

I.B. 43

=====

November 1980

NC documents 16.11.80: The current situation & our
tasks*; S* groups and the League

NC minutes 12.10.80. (Note: minutes of discussion
on Iran/Iraq war are to follow)

NC documents 12.10.80:

Irish work

Local government autonomy

Discussions with WSL

4.10.80

20.10.80

* This is the original draft of this document
presented to the NC. Some small amendments were
adopted by the NC, mostly strengthening the idea
that the industrial situation remains
potentially explosive.

S* GROUPS AND THE LEAGUE: PROBLEMS AND TASKS

1. The overall experience of the turn to S* groups has been a positive one. Despite uneven development between branches, we are well on the way to reaching the target set at Conference "of 250 members in the S* groups by Christmas".
2. The perspectives still remain those contained within the resolution 'Perspectives after Blackpool', passed at the last NC, and supplemented by the discussion on our attitude to the IMG.

We should recognise, however, that the decision concerning building factory branches cannot be implemented (beyond encouraging experiments) because they still have no constitutional standing in the LP.

3. Many of the tasks in that resolution, agreed a month ago, have not been implemented - e.g. on union democracy committees; on getting "all S* supporters involved in the CLPD". Also, the failure to organise work around the Gardners occupation (with one or two exceptions) is an indictment of how we're not turning "local Labour Parties (and S) groups!" outwards to help and intervene in the direct-action struggles against the Tories and the bosses.."

The failures there also have to be seen with the severe financial position we're facing, and the fact that the S launch meetings to date have been very small.

3. The turn to S* groups has not prevented us saying what has been necessary, or blunted us politically. Indeed, the production of two pamphlets, and the forthcoming pamphlet on the Workers' Government, have given us the possibility of strengthening our political profile.

(The resolution in the SC minutes deals with the magazine and the IB).

The political problem facing us lies in another area. At the Conference we agreed: "Here and now it must be understood that the proposal to do most of our practical work through the S* groups will be a formula for liquidating the League organisationally unless it is linked to a firm perspective of developing and hardening these groups towards a serious revolutionary standard of discipline - i.e convergence."

We said there should be flexibility "on the tempo and forms of convergence", but there was an overwhelming majority in favour of beginning it.

4. The organisational framework has generally been established. Our main task now is to ensure that S* groups become "socialist activist and discussion groups"; that the tasks we agree on are carried out; that the groups are hardened up.
5. We accepted at the Conference that the S* groups would be "rather ramshackle in their activity at first" - but that was on the basis of League members patiently arguing with non-League members the need to structure and prioritise the groups activity. The functioning of the League members was the key to overcoming the situation.

"...of course at all times League members will act as the most dedicated and responsible members of the S* groups, prepared to 'carry' the work when and where required.*"

This has not been happening, and it's the central problem we face.

6. The danger is of the League liquidating organisationally, and therefore politically, into "ramshackle groups". While we accepted that most of the League branch's work would be transferred into the S* groups, we also agreed that "Local League branches will normally meet monthly, though they can have extra meetings if necessary." In at least two cases, they have not had one meeting since the establishment of an S* group.

In the first 2½ months of the turn, it has been inevitable (and right) that attention has focussed on establishing the S* groups, and that a certain amount of organisational confusion would exist. But there is nothing inevitable about losing the lines of League organisation and discipline - indeed, the Conference decision about tightening up the organisation, and asserting the need for the right and responsibility to insist on effective action, was a necessary part of the turn.

Without being alarmist, the NC must commit itself now to fighting for the Conference decisions, including the need to use disciplinary measures to ensure the organisation functions properly. The possible disruptive effects of having to take disciplinary measures will be a small price to pay for maintaining our organisation.

But we have always agreed that disciplinary measures will only be a part of creating an atmosphere in the organisation that decisions need to be carried out, and that we have a right to insist on it - and that NC members should be a driving force in the organisation to create the pressure for that to happen.

7. Our central resources continue to be overstretched. A combination of 2 comrades getting full time jobs, and the immediate demands of both the democracy and Fightback campaigns, means that we have not been able to strengthen our organisational and administrative centre. That problem will only be compounded if our potential financial crisis is allowed to develop.
8. (For extended NC to review the situation, see also resolution in SC minutes).

Macanlay.

The current situation & our tasks: 16 November 1980

1. Since May this year the strike rate has dropped dramatically, from the 1926-type levels of 1979 and 1980 to a level like 1976.

This is due to (a) the economic slump, (b) the conscious decision of the TU leaders after May 14 to keep their heads down and concentrate on seeking a united front with the CBI on import controls, etc, and (c) the failure of even the left TU leaders to wage an effective struggle for jobs, which doubles the effect of the economic slump.

2. The Tories see this as a chance to attack TU strength. Their policy is the same as last year: to allow stronger sections to win increases 'over the odds', but to go for confrontation with weaker sections on the basis of very low pay offers.

3. As it stands, the prospects for industrial resistance are bad. The TU leaders are still nearly all committed to keeping their heads down and waiting for better days; not many industries have rank and file organisation strong enough to break that commitment.

4. But big struggles are by no means ruled out. The firemen and Gardners have set an example. (Gardners, a very important one, because it is the first really serious fightback on jobs after a long series of abject defeats). The undecided situation at BL testifies to a continued fighting spirit (*). We should give active support to the firemen and Gardners; argue for resistance; and be ready to throw ourselves into aiding any other important struggles that arise, to the best of our ability.

5. We argue for solidarity with the firemen; a public services alliance, not just at national level but in each area; united industrial action against the 6% and

- - - - -

NC 12.10.80

Present: Alan, Armstrong, Daly, Foster, Fraser, Gunther, Harrison, Keith, Lamarre, Landis, Lewis, Macaulay, Matthews, O'Keefe, Oliver, Ramsey, Ritchie, Whettling.

1. SOUTHERN AFRICA (Dupont also present)

DUPONT. The document [presented for conference, referred to NC because of lack of time at conference: see IB 42] is a revised version of a previous document to the NC. The issues behind it - the problem of supporting nationalist movements and coupling that support with criticism. There is a tendency on the left to combine public uncritical support and private ultra-criticism. We felt the criticism had to be public while not negating the support.

