

INTERNAL BULLETIN 44

Discussions with WSL

League National Committee meeting 20.12.80: discussion on the WSL.

Discussions with the WSL;

12.11.80 ... discussions on

CUTS AND SIX PER CENT LIMIT
BUILDING BROAD MOVEMENTS

26.11.80 ... discussions on

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL
FURTHER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE 2 TENDENCIES

10.12.80 ... discussions on

LONGBRIDGE
CUTS
YOUTH WORK
FOURTH INTERNATIONAL (CONTINUED)
JOINT MEETING OF N.C.s

Note: The minutes for 12.11.80 include corrections to the minutes of 20.10.80. The minutes in this bulletin are as yet uncorrected.

WSL/I-CL DISCUSSIONS 12.11.80

Present: For I-CL - O'Keefe, Alan, Oliver
For WSL -- TR, AT, AMS, TH

CUTS AND SIX PER CENT LIMIT

Alan: We think the public sector alliance is the central idea at present - not just to support the firemen but to organise joint action against the 6% limit and the cuts. We should get the cuts Steering Committee set up by the Lambeth conference to take an active role:

- 1) It must become an active body; T.Knight must not be allowed to hi-jack it.
- 2) It must really fight for the conference decisions. Knight's counter-proposal for a week of strike action in February is basically faking.
- 3) It must link up with the fight against the 6 per cent and the struggle to develop local public sector alliances.

We've also discussed the possibility of organising a lobby or something round the conference called on 6th December by the LP NEC, but we're checking out whether it's feasible.

Immediately we want WSL/I-CL coordination on the Steering Committee.

TR: Fisher has just said that he will take the pay issue claim by claim.

Alan. Our estimate is that NUPE probably won't fight; but we must argue for a fight.

TR. We saw BL as a possible spark. But there is incredible hypocrisy from the TU leaders - including the CPers in FTAT, for example. They are determined to stop any action. In NUPE, our impression is that the rank and file is buzzing - but the bureaucracy has a lot of weight to put that down. The BL sellout has really set everyone back. We should condemn all the TU leaders involved - they have policed the 6% and pushed a bonus scheme that will lose jobs.

We're in favour of joint work, especially on the Steering Committee. I agree with what you said on the 6%, but we need to be on the ready to move into any important confrontation.

O'Keefe. We were thinking of putting out a bulletin for the FBU dispute. One side national, the other side local.

TR. What relation would it have to the SWP bulletin?

O'Keefe. It would be parallel. We can't accept a monopoly for the SWP, and anyway we would disagree with them politically.

TR. A joint bulletin would be OK - also perhaps joint meetings.

((Details of this firemen's bulletin were discussed)).

O'Keefe. What would your attitude be if there was some question of the IMG coming in on this?

TR. We would not particularly want it.

((Further discussion on a possible lobby for the December 6th conference and additional joint meetings on Poland)).

CORRECTIONS TO PREVIOUS MINUTES

AMS. The minutes refer to a Woman Worker group in Oxford. In fact we only referred to Woman Worker activity. On school meals, the minutes omit the point that the women are forced to cover for staff shortages by agreements made by the bureaucracy.

TR. I said a communist women's tendency would be built in struggles, not "come out of" struggles.

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CONTINUATION OF PREVIOUS DISCUSSION

O'Keefe. I see a central contradiction in the WSL's approach. Much of the WSL's criticism of the broad groups and of Fightback comes down to rejecting the method by which the I-CL organises on our full politics but also organises the broad groups and F on a lesser basis. That rejection implies a clear position like the Spartacists - it is only permissible to organise on the full programme. But the WSL does not consistently take that position. In trade union work it relates to the class struggle in an un-sectarian way, contradicting its insistence on the full programme for more general political organising.

The WSL's experience of two waves of Spartacists is probably due to this contradiction. Generally, the WSL's sectarian side leads it to criticise us, and inhibits its activity in certain areas. But some people in the WSL are bound to take up the full implications of the sectarian side - and they end up with the Spartacists.

AMS. What contradiction? My criticisms of F were based on experience in the class struggle - e.g. over school meals cuts and St Benedict's - and the role of leadership in those struggles. I-CL comrades say they approve of WSL activity in the class struggle, but why does the WSL insist on the full programme at all times. We don't insist on the whole programme at all times. But at the Fightback conference a full programme was needed, because it was setting up a whole movement. We judged the question concretely in each case. On the 'pin money' leaflet, we did not say that it should have contained the whole transitional programme, but that it lacked crucial policies like occupation and supporting strike action. You can't compare that criticism with the position of the Spartacists, who do not locate demands in particular struggles.

O'Keefe. Not all your criticisms were of the concrete sort you mention. On the 'pin money' leaflet and on some specific struggles we accepted the WSL's criticisms. But in a previous discussion TR said that the WSL was against a limited platform like we have for the broad groups.

TR. I did not mean I was against limited platforms in general. We are against that particular platform because it omits crucial transitional demands.

O'Keefe. Specific criticisms of the platform may well be valid. But you seem to criticise not the details but the general concept of the broad groups and of Fightback.

We also have a difference on the bureaucracy. It's not a disagreement on assessment or on basic programme. But we think there are times when revolutionaries should not focus on attacking the bureaucracy. We must relate to a bureaucratised labour movement, having united fronts with some bureaucrats on some issues - or we will be confined to propagandism. People learn about the bureaucracy through experience and struggle - and in some struggles the bureaucracy plays a limited progressive role. The WSL has a static, fixed view of the bureaucracy, leading to a propagandist tendency. Obviously in any real struggle revolutionaries must say what has to be said about the bureaucracy, but that's different from routine denunciation in advance.

AT. What examples would you cite?

O'Keefe. In the last discussion, we were criticised for not bringing the question of the bureaucracy to the fore in the Fightback group in Leicester.

There was a 3-way split around the Communist International. The ultra-lefts and the KAPD had a definite view of the labour movement - that it all had to be scrapped and a new one built. Lenin and Trotsky argued instead for fighting in the existing labour movement. Obviously the WSL is not the same as the KAPD, but I think there are lessons to be learnt.

Alan. Some other examples. A recent Socialist Press front page had a headline,

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"Who will fight the Tories?", with sub-headlines, "Not Benn", "Not the TUC", etc. Our disagreement is not on the basic assessment involved but on the approach, which seems to be based on a class-room, literary-exposure method of propaganda, as if the main task of revolutionaries were to convince the world through propaganda articles that the established leadership is rotten. We would argue instead for a focus on proposals for class action, and a presentation which can convince workers, so far as possible, that the bureaucrats, not the revolutionaries, are responsible for splitting any action.

There are other little examples. At a Mobilising Committee meeting at the TUC, a WSL member got up and denounced Ron Todd for his role in strikes - it was abstractly correct but failed to relate to the audience at all. At the Labour Coordinating Ctee trade union conference a WSL member introduced himself by saying, "I'm not a Labour Party member. I'm a Trotskyist. I'm a member of the WSL". This method of emphasising the separation of revolutionaries from the mainstream labour movement, and directly counterposing our small groups as 'the alternative' to the bureaucracy, is false.

TR. This is a real disagreement. In our trade union work, we fight for the particular aspects of our programme that are relevant to particular struggles. Our disagreement with the Spartacists was not so much over what programme to put forward as over the working class orientation. Under the pressure, some of our comrades broke from a working class orientation towards a propagandist orientation. We win our comrades in struggles - not on a propaganda basis. You can't blame the organisation because a group became tired of our orientation and went in an opposite direction.

The record shows we are not propagandists. Every time in a struggle we've started off with proposals on how to win - and also warned the workers in advance about the bureaucracy. E.g. with the hosiery workers in Leicester, where there is a very right wing bureaucracy, we would warn the workers right from the start.

