation of any talk about my personal disaffection I cite my past, present and future record of political work for the organisation.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF STUDENT ACTION MAJORITY POSITION

- 1). Both C4 and M are our political enemies. There is no evidence to suggest that C4 have been any less witch-hunting towards us than M would be if they controlled N****.
- 2). C4 however represent something over and above the precise political positions they take. They consist of elements of the post-October '83 MP Establishment and are a recruiting ground for it including for its personnel.
- 3). C4 is completely linked to the MP bureaucracy; it is virtually interchangeable with the NUS 'bureaucracy' (in so far as there is one).
- 4). Under no circumstances should we vote for C4 against M in N****.
- 5). This may mean in practice using our votes to put M in control of N****. If our vote plus M's vote is bigger than C4's vote it would mean that.
- 6). The notion that we can calculate 'tactical voting' in such a way as to give ourselves 'the balance of power' on the N*** NC is a bad one because
 - a). it involves extremely complicated mathematical deductions which cannot be known definitively to be right and can lead to a monstrous cock-up.
 - b). it subordinates a political perspective to such calculations
 - c). see 1-4 above.
- 7). Obviously we try to get as many of our own people on the NC as possible.

THIS IS AN EXPLANATION OF WHAT THE DISPUTE IS ALL ABOUT.

The argument, is over whether or not we should give M complete control of NXXS. When the NC discusses the matter the technical details of the elections are quite important so please read the following carefully.

NXXS elections run like this. They are all STV. 9 posts are elected individually. These nine make up the officers group and are elected in the same session of conference. These are the most powerful positions. Then 2 more posts are elected individually. These are editor of the NXXS paper and of the student page in YM paper. Then 5 people are elected all in one election, these are known as the bottom 5 because it's an election where small minorities get elected because the quota drops to about 30.

In this last 'bottom 5' we always get someone elected. We don't always have quite the quota on our own votes but independents and looser DL members vote for us.

Our choice is whether we vote to give M complete control or to aim for a split Exec, ideally with us holding the balance.

There is no dispute over whether we should negotiate for the best deal for us. At the last conference we negotiated with M, and they paid a very high price for our votes. (In fact if the conference hadn't been abandoned we would have come out with an Exec something like this: Officers group 2us, 1M and 4DL; 2 Editors would probably have gone to DL; on the bottom we would have got 2, the DL would have got 2 and M1. That's a strange projected result given that M had twice as many, almost three times as many delegates as we had. The reason was that the conference was very tight and the few independents there would vote for us and not for M where we stood down to give them a clear run)

It is also common ground that whatever we decide to do we have to keep quiet about it. 2 years ago a MIG blurted out our position and the M then refused to negotiate with us because they knew we already had decided to vote for them.

NOXX is very finally balanced. We will almost certainly hold the balance at the next conference.

Standing our own slate is dependent on negotiations, and really doesn't matter very much. It obviously does in a more open conference but where everyone, or everyone bar 6 at the last conference is ~~xxx~~ aligned.

Either position will mean voting for M down the line, or transfering to them if the balance is very fine, and M haven't got an overall majority.

THE DEFACTO POSITION.

Who are the DL? They are a politically loose, but organisationally tight group. Which is held together by what they see as anti-Trotskyism. In fact they hold together very well at conferences because they hate, for good reasons or bad, the M.

Politically they span from pro-Kinnock witch-hunters to a few good people who without a doubt would have gone for Heffer and Meacher.

They are semi-Stalinists, some of them rather more than semi, who believe in detente, collaborating with the statist unions and so on. They have a soft underbelly when it comes to women's issues and lesbian and gay liberation.

C4 are a smallish group in DL.

During the miners strike the NUS wing of the DL have been outrageous. But now they are fixing up a tour with NUM speakers for November. The NXXS activists in the DL have produced stickers, posters and are preparing an action pack for the start of the term.

Both wings of the DL refuse to try to go for a fight with the Govt over Ultra Vires and SU autonomy - which are probably the hottest issues in NUS at the moment.

All in all they are a dreadful bunch of people. They won NUS from the Left Alliance (liberals and CPers) a couple of years ago. Most people think that their leadership is significantly better than the LA.

Deciding what to do about the political composition of NUS cannot be done without taking into account the effects in NUS.

What would happen if M took NOXX?

Obviously we can only guess what the DL would do. They would be in a mess as the election nominations for NUS Exec will have to be in less than a month after the probable time of Conference. It's almost a certainty that they would ~~xxxxxxx~~ not split immediately. It's not impossible that they would ask the Party to step in.

But it is almost certain that M cannot win NUS elections. And in my mind that's not entirely unhealthy. NUS is quite sophisticated on things like sexual politics and international issues. Even M don't think that they stand a snowball's chance of winning more than perhaps a couple of positions. This would probably mean that NUS would go back to the LA.

I doubt that M would be able, in the short term at least, to tie up NXXS in the same way as they have in the YM.

At the moment we get a good deal from the DL in NXXS, speaking time, giving us a few votes in 81 because we were under quota and so on.

Giving M control of NXXS though would certainly be a start on a nasty path to M strangulation.

With access to any club they want, the paper, 1000s of pounds and control of the twice termly activists weekends M would pretty quickly hegemonise new students and piss off established NXXS activists. When the initial

fightback was lost then we are in for a steady withering down of the organisation, down to the M, their periphery, a few stragglers and us.

The only way I can conceive of that not happening is either if DL muck it up and cannot provide an alternative pool of attraction or if M do actually pull it off and take NUS. In which case its a totally different ball game altogether.

Given the nature of M, and I'll take as read that we all accept that they are not to be considered as a part of the left as we would treat say SA in a similar situation and that they are a particularly pernicious sect, and given that their control would not actually develop NXXS, then we should go for a split exec.

How would that work?

a it wouldn't allow M to do as they pleased. Our votes on the Exec would decide what was passed.

b we would have a genuine say over what goes on in NXXS. If M take it then we are reduced to being about 2 lone voices on the NC whose proposals would only be accepted if M agreed with them.

c either position would keep our independent profile - we would still put down motions on our politics which would always be defeated.

d some good proposals do come from the DL, like affiliation to the womans campaign for jobs, affiliation to the LCI and sponsorship of various conferences which we support.

A final point. Could we ensure a split Exec?. We can't absolutely guarantee to have the precise figures. Nor can we determine what the few, possibly decisive independents would do. But we knew almost exactly what the score was last year, and now with that experience we do certainly know what we have to find out and in what detail. We will know the limits to our voting ability. And if we need to be cautious then we should err on the side of M.

Joplin.