When ZANU took power, there was a tendency on the left for a rapid turn-around from near-uncritical support to all-out criticism. (That problem also arose over Iran).

There is ongoing failure by the left to make headway in Southern Africa solidarity work against the Church/CP establishment. And it's a political problem. In the left papers there is a lot of incoherent rhetoric. E.g. Militant: 'arm the workers and peasants of Zimbabwe', at the time of ZANU's electoral victory. Who would arm them? for what? Or WSL: 'pursue the guerilla struggle to the end'. What end? These slogans just reflect ineffective efforts to be more radical.

There are also issues about the relation between national struggle and class struggle. In South Africa and Namibia there have been major workers' struggles. And the development of national struggles has almost invariably been at the expense of independent workers' struggles. That's also true in Zimbabwe: e.g. ZANU and ZAPU took industrial militants off to the armed struggle.

In Zimbabwe and Namibia a rural-based guerilla strategy could however work. In South Africa it can't; it's a farce. And the present anti-apartheid campaigning is based on passivity by the working class in South Africa.

But a new workers' movement is arising in South Africa: e.g. the trade unions. We need to develop solidarity action which can aid an independent workers' movement. On the other hand we must avoid pure trade-unionism or negating the national struggle.

We should also have a more general discussion of international solidarity work: not only S.Africa but Ireland etc.

ALAN. The section on criticism of other groups should be noted, not approved or rejected. I'm not sure the criticisms are justified, and there is no full documentation. If we are to catalogue criticisms, the IMG's attitude to ZANU should be mentioned - a carbon copy of their Nicaragua position.

On the left caucus in the AAM: it may tend to become a sectarian circle of critics.

DUPONT. That danger does certainly exist. The left caucus has done very little. Its most healthy aspect is its TU focus, but that's been more individuals in the left caucus than the caucus as such.

AAM has a position of supporting SACTU (the CP-led unions) as the only legitimate SA trade unions. We should fight to change that.

KEITH. A rapid transition from a focus on support to a focus on criticism: well, that basically reflects a rapid transition in reality, from a movement fighting against the old regime to a new regime. It's difficult to assess the military tactics of guerilla movements at a distance, and anyway we hardly want to take critical distance at a time when the bourgeois press is making an outcry against 'terrorism'. We have to make the comments at more

leisure. We've missed opportunities to do that.

We should also expose the TUC's role in the TU movement in S.Africa.

DUPONT. Obviously there is an objective basis to the sudden shift, but on the other hand we can prepare the ground for this turn and to some degree predict the forms that the struggle will take after the 'success' of the liberation struggle. We should have been more aggressive on this.

While there are actions - like using the old state apparatus to suppress the masses - that we obviously should and do criticise, there is also a tendency to say abstractly, 'this isn't socialism'. I agree about exposing the roles of the LP, TUC, and BL etc. in the paper.

On Alan's point about the criticisms of other groups: the problem is that Sparts, WSL etc. do not have a worked-out position - all you can do is go by what appears in their papers.

Amendment (ALAN): Replace the second para under 'Future Solidarity Work' by: 'The caucus could get trapped in a clique/discussion-circle model. We must make sure at least that we do not get trapped that way, and argue for an activist orientation (as against the AAM leadership stress on petitioning governments, the UN, etc.)'

- Accepted by Dupont.

Amendment (ALAN) to note (rather than accept or reject) the three paras. on criticisms of other groups

- Carried, with 2 votes against and 2 abstentions.

Document as a whole, as amended:

- Carried, with 1 abstention.

2. POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES/ CURRENT SITUATION (see Perspectives after Blackpool doc. already circulated).
ALAN reported from the S@ Delegate Meeting.

O'KEEFE. The Blackpool decisions were very important. Tony Benn says it is like re-founding the Labour Representation Committee, and that's largely true. The LP has become fluid and malleable again. Why? Despite all the betrayals, the structure has shown itself flexible. Part of the reason for the current developments is also the failure of the Trotskyists. But even if Trotskyists had built a better party over the last 20 years, we would still have to deal with the LP.

Blackpool has radical implications. Parliament is de-throned within the labour movement. The right wing will fight back - but the opening which has been created is very important.

Problem: the labour movement is still very backward politically. E.g. on incomes policy, nationalisation - and, of course, the State. So the situation is very dangerous: the sort of situation that leads to a violent backlash by the ruling class.

Benn's performance on the House of Lords is clearly conscious faking, like Lloyd George. He's doing a manoeuvre to disrupt the existing set-up, get his own career advanced - and then try to reconsolidate the system. Also look at his feeble ideas on the state bureaucracy.

Where are we in this? The S@ groups turn has been successful in the limited terms we set out for it, though we still have a lot of problems to surmount in consolidating it. We've gained some standing in the real labour movement. Still, we're very weak.

The IMG and SWP are beginning to see the bandwagon rolling in the LP. E.g. look at Paul Foot's article on the Blackpool conference in SW: they seem to be losing their balance. We could find ourselves being swamped by others taking up the ideas we have fought for and distorting them - like the French Trotskyists were swamped in 1934. We have to be very energetic

in consolidating our position. We have to make a dash for growth. We should go for getting publicity as the revolutionary Marxists in the LP (as against Militant).

We lack discipline and dynamism. We have to convince comrades that the League is central, give comrades a feeling of their personal responsibility to be active Marxists.

I'm drawn to the idea that in January (say) we should consolidate the S@ groups by founding a formal organisation. We could get away with it, I think.

The possibility of extra-parliamentary forces controlling the MPs is an obvious opening for the workers' government.

KEITH. The Blackpool decisions are very important. But we should not go overboard. O'Keefe's article overstates, for example, the impact of mandatory re-selection.

We must consider what the RFMC should do and what we should do in it. E.g. RFMC should take a position on the 3 year rule.

LAMARRE. The Steering Committee stressed campaigning in the TUs on LP democracy. I fear the question of TU democracy could get squeezed out. But it's important. We must link the issues closely, and also raise the angle of greater activity by women in the TUs. For women we need more than the conventional democratic reforms.

LANDIS (reported on the RFMC)

ALAN. At the Steering Committee I argued that campaigns in the TUs on LP democracy should also have a definite platform on TU democracy. I was wrong. If the immediate focus is on LP democracy, then we can rally maximum united forces round that and draw the lessons on TU democracy in the course of the struggle.