The real weaknesses we have - and our real strengths - relate more to the WRP than the Sparts.

O'Keefe referred to a limited progressive role of the bureaucracy in some struggles, and he cited the defeat of In Place of Strife as an example. But in the late '60s the SLL campaigned strongly and correctly against the bureaucracy, for a general strike. At the same time the SLL supported even one MP who was willing to vote against In Place of Strife.

The Mobilising Committee meeting at the TUC? The intervention was about Adwest, which was very important. The T&G bureaucracy was using quibbles about dues payments as an excuse for defeating that strike. Ron Todd was one of two or three people personally responsible. We tried to get Adwest workers to go to Ron Todd's meeting. Revolutionaries have got to take up these struggles and expose the hypocrisy of the bureaucracy.

The Spartacists criticised us for our focus on individual struggles. But we think these struggles must be taken up, and people like Benn must be exposed for opposing strike action.

O'Keefe. If you consider that limited programmes can be valid - then which limited programmes are valid?

TR. It depends on conditions. The national nursery campaign has a programme consisting of a few demands around the cuts. It relates to a struggle.

AT. The point about Fightback is that it blends easily with the feminist milieu when what revolutionaries need is a sharper political fight. It drops the demands to the level where you won't make the development you set out to make.

The Spartacists? We recruited a group of people from the RCG. They had a propagandist background. And eventually they returned to that background.

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At Adwest, our struggle throughout was to turn that group of workers towards the bureaucracy, and fight against the Maoist influence.

TH. In Brighton, the Adwest workers had been lobbying the TUC. Moss Evans refused to give them a hearing. But it was a central struggle for the picketing laws. Ron Todd was spouting on Labour Party democracy. I tried to get a worker from Adwest to intervene, but he wasn't willing. So one of our comrades made an intervention instead. It was very important to raise the issue. Otherwise Ron Todd would get away with appearing as a champion of democracy in the labour movement. Ron Todd thought it was important too. He was very annoyed.

What is the alternative to doing what we did?

AMS. I think the central difference is one of method. The I-CL is actually propagandist. We're trying to operate through struggles whereas the I-CL attempts to set up Fightback and then turn people towards the trade union movement.

These people drawn into Fightback are not spontaneous forces. They are IMGers and people like that. You've superimposed a propagandist approach from above - with the propaganda suitably monitored and with bits omitted. But we're trying to draw out what's necessary from actual struggles.

The central question is the fight for revolutionary leadership. The I-CL argues we should not go in hard initially on the bureaucracy. But many workers are even anti-union, because of the sell-outs, and to relate to them we have to criticise the bureaucracy.

The reason why F does not find criticisms of the bureaucracy necessary is that it does not start from local struggles.

I don't think people will be put off by raising the questions of programme and of the role of the bureaucracy. The working class is not hostile to raising the question of the bureaucracy.

O'Keefe. It's true you can get a lot of support for denunciations of the bureaucracy. But it often doesn't mean much, like with the SLL in the late '60s.

In actual struggles, certainly, revolutionaries must attack the bureaucracy as the struggle demands. If we fail in particular cases, that is to be condemned. But the general question of 'filtering' propaganda is different. Revolutionaries do need to select what ideas we raise in what situations.

TR says a limited platform is all right when based on a specific struggle, but the broad groups' type of limited platform is not all right. That seems to show a very limited concept of struggle, as if direct action is the only form of struggle. Direct action is the bedrock, but other forms of struggle are also important. And we think a revolutionary organisation has a responsibility to initiate limited struggles like F's where appropriate.

AT says we need a political fight against feminism. Yes. The I-CL makes hard Marxist propaganda. But that should not rule out also doing limited activity like Fightback.

The Spartacists? I did not raise them as a sneer. But I still think there is a logical link between them and aspects of the WSL's approach.

Ron Todd? Compare TK. K is a faker on the make. Yet by working with him we got contacts, a base... and we didn't compromise ourselves: that's a correct approach. It's understandable that we want to cut Todd's throat, but the question is how to undercut him effectively. E.g. we also attack Benn, but combine that with building up a joint campaign on LP democracy.

TH. It was right at that particular meeting to denounce Todd.

O'Keefe. If you could get an Adwest worker to do it, yes.

AT. We do not go in for denunciations in the abstract. It's linked to a specific, current struggle.

What would you say was the basis of the success of F in mobilising people?

Alan. Basically, F has provided a formula for women's movement activists

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to relate to the labour movement (and vice versa), without making detailed factional commitments they are not yet ready for. The Working Women's Charter was confined by the IMG to a paper alliance with TU bureaucrats. Women's Voice is restricted by SWP factionalism. But there is a widespread felt need for an active organised link between the women's movement and the labour movement.

The initial amorphousness of F is an advantage given its basis. Some of the people drawn in will go, some will not develop very far. The ultimate test will be if we can organise effectively for direct struggles. We build for that, without attempting to force F's development prematurely.

With this approach we have been able to build F much more broadly than our own women's fraction. At the second F conference, which was smaller than the first because of the nature of the event, our comrades were a small minority, yet an open WA slate was elected to the F Steering Committee after a WA paper for the conference had put across our full politics. A number of F women have been won to the broad groups or even to the I-CL; and without that sort of recruitment we can make no decisive steps forward.

AMS is right: the differences are differences of method. The WSL stresses working consistently round local struggles and drawing out the implications. Fine. But the WSL also seems to exclude and reject the idea of constructing a broad movement from the top down, subsequently linking up with local struggles. And that means cutting off opportunities.

The broad groups are much more than the I-CL. But they have our essential politics in practice on all major questions. And they are active around our essential politics, e.g. round the cuts and Lambeth. The development of Fightback will depend on what it does - on local groups, struggles, development of an I-CL nucleus within it.

In the broad groups and in Fightback we try to educate people round us and win them over. The tempo depends on strikes, etc.

How did we start the broad groups? We launched a campaign around the general election and found a bigger response than expected. That was 'from the top down' but it interacted with local struggles, e.g. Lambeth. If we insisted on building only from the base up, we would have missed all the opportunities.

We have compared the turn to the broad groups with entering IS in 1968. The entry into IS did not arise from local struggles. It was a manoeuvre 'from the top down'. But it enabled us to develop into a national tendency. If we had just focused on local struggles, we would never have developed.

The WSL stresses local struggles...

AMS. ... Not local struggles, class struggles...

Alan. As revolutionaries, we believe the most important thing about a strike is what comes out in terms of organisation and consciousness (though obviously gains on wages etc. are also important). The WSL's approach seems to pose the WSL itself as the only way of linking local struggles. And direct class struggle is necessarily local until it becomes a general class confrontation. We believe that part of the work of revolutionaries is also to relate to the organisations which have already come out of struggles.

The difference of emphasis here probably explains our different experiences in the LP. Our two organisations have similar numbers, yet we have been able to achieve more in the LP than the WSL.

Take a historical example: the SDF and ILP. The SDF was very militant in unemployed struggles, its members led strikes. The ILP did not have the same approach. Despite that, Engels correctly saw the ILP as the progressive force. The main task was to create a Labour Party in Britain.

There almost seems to be a dualism in the WSL. To us, it appears almost as if the paper comes from a different organisation than the one we see in day

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to day struggles. In day to day struggles the use of limited programmes is judged concretely; but for building 'from the top down' it is rejected. E.g. at a previous discussion PF said it had been an omission to have items of the WSL's programme not included in the CDLM's programme, and now the CDLM programme contained everything essential from the WSL programme.

AT. When you say local struggles, you mean trade union struggles. But for us trade union struggles are fundamental. We direct ourselves towards the trade union struggles of the working class and intervene in those struggles.

Our LP work has not had the impact it should have had with the number of comrades we've had. That's a weakness which we are remedying. But we see it as not as fundamental as the struggle within the trade unions.