ARMSTRONG. The problem with the paper's coverage is that it locates the centre of the political world wrongly. To define ourselves as revolutionary Marxists in the LP is inevitably self-limiting, wrong, and detracts from a focus on direct action. It would mean looking at direct action through LP spectacles. In the paper we are losing, not strike reports, but a direct intervention into shop floor struggles, on how to fight redundancies etc. I think there would be a contradiction between the orientation O'Keefe outlined and our industrial bulletins.

I was worried about the S@ turn. I was reassured it would not mean a LP shift - but now we're presented with a LP shift. We've gone overboard on the LP. It could have massive implications.

RAMSEY. Armstrong has caricatured our views. If he thinks industrial bulletins become irrelevant in our perspective, he must completely misunderstand the whole orientation. If we're steering towards a relatively open revolutionary Marxist organisation in the LP, that means presenting a pole of attraction to people outside the LP too.

In the TUs - the point is to draw people into activity on LP democracy and not to allow that to be blocked by quibbles on details of TU democracy. Then we argue for TU democracy on the basis of the lessons of the activity. We should not be ultimacist.

We should also organise LP people inside non-affiliated TUs, and at the same time fight for TU democracy there.

DALY. I share some of Armstrong's misgivings. We seem to be too tied up in the immediate issue of TU democracy. I don't think other people will see it the same way as us. Callaghan's unity line will get a real hearing. There's not enough stress on the need to fight for our policies. That's what we can mobilise people on.

FOSTER. I don't see what Armstrong and Daly are talking about in relation to

some sudden shift by us. It's a straw man.

On LP democracy and TU democracy: R is right.

O'K's ideas; on the weekly, especially, we need to look more carefully at resources. Proclaiming a revolutionary Marxist organisation? It could cut us off prematurely, and anyway we may not have the forces. We would need a qualitative leap forward.

OLIVER. There is a political ferment, and if we don't organise it someone else will. O'K is right on that. But the specific ideas, e.g. openly proclaiming a revolutionary Marxist organisation, seem wrong. We've been proved right, and we shouldn't get worried because IMG or SWP move in to the LP. To set up an open organisation would be premature. Let's concentrate on getting the S* groups established, and focus on a rally in the New Year.

KEITH. Armstrong's misgivings are completely misdirected. At most he can be saying that the balance of the paper is a bit out.

LP democracy and TU democracy? The way they relate is different in different unions: AUEW, TGWU, NUR, NUPE... Concretely we should ask our TU comrades to work out precise formulas in each TU.

Question to O'K: what does he mean about concretising the workers' government slogan in relation to Blackpool.

On the idea of a weekly: we can't just ask the S* groups what they want, we have to look to our own central resources.

What's happened about the dignitaries and the S* EB?

Founding an open revolutionary organisation? What exactly does it mean? Is it 'convergence', or what?

O'KEEFE. Yes, let's have a rally. That's separable from declaring an organisation. I haven't proposed declaring an organisation yet - just put it forward as an option for discussion.

Oliver on IMG: IMG can mess up a lot of things. Let's not be complacent.

Daly: says we need more stress on mobilising and direct struggle. But we haven't stopped stressing that! Look at the latest front page of the paper, on fighting the cuts. Too much stress on the democracy issue? There's a struggle and we have to get involved.

Armstrong: he lets his fears be projected to the point of being paralysing. We need a lurch towards the LP for a time - but that doesn't mean seeing the LP as all-sufficient. Artificial even-handedness would be wrong. Anyway, Armstrong is theoretically wrong about direct action. A strike cannot be put on the same level as the general political self-rearming of the working class. Armstrong's arguments sound like the anarchists' against Marx. We cannot counterpose strikes as being more important than the political rearming of the movement.

Dignitaries? We haven't done enough work on it.

Workers' Government and Blackpool? It's a matter of seizing on the element of extra-parliamentary control in the Blackpool decisions, without exaggerating it.

ARMSTRONG. I find this debate difficult. All sorts of things are said which have wrong implications. I query the implications, I'm more or less reassured, then we start again...

O'Keefe is wrong about the focus on the LP. (a) There will be important class battles, and we need to relate directly to them. We need to walk on 2 feet. (b) O'Keefe's organisational calculations are wrong. If we are to relate to serious ex-SWP

people, we need to have industrial activity.

I don't actually disagree with the document, but I propose a reference back [see below].

O'KEEFE. Armstrong should withdraw this reference back, and give it a month to see if his fears are real.

ALAN. Armstrong is once again counterposing direct action to the LP. Direct action is the central driving force in the struggle for socialism, but it needs political organisation and channels. Stressing direct action as against political organisation is like saying the steam is important but the piston case is not.

The Gardners sit-in is very important, but to ask whether Gardners or the LP is more important is ridiculous. Both are vital.

Obviously we can discuss allocation of resources. If there is a big miners' strike, we would have to throw forces into work round it. But that work would also include turning LPs outwards and arguing with miners about the LP.

We are not so much lurching towards the LP as towards building S* groups. The bulletins are not counterposed to this lurch: they are one way of building the S* groups.

Armstrong is counterposing general abstract truths...

O'KEEFE. They're not true even in abstract!

ALAN. ... counterposing them to the specific tasks of the present situation.

ARMSTRONG. Alan is misunderstanding me. I'm not prepared to withdraw. I am trying to be constructive.

ALAN. If we pass this reference back, what precisely is the Steering Committee instructed to do?

ARMSTRONG. I think it's clear from my motion.

O'KEEFE. Proposed a counter-motion [see below].

Voting.

Armstrong's resolution: "This NC refers back the Perspectives after Blackpool statement on the grounds that it implies an excessively heavy emphasis on the internal battle in the LP and a down-playing of intervention on the shop floor and in the direct action struggles of the class except from the LP angle".

O'Keefe's resolution: "This NC understands the perspectives as in no sense obligating the organisation to abandon industrial bulletins or industrial work, or to ignore the industrial struggles that will emerge before the LP conference. We will maintain and extend the bulletins; work for the LCC TU conference; make propaganda for TU democracy; and respond to the best of our ability to any struggle that emerges".

Armstrong's resolution: LOST, Armstrong voting for, Daly abstaining, and all others voting against.

O'Keefe's resolution: CARRIED, with no votes against, 6 abstentions, and all others voting for.

O'KEEFE asked for an explanation of vote from the comrades who abstained.

ARMSTRONG. It's pious and tells us nothing.

FRASER. Its content was included in the original proposal.

(ALAN. That's the point of O'Keefe's resolution - that, contrary to Armstrong's fears, industrial work is included in the perspectives)

RAMSEY. I think O'Keefe has bottled out to Armstrong's backward argument instead of confronting it.

DALY. O'Keefe's resolution is pointless because it adds nothing.

LAMARRE. O'Keefe's resolution does not relate to Armstrong's points.

KEITH. The procedure O'Keefe used should be condemned. It's putting forward a proposal to blur the differences and making it impossible for Armstrong to counterpose his ideas.

(O'KEEFE. I don't think Armstrong has anything clearly counterposed to our ideas. So I think the meeting has a right to try to make the line clear and give a unified lead to the organisation).

Voting on the general line of the Perspectives after Blackpool document and the article on Blackpool in the paper:

CARRIED, with Armstrong voting against, Daly abstaining, and all others voting for.

KEITH. Why did Daly abstain?

DALY. I don't agree with the emphasis.

3. IRISH WORK

FOSTER: presented document from Irish commission.

I'm not entirely happy with the decision against working in TOM. But it seems there are only a couple of areas where work in TOM is even worth considering.

ALAN: put an amendment on work in TOM [see below]

LAMARRE. The document says we should fight for the LCI to stand by the decisions of its last conference. In what way has it not done so? On Charter 80: why do we need to support it rather than having our own campaign.

O'KEEFE: put some amendments [see below]. We should not limit ourselves; we must be ready to take initiatives ourselves if necessary rather than waiting for LCI, etc.

CALLAGHAN. In Irish work, getting resolutions through in the labour movement is very important. They do not go through on the nod.

On Lamarre's query about the LCI: the Chartists and their allies who run the LCI are against troops out now, and they have ignored the conference decisions on that.

Why support Charter 80? It exists and has some credibility.

Work in TOM? The LCI gives us opportunities, but TOM just limits us. TOM no longer exists as a national movement. It's just small committees with other leftists. We should go out and talk to the people who disagree with us.

KEITH. The document says, "Each branch should appoint one comrade to be responsible for Irish work". Each S* group? That's not possible.

We need more coverage in the paper, including criticism of the

Republicans. E.g. on the recent killing in the Royal Victoria Hospital.

We should have an article about the LCI in the IB. And we should have a pamphlet.

MACAULAY. 'Branch' means 'League branch'. But the League comrades responsible then try to get other S* supporters to be active.

I support the amendment on TOM. TOM branches have sometimes been more than talking shops. We should not exclude work in them altogether.

The document does not mention our idea of a labour movement conference on Ireland, linking up with B.Sullivan.

There are a lot of divisions inside the LCI - which gives us opportunities.

Could we do a S* submission to the NEC working group on Ireland?

RAMSEY. Proposed amendments [see below]

On Alan's amendment: we should drop the phrase, "or the SC".

ARMSTRONG. I support Alan's amendment with Ramsey's deletion.

There are some healthy TOM branches.

We should be clearer about how we raise the solidarity question.

WHETTLING. I agree with Keith about the hospital killing. But I was worried about the balance of Keith's argument - it could tend towards a 'Militant'-type line.

Callaghan is partly right on TOM. But Birmingham TOM has done some useful things. It provides a chance to work with SWP people who are worth relating to.

O'KEEFE: moved another amendment [on the hunger strikers: see below]

CALLAGHAN. We should do all we can to build the LCI and win a majority within it. We should not boycott TOM. But we do not build it.

Yes, I'm sure some of the work of Birmingham TOM is useful. Of course the LCI won't do much unless we make it do it. But the LCI provides openings. We should take them and not allow exceptions which could become the norm.

FOSTER. We should basically go round the LCI leadership, e.g. on the hunger strikers, but also use the LCI framework.

Voting

On TOM: to add any provision at all for exceptions:
CARRIED, with 4 against.

Ramsey then withdrew his amendment, on the understanding that all applications for permission to work in TOM would go first to the Irish Commission (before the SC), and so Alan's amendment was agreed.

All the other amendments accepted unanimously.

The SC's proposals for the membership of the Irish commission (Mellor, Callaghan, Foster, Evington) was accepted.

The resolution as amended was carried unanimously.

12.11.1976

AMENDMENTS to resolution on Irish work.

1. From the movers: in para. 2, point 1(a), replace "focusing on resolutions..." with "simply focusing on resolutions..."
2. At the end of para 4 of point 1, add: "In any case we fight for these demands ourselves" (O'KEEFE)
3. At the end of para 5 of point 1, add; "... and have cd Evington (our cd. on the LCI committee) to write regularly". (O'K)
4. At the end of para 1 of point 2, add: "and the commission will produce S* material on this as soon as possible" (RAMSEY)
5. In the second sentence of para 2 of point 2, replace "...it focuses on the 'human rights' angle..." by "... it only focuses on the 'human rights' angle..." (O'KEEFE)
6. In the last sentence of point 2, replace "... oppose support for..." by "... denounce..." (O'KEEFE)
7. In point 3, add after "We should not work in TOM", "... except possibly in some areas with the approval of the Irish commission or the SC" (ALAN)
8. In point 4, add at the end of part (c), "including a labour movement conference on the problems of the TUs in Ireland" (RAMSEY)
9. In point 4, add a new part (e): "The commission should prepare material for S* groups on Ireland" (RAMSEY)
10. Add a new point 5: "If the hunger strike announced by the Provisional IRA takes place it may change the whole situation for Irish work. We will have to respond and take initiatives as events unfold. If necessary we will act outside the framework for our normal work outlined above" (O'KEEFE)

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY

ALAN introduced a resolution [see separately] and it was passed unanimously with Armstrong abstaining.

ARMSTRONG; I don't agree politically but I agree that the resolution is a fair interpretation of conference.

5. CO-OPTIONS TO N.C.

ALAN. The SC proposes we co-opt cds Appleyard and Muir, basically for geographical reasons.