We don't disagree on building from the top down or a limited programme. The question with F is, what political basis? It got a big conference because it had a popular name and a vague basis. The second conference was smaller because more people knew what was behind it. We don't say a full programme is needed, but a clearer basis. You need to deal with the feminists and other elements.

Oliver: How does the WSL think LP work can be used to extend and link up TU struggles?

AT. Take struggles from the TUs into the LP and from the LP into the TUs - e.g. on democracy.

TR. What takes place in the LP is a reflection of the class struggle. A layer of the working class has moved towards saying that they never again want a Labour Government like the last one. The development results from the struggles against the last Labour Government. If no-one had fought that government, then there would be no movement now inside the LP.

We try to bring the struggle as sharply as possible into the LP: e.g. take up Benn on the question of strikes.

AT. The reference to 'local struggles' seems to downgrade trade union struggle. We put enormous resources into struggles when they break out. E.g. the recent ICL closure at Winsford. We moved fast - called together not only our members but also contacts - organised a call for occupation. That's where we put our resources.

TR. Or locally in Oxford - we've been organising for a hospital occupation.

O'Keefe. How did you approach the ICL workers in Winsford?

AT. We have a strong branch which has done work round ICL for some time. (It comes from a strong WRP branch in Winsford). So we knew who to contact.

AMS. There is no doubt that there is a widespread response to and need for a socialist women's movement, and the Working Women's Charter and Women's Voice stand as evidence. In our trades council and union branch, support for Fight-back has gone through on the nod. But when we're trying to get through policies which we need to win struggles, they are bitterly fought by the bureaucracy. F does not include policies which people won't like - so what do you do with all the people you attract? How can you take them forward?

At the F conference, the Workers Power/WSL resolution was attacked, among other reasons, for not relating to women in the home. But don't women in the home need policies and programme? The policies we put forward, e.g. on nurseries, can help organise non-TU women. And those policies do not alienate people apart from the conscious right wing.

O'Keefe. F gets through on the nod... OK. What do we do then? Draw women into the labour movement, into struggles, give them a political perspective. Why was the first F conference big? Undoubtedly it helped that it was not labelled I-CL. But it did respond to a real need from which we can logically

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develop the struggle for a working class based women's movement. Obviously the development depends on the I-CL fulfilling its specific role.

From the top down? Lenin argued against the Economists that crucial political ideas do not develop spontaneously from direct struggle. Thus building from the top down is crucial for propaganda groups. The WSL is right about the need for involvement in struggle - but it defines struggle in too limited a way, as only including direct action.

On the trade union bureaucracy in the late '60s - I'm not saying they ceased to be reactionary! But since the bureaucrats became reactionary history has gone on, and the bureaucrats are still part of the movement. The problem with the SLL in the late '60s was that it rejected the idea of an evolution of the labour movement. We think an evolution must take place, and therefore it is not always right to pick fights with the bureaucracy; e.g. we can have a united front with some bureaucrats on LP democracy.

AT. I think the real difference is on the vital role of involvement in class struggle. For us, it is not just a matter of having the right ideas, but of building up the programme and taking it into the class struggle. Most of our recruits have come from that activity - not because we went in in order to recruit, but because recruitment was developed as part of our intervention.

((It was agreed that comrades could add written contributions to the minutes if they wished. AMS pointed out in particular that contributions relating to details of particular struggles were often not fully reflected in the minutes)).

ICL/WSL MEETING 26.11.80

Present: ICL: O'Keefe, Alan, Foster, Ramsey

WSL: AT, TR, TH, PF

Fourth International:

AT: We faced difficulties with international work when we were expelled from the WRP. We went back to the history of the FI: within a year we developed our basic position. We see the analysis of Pabloism as key to the problems of the FI post-war. Problems were very much rooted in the material situation and pressures that the Trotskyists faced after the war. There were some useful contributions e.g. Grant immediately after the war. Pablo's conclusions from the Tito-Stalin split - seeing Titoism as progressive - was imposed on the whole international.

1953 split: Healy and Cannon took a progressive role from limited theoretical position: the defence of orthodoxy. Pablo basically misunderstood the role of Stalinism. Basic deviation on Stalinism has been central to the problems of the FI since, including their position on Cuba. All sides were unable to analyse Cuba.

Reunification of 1963 was unprincipled as it was carried out without discussion of the basic problems. It set Healy and Lambert off in a sectarian direction while the USFI went through into guerillaism.

The deviations ~~x~~ are attempts to look for short-cuts to revolution away from the problems of building a revolutionary party in the working class.

PF: We don't see Pablosim in the one-sided way the ICFI did, as a specific deviation that they fought. Lots of things now described as Pabloism developed in Bleibtreu's 1950 article. On China Pablo's position was at that stage clearer. Groups in the French party fought it out on the terrain of Pabloism e.g. the French party on Algeria in 1955.

O'Keefe: When we started as an independent tendency we didn't think much of the IC. At that time the USFI didn't call for a political revolution in China. After the USFI rectified their position on China, we began to see the USFI as relatively progressive in relation to the IC.

We disagree with your definition of Pabloism. The root problem goes back to 1943 when the expansion of Stalinism began.

There were two responses: a) Stalinism a new form of class society b) try to develop a coherent theory of the expansion. That hasn't been done adequately. The crisis of the Trotskyist movement begins there. 'Pabloism': one solution to that problem: maintaining Trotsky's definition and extending it to countries with Stalinist regimes. The conception of 'Pabloism' locates all the difficulties (a) in focusing on Pablo (b) in pointing to differences of interpretation of what was a common position. Misses the point to locate problems in terms of Pablo's response. On Algeria: Lambert ~~x~~ took a left social chauvinist position and failed to be minimally communist. Pablo did give solid support to fight against imperialism.

By 1963 there was more or less real agreement between those who formed the USFI. Those opposed to these positions could have gone in and fought for their views. The reason they stayed out determined the nature of the ICFI. The SLL & OCI were both national organisations, concerned to maintain their independence. Of the 2 blocs the IC was the more unprincipled. The IC was not adequate politically. whatever the USFI's failures on Cuba, those who failed to make the same analysis of Cuba as of events in China made ~~x~~ more serious ones. This is because the IC was motivated factionally.

O'Keefe(continued):

One difference between us is that we look on the prospects for the FI as far less rosy: we see the root as a number of unresolved theoretical problems. Trotskyists have failed to integrate e.g. the Chinese Revolution into their own experience. Organisationally chaos follows from that. There is no authoritative international leadership. The idea of a democratic centralist international is not immediately feasible. We see the tasks as now being to create dialogue and discussion.

TR: We tried to look at the history objectively. On the 1953 Open Letter: we looked at Healy's history beforehand (as a runner for Pablo), looked at the weaknesses and seeds of later destruction. But still correct then. 1963: weaknesses of IC positions also plain over Ceylon and Cuba. There were definite agreements that no discussion would take place. Healy was uncritical of the Ceylonese leadership but the ISFI did cover it up.

Cuba: IC was arguing necessity for a revolutionary party while the USFI was against. Though in appearance USFI position stronger, in reality it was weaker as they went overboard on Castro. The SLL fought for a revolutionary party in the working class while the USFI went in for protest politics.

Today the WRP is completely 'Pabloite' on the Middle East. But in that period their strong side was dominant.

Alan: Not true that the Pabloites didn't understand the counter-revolutionary role of **STALINISM**. You find that in Pablo's 1950 text. But they were trying to integrate that into the reality around them. Since World War II there have been a series of attempts to mesh in general ideas and the development of unforeseen events in order to give a guide to practice. It has been inadequate: it has led either to supine cheerleading for whatever's going on or to attempts to maintain principles while ignoring what was going on.