MACAULAY. And also to increase representation of industrial workers on the NC.

O'KEEFE. We should also co-opt Harding. He is Manchester organiser, and Muir is not so experienced.

MACAULAY. I disagree with O'Keefe.

KEITH. It is a bad idea to co-opt people who have been specifically voted off the NC by conference.

Voting.

To co-opt Appleyard: unanimous

To co-opt Muir: unanimous

To co-opt Harding: LOST, 3 votes for, all others against.

6. MATTERS ARISING: CONFERENCE, SC MINUTES

OLIVER. What about the magazine?

O'KEEFE. We have in preparation a special issue on Poland and other material.

ARMSTRONG. It's important to get the magazine out.

OLIVER. On the WSL: I think we should aim for unity fairly quickly.

Agreed on Alan's proposal that Oliver be invited to attend the next session of discussions with the WSL, and then be invited to attend an extended SC to discuss our attitude to the WSL.

7. IRAN/IRAQ WAR

[Minutes of this discussion to follow separately]

Voting.

For position put by O'Keefe, of opposing the war on both sides:
Daly, Foster, Gunther, Harrison, Landis, Lewis, Macaulay,
Matthews, O'Keefe, Ramsey, Whettling (11)

For position put by Alan and Keith, of siding with Iran:

Alan, Fraser, Keith, Lamarre. (4)

Abstaining: Ritchie, Oliver. (2)

PERSPECTIVES AFTER BLACKPOOL

The Left gained real victories in Blackpool. But there are many weaknesses in the position of the Left - weaknesses which could ruin everything.

- + In the decisive votes, the Left depended on the block votes of many unions which are far from democratic themselves. Victories gained that way can be lost or neutralised through bureaucratic manipulation very easily.

- + The constituency Labour Parties generally lack an active mass membership.

- + The policies of the dominant sections of the Left are confused to an extent which could spell disaster on the Chile model, or simple betrayal, if a Labour Government came to power pledged to those policies.

Therefore our tasks in the coming months must be:

- + To take the Labour Party democracy struggle into the unions. We should aim to set up committees in the various unions which will circulate material, prepare model resolutions, (differing according to the situation in each union), send speakers to branches, call conferences, and link up with existing rank and file groups. S+ supporters will combine their work in building such campaigns with vigorous argument for trade union democracy, using the S+ broadsheet on this question.

- + To help to build workplace Labour Party branches on the broadest possible scale.

- + To keep the Mobilising Committee going, united behind an agreed policy on the electoral college; and to get all S+ supporters involved in the CLPD.

- + To step up the fight for Marxist politics in the labour movement, especially on the crucial questions of the State, nationalisation, workers' control, etc.

- + To turn local Labour Parties (and S+ groups!) outwards to help and intervene in the direct-action struggles against the Tories and the bosses: strikes, occupations, anti-cuts battles etc. We must link up the energy of such struggles with the political fight inside the labour movement.

In order to carry out these combined tasks, we need a strong Marxist organisation in the labour movement. The situation therefore demands that we put more energy and urgency into our work to build the S+ groups. LP conference showed that it is possible for the S+ groups to become the most active and visible organised force in the Left of the LP. That should be our immediate aim.

RESOLUTION ON IRISH WORK:

1. Our work should be focused on the Labour Committee on Ireland. Each branch should either join an existing branch or set one up. This means that all comrades should take out LCI membership cards quickly.

We should try to orient the LCI away from (a) focusing on resolutions for conferences and (b) simply making propaganda, towards trying to get labour movement bodies directly involved in activity.

This means we should make a national drive to get resolutions through labour movement bodies (using a version of the LCI model resolution amended to include immediate withdrawal) and affiliating them to the LCI. This is not necessarily counterposed to one-off activities such as labour movement conferences, but should be the minimum bedrock activity we undertake immediately.

We should also fight for the LCI to stand by the decisions of its last conference, particularly its demand for 'Troops Out Now'.

The Irish commission should oversee this work and ensure that comrades write for and sell 'Labour and Ireland'. We should also offer the LCI a regular column in the paper to report on their activity.

We should also press for labour movement bodies to produce bulletins (as in Leicester).

2. The most immediate task of solidarity is support for the Republican prisoners in Long Kesh and Armagh, who are threatening to escalate their protest to a hunger strike. This would mean that the issue of the prisoners would soon come to crisis point, so that this work is particularly urgent.

The main campaign existing at the moment is Charter 80. It is not adequate in that it focuses on the 'human rights' angle and does not explicitly raise the demand for political status. The IMG and SWP have consciously set out to create an 'Irish ANL'.

We should nevertheless actively support Charter 80, while raising this criticism of the way it was set up.

Practically this means:

(a) supporting and raising resolutions in support of Charter 80, while amending them to include political status;

(b) Taking part in local groups where they are set up and supporting local initiatives;

(c) supporting national initiatives such as the Day of Action planned for December 10th and the demonstration planned for March 1981.

Militants have set up their own campaign on Irish prisoners ('Labour Committee on Prison Conditions in N. Ireland'), which they clearly hope to link with the NEC resolution on H Block. It opposes the demand for political status, instead talking of the need for the 'labour movement' to try the prisoners. We should oppose support for this campaign, proposing instead support for Charter 80.

3. The LCI should be our number 1 priority, along with work on Charter 80. We should not work in TOM.

4. Our immediate work should be:

(a) mobilising for the Nov. 15th demo;

(b) setting up/ getting a foothold in LCI branches;

(c) committing labour movement bodies to some activity and to the LCI;

(d) undertaking activity on the prisoners' issue.

Each branch should appoint one cde. to be responsible for Irish work. The Irish Commission should follow up branches' work as soon as possible.

CLARIFICATION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY

The conference Political Resolution said: "... we must support council's rights - even their right to raise rates - against Heseltine". Armstrong proposed an amendment plainly condemning local government autonomy as "logically untenable":

"Tory councils can use it in the future as a justification for implementing reactionary policies in defiance of a Labour Government".

Armstrong's amendment was lost. But then conference passed an on-the-spot amendment from Harding calling for support for Labour councils' "right to impose pro-working class measures..."

This makes our position unclear, and gives the NC the duty to clarify it. Obviously we don't just support Labour councils' having some right to impose pro-working class measures; we support them imposing such measures, rights or no rights. Does the amendment mean that we don't support any other rights for Labour councils; i.e. the question of councils' rights against central government, as distinct from our support for pro-working class measures, has no weight or validity at all?

It seems that was not the intention of Conference. In the first place, Conference rejected Armstrong's plainly-worded amendment. In the second place, Harding's amendment, if taken in its exact (no doubt hurried) wording, is simply irrelevant to the whole debate. In the third place, Harding, moving his amendment, did not say what his amendment said. He recognised local government autonomy as an issue worth supporting, but objected to the emphasis (or apparent emphasis) in the Political Resolution and argued that we should stress working class interests. Since Harding's amendment was not available to Conference in writing, it is reasonable to suppose that the comrades who voted for it but not for Armstrong's amendment voted not so much for Harding's words as for the general sentiment of his speech.

(As the co-author of the Political Resolution, I may state that it was not at all my intention to imply that local government autonomy should be a bigger concern for us than direct working class interests. Rather I took for granted the priority of direct class issues. But it seems this was not clear).

Thus I think we will clarify the position best by adopting a resolution declaring:

1. As a general democratic issue, we support local government autonomy.
2. In relation to the Labour councils who wish to defend their right to raise the rates against the Tories, we support their rights but argue that a policy of mass mobilisation is needed to win those rights and rate rises cut across any such policy. (We also support local labour movement agitation against rate rises, of course; but we argue that the Tories forbidding rate rises is a different issue from the labour movement instructing its representatives not to raise rates).
3. Where the democratic issue of local government autonomy clashes with a direct class issue, the class issue takes priority.
4. We make the direct class issues central to our agitation on the cuts, while not neglecting local government autonomy as a secondary theme.

ALAN for the SC.

NOTE: The classical Marxist position on this issue is expressed succinctly in, for example, Engels' Critique of the Erfurt Programme.

"So, a unitary republic. But not in the sense of the present French one, which is nothing more than the Empire founded in 1798 without the Emperor. From 1792 to 1798, every French Department, every community, had full self-administration on the American pattern, and we must get that too. How the self-administration is to be arranged, and how one can get along without bureaucracy, has been shown to us by America and the first French republic, and even today by Australia, Canada and the other British colonies". Engels proposes: "Full self-administration in province, district and parish by officials elected by universal suffrage. Abolition of all local and provincial authorities appointed by the State".

See also D. Ryazanov's edition of the Communist Manifesto, where the commentary discusses the whole question in detail.

NOTE 2. Harding's contribution, from the conference minutes: "Neither resolution nor amendment adequate. We elect councillors to carry out a programme. We defend local democracy as we defend bourgeois democracy. We wouldn't defend local government against left-wing reforms from central government".

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY

Text of Political Resolution:

"Ted Knight of Lambeth argues - or used to argue - that the time to fight will come when Heseltine imposes his penalties on 'overspending' councils. The argument bears all the marks of an evasive attempt to put off the fight into the future, and probably Heseltine can operate the penalties deftly enough to avoid creating any big anti-Tory united front. But we must support councils' rights - even their right to raise rates - against Heseltine; and with more and more cuts likely to come, it is quite probable that some council or other will sooner or later stand and fight".

Armstrong's amendment:

Add at end of para:
"Our arguments should be based on defence of working class living standards and not on 'local government autonomy'. This argument is an attempt by reformists to find a constitutional justification for opposing the cuts and is logically untenable. If Labour Councils can use it now as an argument against having to make cuts, Tory councils can use it in the future as a justification for implementing reactionary policies in defiance of a future Labour government".

And delete, "councils' rights - even their right to raise rates - against Heseltine". Insert: "any councils resisting Heseltine and refusing to implement cuts, even if we are against the methods they employ, such as rate rises".

Harding's amendment:

Delete "councils' rights - even their right to raise rates - against Heseltine", and insert: "Labour councils' rights to carry out measures in the interests of the working class against Tory attempts to impose their own policies".

WSL/ICL DISCUSSIONS: 4th October 1980

Present. For WSL: KW, AT, TR, AMS, PF

For I-CL: Alan, Keith, Marshall, Ramsey, Foster

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS DISCUSSION

It was agreed that the rough notes available should be typed up.

TRADE UNION WORK

Alan: presented a draft document on TU democracy. In the TILC document, WSL defines its guiding rule as 'seeking the point of conflict with the bureaucracy'. This is wrong. Rather, we should base ourselves on the logic of the class struggle, and the necessary conflict with the bureaucracy will flow from that logic. I think the wrong formula can lead to sectarian mistakes - artificial confrontations - and also to opportunist mistakes, where broader interests of mass involvement are sacrificed to narrow immediate considerations of jousting with the bureaucracy.

Keith: We've also had differences on workers' control and workers' self-management. The WSL has said that workers' control in nationalised industries is workers' self-management, which we would not accept.

TR. The 'point of conflict' must be seen in terms of developing a revolutionary leadership. You don't just look at each struggle one by one. You are often dealing with an arena where you know the forces involved.

Obviously the first task is to present a perspective to win the struggle. We've always done that, round the hotel workers' struggles for example.

But in presenting that perspective, it's our duty, if we know the bureaucracy we're dealing with, to expose that bureaucracy. So we seek means to show the bankruptcy of that bureaucracy. We aim to bring workers into conflict with the bureaucracy to build a new leadership. We counterpose this approach to the "rank-and-file-ism" of the SWP.

At Grunwicks the key question was not mass pickets but to show that the union bureaucracy had the power to win the battle but chose not to. That's the way to develop revolutionary militants in the unions who have gained knowledge of Stalinism and reformism in action. The key is to show that the working class has the power to win, but the bureaucracy won't use it.

On the questions of trade union democracy, the difference is that we often don't have a fixed position on such questions. For example, we think there's a time not to have mass meetings - like on the Robinson issue in February this year. The AUEW District Committee should simply have done all it could to get as many workers as possible on strike.

AT. If it appears that we go out to seek confrontation with the bureaucracy, that's wrong. The question is what you do when you're in a struggle - both to win it and to develop something from it politically. You need to combat the bureaucracy - rather than have the rank-and-file-ist approach of the SWP.