The theoretical framework of the movement fell apart in the period 1948-51. Up to 1948 we were still talking about a living movement. In 48-51 they were unable to get a grip on what was going on. At that time some people concluded that it was only possible to support Stalinism and left. But those who remained made efforts.

On the IC building a rev. party: the value of that depends on what sort of revolutionary party you're building. Those who clung to that principle were often worse than those who tried to relate to reality e.g. the OCI in May 68 and the SLL's attitude to VSC. That sort of dedication to build a revolutionary party is unstable and flip-flops into opportunism. The OCI in 1952-68 made flip-flops with no relation to reality.

We have to see the whole picture: the dead-end sectarian side of the IC. Debatable whether the SLL or OCI better on opportunism than the ISFI: the OCI was uncritical of the Algerian MNA and the SLL supported Mao in the Cultural revolution.

SWP(US) in the 50's and 60's was the most healthy strand. Agree that the SLL was the revolutionary current in Britain until the mid-60s. But we're probably more critical of it than you.

If problem just currents not understanding nature of Stalinism, easy to do something and gather those who do understand together. There isn't now an adequate world leadership. We haven't done it and are not likely to in the next few years, though we can contribute to it. Process of building a revolutionary international is very difficult.

AT: Right that it is not a question of not understanding counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism. That is the distinction between 46-48 and 48-53. Healthy discussion on Stalinism took place in 46-7, there was the material there to develop positions. The turn came with Yugoslavia; Pablo eulogised Tito and then there was China. These massive pressures led to capitulation to Stalinism, which they faced in isolation. Pablo, as the international leadership, intervened in every section to turn everything to eulogising Tito. They all went along with it.

The difference in positions is that we approach the question from a methodological standpoint. Something common to all deviations since 53: they were all away from the construction of revolutionary parties rooted in the working class. We're equally critical of the method and bureaucratism of Healyism, but Healy directed towards the working class: entrism, work in the unions in the 60s (the work on In Place of Strife was the high point of their influence in the mass movement). We defend that trajectory: it connects with what we do now.

Self-evident that there is no authoritative international centre or Trotskyist party that leads major sections of the working class. The problems of reconstruction are massive, but the objective conditions are favourable. Reconstruction on two levels: (a) fundamental theoretical development (b) elaborate programme for the day to day struggles of the working class, along the lines of the Transitional Programme. Only then can parties have authority.

Alan: Differences in practical conclusions resolve themselves into nuances. There remains differences on particular questions: structural assimilation, Afghanistan.

We agree on the orientation to the working class. It has been important for us in deciding how to relate to other political currents e.g. IMG. But must qualify that: Lutte Ouvriere make that orientation the keystone of their understanding of the whole history of Trotskyism. LO have done industrial work very seriously but done it on the basis that all the documents of the Trotskyist movement since 1940 are worth nothing. See the world as having stopped there and just add analyses of current events. This is not adequate: they reacted in a sectarian way in 1968.

Not true that Pablo intervened to turn the FI towards Titoism. The turn was not immediately after the Tito-Stalin split; the change on Yugoslavia comes with the general change because of the Cold War and the resulting loss of forces and also because world events are occurring that they have no grip on.

PF: The movement faced tremendous crises. We look at the period after the war in terms of the material conditions., also in the context of the restabilisation of capitalism. Isolation was an essential element as the adaptations took the form of seeking short-cuts. There were both strengths and weaknesses in the IC. We are also part of the crisis of the Trotskyist movement.

Also disagree on structural assimilation. In ICL and the FI you argue that before 1968 a revolution against Castro not needed in Cuba. You said nothing to associate Castro with the Kremlin as the hangman of revolutions, but look at e.g. Eritrea.

O'Keefe: In reaction to Mandel etc. can get a focus on party-building and culture, but where get a paucity of culture (Healy, Lambert) you get bad developments. The idea that a party-building emphasis is better is dangerous: what distinguishes Leninism is the role of theory in the party. That's why an explanation of Cuba and a coherent view of

O'Keefe(c-ntinued): the world is important. Otherwise you get people possessed of an odd view of the world who zig-zag wildly e.g. the SLL in Ireland in 1968-69 - there was no hint in their paper of divisions in the working class and in Derry they opposed the defence of the barricades. That undermines what I accept is the positive side. Beyond a certain point inadequate politics undermine that.

The SLL's point of no return was in 1968. They were unable to relate to a mass movement around the Vietnam War. I disagree that the sectarianism of the SLL is exemplified by the way they pose nationalisation: it is in the way they pose 'Build the Party'.

AT: We also made this point.

O'Keefe: It counterposes a sectarian caricature to the living labour movement. One can't say there was a healthy aspect.

Alan: Always saying 'Build the party' can become counterposed to a working class orientation.

O'Keefe: Structural assimilation is an adequate theory for where the Russian Army was in control, but evades the issue on China and Cuba, where there were autonomous revolutions. You can't get away with just saying that without Russia it would never have happened. They carried through part of our programme. Stalinism is counter-revolutionary but in some areas has been anti-capitalist. That disoriented the Trotskyists. Wohlforth's theory is a spin-off from Schachtman's view of the world in which everything is explained in terms of the existence of Russia.

Castro tried consciously to overthrow capitalism, having started out as a democrat. They carried through a transformation. The Castroites were not a repressive force in the early 60's, though the regime was Bonapartist. In the mid 60's they did try to expand the revolution. Castro is now a Stalinist, but not just like the Kremlin.

Afghanistan: in A. can't just talk about the Stalinists carrying out a revolution or refused to call for troops out because of what would follow. That implies a progressive role for Stalinism.

TR: Stalinism is both counter-revolutionary and sometimes anti-capitalist, yes, but both are contained within one thing. It results from Stalinism being based on deformed and degenerate workers' states. We see structural assimilation as tied in with the betrayal of the European revolution after World War II - the progressive transformations of Eastern Europe were part of an overall counter-revolutionary role. Any progressive transformation in Afghanistan would be part of a reactionary policy. We don't support the invasion.

O'Keefe: The point is that Stalinism is sometimes revolutionary against capitalism but always counter-revolutionary against the working class.

TR: We would agree.

On the question of orientation: Alan said that the SLL was non-revolutionary in 1968 i.e. worse than the USFI. But Tariq Ali WAS created by the prss. No doubt the SLL should have been on the Oct 68 demo. But that's one demo. The SLL was right to criticise T. Ali. The SLL abstained because it had previously been the only organisation fighting for the victory of the NLF - it intervened on that slogan on CP demos and had the police called against it - and the VSC leadership stopped the SLL criticising Stalinism. The SLL took a sectarian position - but in 1968 the SLL invited Tariq Ali on to its platform on a Vietnam demo. The SLL wasn't sectarian towards the Vietnam war and it gained a lot of militants from its work and its fight against protest politics.

The SLL made a mistake but they were fighting for a revolutionary party. The IMG were turning away from the working class - a much worse error. The SLL's struggle to build in the working class was a much more revolutionary line than protest demos.

TR:(continued): The SLL on Ireland: the troops out position was vital and not popular. You have to put the theoretical errors in context. If the WSL is wrong on Afghanistan but have a correct general line, then the error doesn't matter too much. E.G. the SLL was also wrong on Cuba, but still took a principled stand against the US.

AT: Obviously it is not enough just to say build the party. The SLL didn't tail-end the working class, but had a political orientation to the working class. Healy took building the party to the point where it was no longer a vanguard party, which went along with the turn from serious work in the unions. You couldn't compare it with LO or the SWP(UK) in the period we're talking about.

PF: Healy simply tried to substitute the apparatus for the vanguard party. The change in the SLL was in Feb. 71: the turn to philosophy. It meant a shift in relation to the class struggle and the conception the party had of itself. The real degeneration was not in 1968.