Keith. As TR says, the important question is what you do practically - not abstract or literary exposure. You measure the bureaucracy against the needs of the struggle.

On mass meetings - I don't know that I would disagree on the practical examples. But we would still say that we have a position of principle in favour of mass meetings.

There are times when on the basis of quite clear existing policy we have to demand immediate action rather than a mass meeting. And tactically sometimes it is better to bring one section out and try to extend the struggle, rather than have a mass meeting for the whole plant.

But as against the strong current of elitism in the labour movement, we have to stress the need for mass involvement.

AT. Obviously we agree on that. That's elementary. The question is what you do in a more difficult situation like the Robinson issue.

TR. Adwest is another example. There was a victimisation, and if they'd gone to a mass meeting they would just have been defeated.

AT. It's difficult to put these things down on paper... the initiating role of minorities and how it relates to the democratic rights of majorities.

Ramsey. Take union branch meetings in work time - it's not an inflexible principle, of course, but it's important.

In our campaign for reform inside the CPSA we stressed mass involvement. There's a tendency for revolutionaries working in unions just not to know what's going on in the membership - either to fall into SWP-type rank-and-file-ism or to overestimate paper left-wing victories. In the CPSA we've had a lot of criticism for what we did on voting reform, but we stand by it: so we've lost the Broad Left NEC, but that Broad Left NEC actually did very little.

In relation to TR's arguments on the 'point of conflict with the bureaucracy': it still seems to me that the conflict with the bureaucracy is not something we seek, but something that results from developing the logic of the struggle. E.g. how would you apply the approach of 'seeking the point of conflict' to the Chix dispute?

AT. We don't seek points of conflict with the bureaucracy. We just say: we want to win the struggle and to make a political development. Then it comes out from the facts of the case that the conflict is with the bureaucracy. E.g. Adwest, Garners.

TR. Look at Garners. When we turned the struggle towards T&GWU Region 1, the SWP just cleared off. Or THF: we demanded T&G action to stop THF, but SWP just said that the rank and file should go and picket THF places everywhere for one hour!

Ramsey. Take Brixton. We did lobby CPSA HQ, but also and more importantly we spread solidarity through the union. We made calculations about the bureaucracy, but we did not just announce them- we acted to change the calculations.

TR. We take all that for granted.

Keith. I think there is a lot of common ground. We would agree in opposing the CP's method of focusing on the official trade union movement at the expense of mobilising - and also in opposing the SWP's "rank-and-file-ism" (though for our part we would not say that rank and file movements are necessarily "rank-and-file-ist").

AT. One other example. Take the Robinson victimisation. At the first rally, the week after Robinson was sacked, the question was what would the AUEW Executive do. Robinson just preached confidence in the AUEW; we argued for mobilising to force the AUEW to act. It's that sort of experience we base ourselves on.

Union branch meetings in work time: in 99% of cases I agree. It's extremely important to go to the mass of workers. But at Cowley the bureaucracy introduced branch meetings in work time in order to swamp the minority which supported us and to witch-hunt us.

TR. Big plants are very different from small plants. Moods can go through them very quickly. It can be difficult to say whether your members support you or not. They back you for years, and then the support can be swept away by an anti-communist tide of feeling.

Ramsey. I would agree with what AT said. But on the question of having union positions and being weakened because the membership disagrees with our politics - we think that regular factory bulletins are vital to get over our political views.

AT. The relation of the cadre to the masses is of course a key question. At Cowley we are putting out a series of 2-sided leaflets - one side on BL, one side on the WSL's general politics.

Alan. There seems to be a substantial measure of agreement.

Foster. We should discuss further on rank and file movements.

AT. Ib BL we've been able to work together with hardly any real differences. The only difference was on corporate bargaining. But we don't have an abstract position on corporate bargaining. It's a question of the concrete conditions. On combine committees, your position puzzles me.

LCC TRADE UNION CONFERENCE

Ramsey reported on the situation. To contact TR when more details are available.

LAMBETH ANTI-CUTS CONFERENCE

(There was a discussion on the SO proposed amendments. Additional amendments on trade-union struggle against the cuts were proposed by PF and AMS and agreed. It was also agreed, on TR's proposal, that the clause, "This should not mean staking everything..." should be altered to, "This should not necessarily mean staking everything...". There was also a discussion on the amendment mentioning work-sharing without loss of pay....)

AMS. We do not support work-sharing in the public sector. We counterpose public works.

Keith. There is no contradiction. Public works are meaningless, as Trotsky often pointed out, without a fight against the bourgeoisie. You can argue for work sharing and for expanded services.

KW. We oppose work sharing in the public sector because we oppose cuts in the work.

Keith. You can't draw such a sharp distinction between production and services. Why not oppose work-sharing in general, on your argument? We want goods produced in abundance, too.

Alan. Take an example. One of our comrades has just got this work-sharing policy through his Direct Works shop stewards committee. Obviously we want more houses built, more maintenance done, etc. But does a fight for work-sharing contradict that? You might as well counterpose nationalisation and a workers' plan to work-sharing in the car industry.

KW. In factories we often don't care about what is produced - we're concerned for the jobs. In the public sector we're concerned for the jobs and the services.

(It was agreed that Keith would draft a short explanation on work-sharing).

CDLM CONFERENCE, NOVEMBER 15

(I-CL said they would support this as far as possible given the clash with the Withdrawal from Ireland demonstration).

BROAD GROUPS

TR. What would the I-CL's attitude be to the WSL joining the broad groups and becoming part of that organisation? What practical problems would arise?

Alan. We'd be in favour of the WSL comingⁱⁿ. What we would have to do first is work out arrangements for joint work on the paper and in relation to the women's and democracy campaigns.

TR. At the moment our position is just that we want to assess the groups - like we want to assess the I-CL.

Foster. We've put up certain barriers round the broad groups because of the IMG.

Alan. Also the WSL coming into the broad groups only makes sense if WSL and I-CL are urgently discussing unity. Look at the problem with the IMG: they would come in to 'fish', and they would also pander to and exploit any backwardness among the new people in the broad groups. If we are going to collaborate on the broad groups, we will need to discuss how we are going to work together to rally these new people to Trotskyism. Otherwise we'll end up with the new people going off thinking "it's true, these Trotskyists just tear each other to bits".