Cuba: there is a problem with the term 'autonomous revolution'. Was Mao's programme for the establishment of a workers' state? No. Stalinism did not set out to create workers' states in Eastern Europe but did it under the pressure of imperialism. A workers' state was not established in China in 1949. The Castroites expropriated the bulk of the bourgeoisie, but is that a workers' state? What about Mozambique, Algeria? Can't see them as autonomous revolutions leading to workers' states. Only happens under the pressure of imperialism, and with the aid of the Soviet Union, thus they should be seen as extensions of the Soviet state. You attribute more to Castro than we would. Castro tried to export revolution; so did the CPs in 1926-34, but their orientation was counter-revolutionary. That did not make it a genuine revolutionary movement.

Alan: Trotsky describes the KPD in the early 30s as a genuine revolutionary party, if erroneously led. What about Castro?

TR: Trotsky was at that time a part of the Communist International.

PF: The export of revolution does not mean what O'K implied. Afghanistan: look at it in context of relations between imperialism and China. Russia not walked in in order to establish a workers' state: only does it under pressure of imperialism; and won't do it as a matter of course.

Discussion on further relations between the tendencies:

Alan: Our basic position is that in terms of general political positions and orientation nothing makes unity impossible. To make it possible need (a) to come to agreed position; (b) agreement on work to be done. In the last few years we've made a turn to broader work in the labour movement. We see in the past that the WSL has had attitudes and practices that would be disruptive of that work. In the recent period there has been a healthy move away from that. We need agreement on activities and work in the labour movement. We do think that improvements are possible in our work. Orientation towards building a broad movement is absolutely vital and seems to have been what put unity on the cards for you.

O'Keefe: Fusing our forces is an exciting prospect but we want to do it carefully. If it is possible, it would be criminal not to do it.

AT: I wouldn't disagree with what you've said. The obstacles are less what we've discussed this evening, but more the previous discussion about orientation, attitude to the TU bureaucracy as these affect day to day practice. We need to find out what the differences are. We feel very strongly about day to day work in the mass movement. We have been encouraged by what joint work there has been so far.

PF: It seems you're more loosely organised than we are; partly with more local autonomy and a lack of discipline.

O'Keefe: Discipline is probably not as tight as it should be as a result of the S* turn.

Alan: We propose immediately that where we both have comrades we should have joint membership meetings on the issues raised in the central discussions. Branch organisers should be in contact for joint work.

AT: Need to take discussion into WSL as a whole. Need to deepen it aiming at national joint membership meeting, say in February. At moment local meetings should be for practical work.

PF: Between WSL and S* or ICL?

Alan: ICL in first place.

TR: Should be a national meeting first. It could be a series of meetings.

Ramsey: Discussions should be expanded into both NCs and then into the organisations.

PF: It is difficult to present the other organisations position from minutes. After NC discussions can maybe ensure discussion takes place at local levels.

It was agreed to hold first of all a joint NC meeting in January.

WSL/I-CL DISCUSSIONS. 10.12.80

Present: From I-CL - O'Keefe, Alan.

From WSL - AT, TR.

LONGBRIDGE

Alan. It looks as if we will have to go for getting sections out, rather than the whole plant, when the appeal result is announced.

AT. What about the T&GWU inquiry?

Alan. There is no inquiry as such. The T&G officials have not said how they will decide whether it is victimisation or not.

The Works Committee have said the strike in CAB 1 is suspended pending the appeal, and that if CAB 1 goes on strike again after the appeal result they will call for support from the whole plant. Our comrades reckon that CAB 1 can be brought out.

TR. Surely CAB 1 will see it as an issue for the whole plant. What's the mood?

Alan. Comrades in other areas of the plant say the mood is one of waiting for a lead, rather than being willing to take immediate action. Some even reckon we could lose a mass meeting now.

AT. So we go for sectional strike action and build it up.

Alan. We're putting in leaflets, organising publicity, setting up public meetings. We'll continue campaigning even if there is no strike. B'ham meeting on Sunday.

Another possible danger is the management delaying the result of the appeal still further.

TR. We could take some of the SO broadsheets on the victimisation.

AT. A Leyland Action Committee leaflet has been put out. We agree that the key question is one section being ready to take action. But how strong a lead will the stewards give? A militant mood can dissipate if no lead is given.

Alan. There was a stewards' meeting in CAB 1 on Monday - a lot of anger and discontent, but they eventually accepted the Works Committee line of the CAB 1 strike being 'suspended' and support being got from the rest of the factory if the strike is re-started.

AT. Efforts should be made to tie down the CAB 1 stewards to a definite commitment to call a strike.

Should we organise to get people from Cowley up to the public meeting in Birmingham on Sunday?

Alan. The meeting is sponsored by Selly Oak Labour Party. Derek Robinson has agreed to speak.

AT. Quite likely Robinson may back out of it. We could send a couple of carloads up if we cancel a scheduled meeting.

TR. We ought to do that.

CUTS

Alan. There is a meeting of the Steering Committee set up at the November 1st Lambeth conference this weekend, and we want to fix up a consultation between WSL and I-CL. Judging by Socialist Press, we differ on our assessment of the Lambeth February strike. In our view it is fundamentally an evasion.

AT. You think Knight is not serious about it?

Alan. It commits him to nothing. There was an exchange in the Labour group when Knight said he was going to go to the December 6th conference and ask other

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Labour councils to follow what Lambeth is doing. Neil Turner replied that Lambeth council was actually doing nothing. And a right-winger came in to say, quite correctly, that Knight's strategy just amounts to waiting for a general strike. In his interview in Socialist Organiser Knight makes it clear that unless the unions beat the government for him he will make cuts and/or raise rates.

Neil Turner reports that the Lambeth DLO workers don't want the council to take a stand because they think that would mean the council going bankrupt and then losing their jobs. They want rate rises instead. But in fact even that won't save their jobs. They are already renegotiating their agreement with Lambeth to enable the council to sack them.

Basically the February strike is a way for Knight to get round the November 1st conference decisions by proposing something else, apparently radical. Besides, we don't think it will get much support. Knight says the council will 'refuse to administer' for a week, but that means nothing unless they are going to lock out the council workers who don't strike!

What to do? In principle we could just denounce it. But we shouldn't do that. It's a call to action from forces much bigger than ours, and if it fails it's a setback for us. Realistically we think we can try for a day of action in other areas - though even that will be difficult. We will try to give the day of action our political content - demanding that national union leaders and Labour councils lead a fight.

At the same time we should campaign for the Steering Committee to make itself an organising committee against the cuts, taking up particular struggles, etc.

AT. We are at a disadvantage because we do not have any direct intervention in Lambeth. But we reckoned that if it was possible to get substantial action in Lambeth, then it would be a very important lead. Are you saying you're against such action?

Alan. If we could have stopped the scheme at the start, we would have done so. Now there is the accomplished fact of a call from forces much bigger than us, we have no option but to support it.

TR. Won't it give a pointer to everyone else?

Alan. Yes, to the degree that it is successful.

TR. The call has gone out for the February strike and we should put the pressure on where we can. At least it exposes the no-action merchants.

Alan. But if we haven't got the resources to make the February strike a success?

AT. We can't judge whether it will be a flop.

Alan. You can judge whether you can get people out in Oxford.

TR. As of now, no. But by February the situation could be changed.

Alan. It could be. But with the date for the strike arbitrarily fixed in advance, it would just be good luck.

AT. What real base has the strike call got in the Lambeth unions?

Alan. As of now, there is support from the direct labour, the TGWU, parts of NALGO; not from G&M, NUPE, rest of NALGO.

We need a campaign directed at the national unions and the Labour councils, to give a serious lead.

AT. Surely if the Lambeth strike has some substantial base, then it is important because it is at least an initiative against the cuts.

Alan. There's no shortage of local anti-cuts struggles.

AT. Strikes?

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Alan. Occupations.

TR. A handful considering the scale of the cuts. How many at the moment? Only one.

Alan. There have been a lot over the last year or so. Anyway a strike for two weeks in Lambeth is not a great advance.

AT. Maybe we have a wrong idea of what is involved. How many workers would it be? 50,000?

Alan. Far less.

O'Keefe. There is no real difference in attitude. We put our weight behind the call for action so far as we can but make our own assessment.

YOUTH WORK

O'Keefe. Has the WSL discussed the proposal for collaboration in youth work? Our youth commission is in favour.

TR. We have not discussed it yet. How is B. organised? Via Youth branches?

O'Keefe. Yes. But our policy also allows for independent B. groups. We would have to discuss the relationship to the Youth. We would not be prepared to leave. But it should be possible to build up substantial collaboration without confronting that. M.'s extreme backwardness has a deadening effect on the Youth, so we do not confine ourselves to the formal structures.

TR. Locally the Youth branch is all careerists.

Alan. Is it M.?

TR. Yes. You can't even get them to go to picket lines...

O'Keefe. That's M. politics, not careerism.

TR. In Oxford it's worse than M. generally. We've come across some real proletarian youth in M. in Liverpool.

O'Keefe. Generally M. is a proletarian tendency in social composition. But it battens on the backwardness it finds in the class.

AT. We have a big youth event coming up in the Midlands.

Alan. We could give some support.

TR. We have done some work with 'Revo' - apparently with not much result.

AT. We have initiated discussions with them. But they are just young IMGers, though they are growing rapidly.

TR. They have got good, eager youth. We have had a problem that some young workers in our youth movement have found themselves out of their depth with the young IMGers.

O'Keefe. With cooperation, we could transform the youth work.

AT. Our attitude is to work in the Youth where local conditions seem to be appropriate.

Alan. Youth branches fall into 3 categories. (1) M.-dominated. Usually (not always) these are fairly dead, and working in them is not very fruitful. (2) Branches built by us. (3) A small but rapidly increasing number of 'independent' branches. So if you just look for good Youth branches to work in, you won't find many. But we think that's the wrong approach.

AT. We see the main thing as building up an independent youth movement, rather than work in the Youth.

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O'Keefe. It is important to avoid sectarianism and maintain a relation to the general labour movement of which the Youth is part. But we can combine building healthy areas in the Youth and doing independent work where appropriate.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL (CONTINUATION)

AT. Last time we discussed how we saw the degeneration of the FI post-war, but not so much how we see the fight for reconstruction now.

The WSL has put forward the idea of the "world Trotskyist movement", and it needs explanation. We hold the position that the FI was destroyed and does not now exist. But we see groupings and fragments which now represent the remnants of the FI. These are the world Trotskyist movement. We have hesitated to say that they are simply centrist groupings. That would be imprecise. They are not, for example, like groupings moving to the left from social democracy. They are groupings which subjectively base themselves on Trotskyism. 'Pabloism' is the most precise definition for the deviations. 'World Trotskyist Movement' describes the fragmented movement that exists.

We base our position on the reconstruction of the FI. This does not mean a mechanical, organisational pulling-together of fragments. It's a political question. It needs a fundamental theoretical development of the Trotskyist movement. But it has to be combined with the struggle to give an organisational form to the reconstruction.

We try to group together the most healthy forces - forces we can work with - and test the possibilities of a democratic centralist international tendency. We're optimistic about the prospects of a democratic centralist international tendency.

The TILC was deliberately not founded as a democratic centralist international tendency. Its document is not adequate for that. You can't just proclaim democratic centralism. A leadership must be developed in practice which has the necessary authority.

We set two years (one of which is up) to make an assessment of TILC and the possibilities of a democratic centralist international tendency. That seems to differ quite sharply from the I-CL view that there is no basis for a democratic centralist international tendency.

O'Keefe. Our formula is that the movement faces a combination of 1914 and 1933. 1933: an organisational breakdown - the great mass of communists misled, but also a more or less adequate political battle conducted against Stalinism by a minority. We have an organisational breakdown today but also a political breakdown (like 1914). We see manifestations of that political breakdown even in the WSL, e.g. on Afghanistan.

In 'In Defence Of Marxism', for example, Trotsky says that though it is unscientific to use the same term for monopoly capitalism and for the USSR, the USSR is 'imperialist' in a broader, looser sense. That idea would be astounding today for, e.g., USFI people. So would Trotsky's idea that Stalin's regime in Poland would be semi-slavery. There has been a real blunting of the Trotskyist attitude on Stalinism. And there is theoretical confusion, e.g. on the analysis of the workers' states. This adds up to a 1914 situation, and no political basis for a democratic centralist international.

For ourselves, we can relate to a political tradition of the movement which is still very powerful, and supplement it bit by bit.

The FI was always very feeble. Since the war, whenever solid national organisations have existed, they have become the centre of autonomous blocs, e.g. within the USFI. That shows that a solid democratic-centralist international will only be built when there is a serious theoretical re-working and also probably some relatively solid national organisations.

Before 1936 Trotsky was against declaring the FI. In 1938 he won his

comrades over to the idea of declaring a propaganda International. If my picture of the ideological ravages of the post-war period is correct, then a propaganda International - which is the best conceivable with currently available resources - is not feasible today.

So what do we do? Seek dialogue, build organisations where we can in the arenas of the existing states, get what links are possible. But the goal of a democratic centralist International is unrealistic when the ideological work has not yet been done and there is not even a prospect of an authoritative leadership.

In the WSL's material I see a double standard. The 1963 reunification is attacked as a rotten bloc, but really the post-'63 IC was much more of a rotten bloc. And yet you seem to think that the IC represents a more or less adequate tradition.

"World Trotskyist Movement"? We have polemicised against this idea, but I think there's some truth in it as long as the need to draw ideological demarcation lines is not forgotten. However, I think the WSL is wrong to reject the characterisation of other would-be Trotskyist groups as centrist. Look at the vacillations of the USFI, for example - a characteristic centrist pattern. They are a special sort of centrist, perhaps, but still centrist.

AT. So what's your perspective for international work? Presumably you don't accept being confined to national work.

O'Keefe. We have had discussion relations, e.g. with the Necessary International Initiative organisations, Lutte Ouvriere, groups in Ireland....

AT. If you find quite close agreement with other groups, what then?

O'Keefe. We would try to set up a coordinated framework.

AT. Like the TILC - but with no perspective of developing beyond that?

O'Keefe. No, we'd try to achieve a centralised structure. But we think it would be difficult. For example, we had very close relations with the LWR in Ireland. But despite formal agreement between us we had great difficulty in getting them to do things adequately. I wouldn't want to build a world view on the experience with the LWR, but we would be sceptical about the possibilities. Try for a democratic-centralist international tendency - yes, as long as you recognise the difficulties. A new International? Not on the agenda now.

TR. Discussing problems of e.g. the class struggle in Denmark can broaden your view. Internationalism is not just international solidarity but also the fight to have a world political perspective.

AT. Take our Turkish group as an example. We brought a group of Turkish comrades out of the WRP. We directed them to Turkey. We allocated resources. An international framework is needed for that sort of work. And we also need an international framework to work with the US comrades who were expelled from the Workers' League at the same time as we were expelled from the WRP.

O'Keefe. There is a noticeable tendency for groups like the SWP/USA, Spartacists, LCR to duplicate their national tactics in international advice. That points to a need to be restrained in giving advice to comrades in other countries.

AT. We have had some of our comrades specialise in particular areas and develop the necessary knowledge to give leadership in those areas.

TR. We have tried to avoid sloganising and premature judgments, e.g. on South America. The Spartacists and the Healyites just look for a wrong slogan or a wrong line, and that's the finish of their assessment of a group.

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It's an easy but wrong approach. We look at the fact that Moreno's group, for example, was working in very different conditions from us. We formulate a full judgment only after some time. We try to avoid the simple sloganising. And, for example, we tell the Danish comrades that they must make their own decisions on their work, not rely on us. We don't just spread the same slogans internationally.

O'Keefe. Your approach seems very reasonable, though we would still criticise the residual International Committee element in your politics.

We're not indifferent to international work. E.g. we responded positively to the Parity Committee, tested the possibilities. Also, however, there is a question of resources. The effort to lead groups in a whole variety of countries can be de-focusing for a group of our size and resources.

Alan. Our assessment may lead to passivity in the international arena in some instances, but it need not do so. We have tried to learn from experiences in other countries. E.g. our industrial bulletins are directly and consciously modelled on Lutte Ouvriere's; our argument and politics on the general strike question are based on our understanding of the French experience in 1968. Comrades study other countries. We had an organised co-thinker group in Ireland. We have a nucleus of sympathisers in Australia now. We do try to learn; we do try to organise. The issue is our assessment of the possibilities and of the necessary balance to be drawn.

We discussed at length with the Austrian IKL and the German Spartacusbund. But we found the problem was that they wanted an international framework as a substitute for doing serious national work, and we had to fight against that constantly.

A system of comrades specialising on particular areas is fine, but it has limits. Unless resources allow other comrades besides the 'specialist' also to have an informed view on the area, then you can never know whether features of what the 'specialist' says reflect specificities of that area or nuances in the comrade's own politics. The Communist International had such resources; in the FI Trotsky's own tremendous knowledge and experience served. For us today we need an assessment of what is possible.

I don't think there is any real difference on what to do now. The root political difference is that we have a more critical attitude to the International Committee history than you do.

O'Keefe. When could we next have a chance to meet the other TILC comrades?

AT. There is a meeting at the end of December, though the TILC Secretariat would have to authorise you being present.

O'Keefe. We would like to attend.

AT. We put a lot of resources into international work.

O'Keefe. But that follows from an assessment that there is a more or less adequate political tradition represented by the International Committee.

AT. No. It does follow from a more optimistic assessment of the existing fragments of the Trotskyist movement.

O'Keefe. Your expulsion from the WRP was part of an international IC split?

AT. Yes. Groups in the USA and Greece were expelled at the same time as us. But now we have split with the Greek ex-IC group. They have become increasingly sectarian, and finally they walked out of our international summer school when we refused to discuss their position that gays are perverts.

O'Keefe. Where does Wohlforth fit in?

AT. Not at all. We had contact when he was expelled from the Workers' League.

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But he never joined the SL (the TILC group in the USA). He joined the SWP. Then he got into trouble with the SWP leadership over Cuba and moved to Mexico, where he is now a member of the USFI section.

JOINT MEETING OF NATIONAL COMMITTEES

AT. We have a National Committee meeting next weekend. The EC is in favour of a joint meeting on 3/4 January, and it is almost certain the NC will accept it.

Alan. A lot of the differences seem to be brought out clearly if you look at our different assessments of the SLL in the '60s. That's one way of discussing the differences. The problem is that it's rather abstract.

O'Keefe. It's best to discuss that in writing, because a lot of comrades are not familiar with the elementary information.

AT. We should have a session on it at the joint meeting.

Alan. It should be useful, at least at NC level. We should also have a session on the Workers' Government, which we have not discussed except briefly in an early meeting. Also, the question of organising broad movements on less than the full programme.

AT. Make it specific - the broad groups and F. We should also discuss the concept of party-building, especially in relation to how to direct it to the working class; work in the unions and the attitude to the bureaucrats. Also, how we see the role of intervention in struggles; I don't think the I-CL gives that enough importance.

Alan. I think that may be an argument at cross purposes. We had a polemic with Workers' Power when they said we did not give enough priority to industrial work. It was not a 'pure' debate, since they weren't serious. But we pointed out that for a small group the possibility of leading industrial struggles must be limited. The organisation can learn from struggles, but a coherent overall view has to be learned much more from the movement before us than from immediate struggles. People are recruited to that overall view through propaganda, not just immediate struggles. The organisation is held together by that overall view. All that does not contradict the fact that work round industrial struggles is vital.

O'Keefe. Workers' Power's position was ridiculous. One of their comrades was industrial organiser. He did nothing. Then they complained that we were sabotaging the industrial work. The WSL is not the same. And politics can be tested in immediate struggles.

AT. A large proportion of WSL members have been won out of struggles: e.g. Oxford nursery occupation, victimisation struggles at Blackwells...

TR. The Bradford recruits from hotel strikes...

AT. We're playing a major role now in a local hospital struggle. Maybe we'll recruit out of it. It's typical of our work. But we haven't seen the I-CL's work in detail.

TR. We're not sectarian. We don't go in saying, "We're the WSL and we'll fight the bureaucrats, so join us". We work with everyone who is willing to fight. In this hospital struggle, we have not polemicised sharply against the CP and the SWP even though they have a disgusting attitude. The vital thing is to win the struggle. Then when people come close to you on the basis of your role in winning the struggle, you educate them politically.

O'Keefe. This underlines the need for such a session at the joint meeting.

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To my mind the WSL's paper does not correspond to its practical work. E.g. when the Leyland Action Committee was discussing Longbridge AT discussed approaching Evans in the best way to get a favourable response, whereas one would expect the paper just to go in for denunciation.

AT. There is also the question of what you mean by a propaganda group. We don't consider size is decisive.

O'Keefe. We base ourselves on Cannon. For example, his argument on the paper as a combination tool, both for widespread agitation and serious propaganda. So we say: we're a propaganda group, but also active in the struggle as far as possible, therefore not just a propaganda group but also an agitational group in a limited way. Also, some propaganda can very quickly become agitation, as the general sstrikeslogan did in 1972.

AT. We have seen the difference between a propaganda group and a group orienting to the working class in terms of the history of the Left Opposition. First it oriented to other political forces, then it turned to the working class, ceasing to be a propaganda group.

O'Keefe. The propaganda group stage also relates to the need to develop a cadre nucleus.

AT. Yes, we would agree with Cannon as against Weisbord.

O'Keefe. I think the WSL sometimes confuses agitation and propaganda. E.g. take the question of councils of action. At first, in the discussions, I didn't understand that by councils of action you meant soviets...

TR. ... A step towards soviets ...

O'Keefe. But propaganda for soviets is rational. Agitation for councils of action relating to particular struggles may also be rational, but it's a long way from soviets. So I think the WSL has been arguing for soviets in a confused way, confusing agitation and propaganda. But I'll try to write up my impressions of your paper more generally.

AT. What do you think of the international coverage of Socialist Press?

O'Keefe. Generally good - e.g. some good articles on Afghanistan, Eritrea...

Alan. I would criticise some coverage, e.g. the insistence that Spain was still fascist a long time after Franco's death.

TR. There was a lot of discussion on that. The crucial issue was the boycott position which we put forward and was discussed with some Spanish groups.

O'Keefe. The joint meeting should also include a session where each side puts forward an overall assessment of the other.

AT. We should also discuss the question of the Transitional Programme.

O'Keefe. Best cover that under the general assessments.

((Details of the agenda were then discussed, ending up with the following list:

Fourth International (including assessment of SLL in '60s)

Broad groups

F.

Work in the unions

Workers' Government

Overall assessments))

NATIONAL COMMITTEE 20 December 1980

DISCUSSION ON THE W.S.L.

01 Keefe. In 1949 the old Trotskyist movement collapsed - through a loss of cadres and also a political collapse. Healy took the leadership of the remnants.

The Healy tendency was characterised by (a) since 1944, a fight for a LP orientation, (b) political primitiveness (e.g. in the early '50s their theoretical magazine discussed nationalisation in an implicitly Fabian way - this primitiveness led to political mimicry, e.g. adaptation to the chauvinism of the Left on German rearmament), (c) an authoritarian internal regime derived from the 1940s faction fight. Healy used the authoritarian regime to consolidate a majority in the post-1949 organisation. By the late '50s, at least, the regime had become pathological. Psychological terror was used to keep the members in line. At each conference a comrade would be singled out and denounced for failures of the organisation.

In 1948-50 Healy had quite a lot of success through the Socialist Fellowship, a loose left grouping within which the Trotskyists had influence. Then the Socialist Fellowship split apart over the Korean war. In 1950-54 the Healy group was still quite influential tho' tainted by adaptation to Stalinism.

In 1954 their paper was proscribed and until 1957 they just sold Tribune. Their practice was certainly opportunist, but not as bad as it would seem now because they were working in a real movement round Tribune. After 1957 they recruited a lot of CPers, started the Newsletter and Labour Review, gained a serious implantation in industry, were able to hold an industrial conference of 500 in 1958.

What happened next was essentially the result of the regime. After 1959 the Healy group became much less open. Then, after the Scarborough conference in 1960, there was a shift in their attitude to the LP. First they were euphoric about the Scarborough victory. Then they soured up as the lefts betrayed, and began an Oehlerite turn identified by Cannon as early as mid-'61. The feebleness of the official Labour left and the sectarian turn of the revolutionary left were two sides of the same coin in this period.

In the early '60s the Healy group gained in numbers - especially raw youth who were easily manipulated, so the regime hardened even more. It began to counterpose its own organisation to the evolution of the labour movement. Serious industrial work was still done, but was being weakened by the turn to youth. The Labour Left was just denounced. In 1964 the Healy group provoked its own expulsion from the LP. By 1965-66 'Build the revolutionary party' was a front page headline. The turn to youth eventually destroyed the industrial work. Then the degeneration accelerated - systematic lying, abstentionism in relation to VSC, a Maoist line in 1967, etc.

The WSL came out of the WRP at an ultra-degenerate stage, when it went literally mad in 1974. And Thornett joined the SLL in 1966 so his whole history was in the degenerate period of the SLL.

It is remarkable these comrades could 'recover' from the SLL/WRP to such an extent. Perhaps it is because long-standing SLL people were more damaged by the turn to systematic lying in the 1960s than people newly coming into the SLL then.

In 1974 Healy seems to have gone literally mad, and the WSL people split. It seems that Thornett had contact with Robin Blick,

an ex-SLLer who had teamed up with the OCI and was producing a duplicated 'Bulletin' aimed at the WRP members. The other element in the split was that Thornett was trying to relate the WRP's politics to the industrial reality around him.

Then Thornett split from the OCI people - perhaps under the pressure of the SLL polemics against the OCI. Both Thornett and the OCI people wanted to go back to a golden age of the SLL - for the OCI people this was the mid-'50s, for the WSL, the mid-'60s. Now in the mid-'60s the SLL was becoming Oehlerite but it still felt some need to relate to the labour movement, and so tried to square the circle with slogans like Make The Left MPs Fight. The WSL picks up those same ideas going in a different direction.

The WSL criticised the SLL/WRP for being propagandist and not using transitional demands. But the WSL seems to tend to see transitional demands as a way of breaking down workers' psychological resistance. They have SLL-ish formulas about "the alternative leadership", but they break these down in their practice to quite rational forms. Actually they do not use transitional demands much except to tag on the end of articles. Also they use a call for Councils of Action, meaning a call for Soviets, artificially tagged on to limited struggles.

The WSL took in a lot of people from various sources after its split from the WRP, and never seems to have really homogenised itself. There have been two Spartacist factions, generated by people sticking to the propagandist side of the WSL as against the practical work of the WSL.

Although in practice the WSL often gives a more rational interpretation to 'build the revolutionary party' than the SLL's original bureaucratic invocation, the approach does lead to fetishism: the sterile repetition of 'kick out Healey-Callaghan', the line of maximum conflict with the bureaucracy, a completely wrong assessment of the LP over the last year, shadow-play 'exposure' politics.

So: they are still fundamentally Healyites, therefore there are a lot of difficulties. But they are a serious organisation, especially their leadership, and a fusion would be highly desirable. Therefore we fight to achieve fusion. We can't avoid some serious preliminary educational discussion, but we should aim to convince the WSL comrades, not to bash them, not to split them - to have an honest fusion.

We should also look at our own state. We are in flux, partly but not completely because of the turn. Unless we rectify this it could jeopardise fusion.

Time-scale? I don't know. Probably 3 months minimum.

Finally: maybe some of the WSLers who seem closest to us are actually just softening up politically. We should take care not to appear as a soft option.

Oliver. I agree with O'Keefe's general assessment. But I think he is wrong about our state - and our influence. We can link up with the WSLers oriented to their practical work, as against the propagandist-minded who have gone to the Spartacists. Some of their politics result from our influence. We should be confident. O'Keefe does not take account of the heterogeneity of the WSL or of our own influence on WSL people. Let's have unity and have the necessary discussions within one organisation. The League may have problems of people paying debts etc but we are relatively homogeneous - look at the Sparts' inability to make any impact on

us. One of the lessons from our previous experience is: don't let "courting" drag on.

If the WSL don't come to us, they could break up. At least we should set a deadline - take a decision for fusion at the joint meeting - implement it before the March rally.

O'Keefe. What does Oliver propose we do concretely? And what impression does he have of the WSLers most favourable to fusion?

Oliver. They are arguing inside the WSL for immediate fusion.

To miss this fusion would be a serious dereliction of revolutionary duty.

Keith. I agree with Oliver's sense of urgency, but you must vote for the SC resolution [NTO 169]. You may have more or less optimism about the speed of the results, but you must support the programme of action in the resolution. The only alternative would be just to declare a common organisation and sort out all the disputed questions within it. But that is hardly possible...

The openness of the WSL - in sharp contrast to the Healyite tradition - is more impressive than their political positions as such.

On our state, I agree with Oliver. We are quite homogeneous politically. We should aim to win over the leadership of the WSL.

But the WSL does have some peculiar positions. E.g. they insisted Spain was fascist long after Franco's death.

Whetling. I share Oliver's sense of urgency. I agree with the SC resolution, but I'm concerned about our seeming lack of urgency in chasing up the WSL.

It's true the WSL have gone in for literary sectarianism. But we should not insist on sorting out, e.g. all the details of 1953, before a fusion. The actual differences are often not the same as the formal ones. In BL we have been able to work well together, and if anything the WSL's tendency has been to conservatism rather than ultra-leftism. Practical cooperation will allow the differences to be hammered out, and that must be within a fused organisation.

They are sectarian, but that partly reflects a serious attitude to the Trotskyist tradition.

We shouldn't put off fusion because of concern about our own state. If we do not bring off a fusion with the WSL, the IMG may.

Oliver presented an amendment for a quicker fusion, before the March 21st rally.

Foster: The WSL left the WRP when the craziness of the WRP was seriously affecting industrial work. Ever since then they have had a separation between their formal positions and their day to day practice. There even seems to be an internal division of labour between the comrades on the paper and the comrades in the trade union work. The difficulty is that they are held together by a formal allegiance to the SLL tradition, which applies equally to the industrial activists.

We should take some care. We were seriously set back in some aspects of our political development by the WP fusion/split. And we have more to lose now.

Landis. We should review the situation after the joint meeting.

Don't rush it. We need time to consolidate the broad groups. Perhaps it would be a good idea to bring the WSL into the broad groups, but on balance I think not.

Grand

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