PF. We decided in Leicester to focus on the joint work we can develop.

NEXT MEETING

Agenda to include Women's Fightback and General Strike.

Present: HF, TR, AMS, AM (WSL)
Landis, O'Keefe, Alan (I-CL)

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

Landis. Fightback is an attempt to build a broad campaign or movement that can relate to women's immediate struggles, and also to break down previous counterpositions between the women's movement and the labour movement. Instead of going to the women's movement and saying: 'turn to the labour movement', we have turned the heat and the focus on the labour movement - arguing for it to be changed to meet women's needs while arguing for women to work in it.

We avoid being ultimatumist towards the women's movement. E.g. at the last Fightback planning meeting some women felt Fightback was getting too much of a LP bias. So we didn't press the issue of F affiliating to the RFMC.

We try to draw in working-class women. We've made some headway in the LP. The LP women's organisation is teetering between tea-parties and the sort of activist women's sections which have been set up recently in London, some under F influence. The women's organisation is ripe for takeover and can be used.

We relate to women's groups as well: some have affiliated to F en bloc. F has taken on a life of its own, way beyond our immediate range of contact.

We have not really got a grip yet on the TU work, though we have ideas.

At the June conference of F we felt we needed a policy to define us roughly but not to have a fixed and final set of demands. In any case we need to learn from experience. We'll develop policy further at the next conference - but we want to keep the cooperation of groups who do have extensive experience on their particular issues.

The WSL intervention at that June conference seemed rather hasty. In contrast, the Workers' Power intervention was obviously thought out well in advance, and they still stick by it. They've been very obstructive in relation to F.

Our day-to-day practical work, I think, does not differ much from what the WSL would do. Does the WSL work in the Oxford F group?

AMS. No. There have not been many meetings. Also we have our own Woman Worker group.

Yes, our intervention at the last F conference was hasty.

TR. How do other groups fit in with F? The IMG, for example?

Landis. The IMG approached the whole thing from the angle of 'Women in Action'. They behaved abominably - and many IMG women think so, too.

WiA was produced by a small group of IMG women, without much support from IMG. The WiA women wanted the merger of WiA and F. But they made agreements and then broke them - were generally disruptive. We weren't prepared to put up with the disruption.

Some local IMG women are still working in F. Elsewhere they are going for WiA groups.

No other tendencies are working in the F campaign.

TR. What is the relation with SO?

Landis. We see F as developing women towards our politics, and thus it should be easy to bring women from F to SO. But it's early days yet. And for many women, F is their first activity. So at present we take it gently.

O'Keefe. We were late in taking up the women's question - in about 1972. First we had the slogan of a communist women's movement. Then we realised that

was a sectarian slogan. From 1975 we based ourselves on Trotsky's ideas on the Labour Party in the USA, to try to find a better way to relate to the confused women's movement.

Trotsky saw a real movement, confused but living, and sought to develop it with a basic slogan accessible to many plus the specific Trotskyist propaganda.

So we developed the idea of calling for a mass working class based women's movement while simultaneously trying to develop a communist core for that movement.

In 1977-8 we were not able to do much with this idea. But the anti-Tory fight has opened up possibilities. Starting from the need to fight the Tories, we can develop a broad campaign while also developing a communist nucleus within it.

AMS. This relates to our last discussion on leadership and the bureaucracy. I-CL thought we were picking fights with the bureaucracy, but we said no: the fights with the bureaucracy come from the needs of the struggle.

I agree with the idea of a working class women's movement. But F is not that. Look at the first F booklet. The contributions are not from women workers in struggle, but from middle class groups with no class perspective.

F develops a blanket respectability; but we need to relate to struggles with ideas on how to win them, e.g. Chix, St Benedict's. And the key there is the question of leadership. But the current F has a whole feature on school meals without any criticism of NUPE's complicity in the cuts. It has an article on St Benedict's without raising the question of strike action. There seems to be a conscious decision not to raise the necessary demands to win struggles and give leadership. But we need to present a programme that will win struggles.

The Bolshevik women never watered down or hid their programme. They had tactical flexibility but...

Landis. We've tried to use the liberals. They're useful for factual information, etc. But we have never deliberately watered anything down in order to keep in with anyone. IMG advocated that approach and we opposed them. We argued for not having all the demands in the platform, but that was only because we thought it better to have them in specific policy resolutions.

The liberals have never tied our hands, but our use of them did enable us to get a first conference of 500 women.

Why did we not have a detailed criticism of NUPE? Because we did not have the necessary contacts and knowledge. If you had sent a criticism, we would certainly have printed it. But we would have one-tenth of the contacts we do have if we had just announced our programme without any attempt to work with anyone else.

F has played a positive role in struggles. E.g. last week there was a successful hospital workers' strike in Cardiff for which our leaflet on women's right to work had played a role in preparing the ground.

HF. I went to the last F meeting in Leicester. The people you are attracting are middle class - certainly in Leicester. This flows from the policy you have adopted. It's not enough just to assert women's rights. Women Worker groups have developed out of struggles - e.g. against the union leadership round a nursery campaign. I know the Leicester F group wants to orient to the working class. But when we discussed the hosiery workers in Leicester, the F group wanted to reach women in factories without taking up the question of the union leadership - just to leave it at the level of organising the rank and file, without taking up the struggle against

the bureaucracy. F just talks about organising at factory level, not about how to win the battles. Some feminists at the F meeting were very hostile to the idea of taking up the bureaucracy.

Landis. Do you know Leicester F are planning a street meeting and leaflet next week on import controls? Are you working with them?

HF. Yes.

TR. A communist women's tendency must come out of actual struggles. The abstract idea of a broad women's movement is fine. But here and now thousands of women are being made redundant - school meals staff, hospital workers etc. There is a massive frustration among women workers, and it's crucial for them not just to fight back but to deal with the problem of how they are organised to fight. The women's jobs going at present are mostly in small groups - easily isolated and manipulated by the bureaucracy. The trade union bureaucracy won't fight - even for their official policies. To organise communist women we must take up the question of the bureaucracy and the lack of leadership. For example in nursery campaigns, where we have been heavily involved. In any broader movement we must fight to show the role of the bureaucracy.

AMS. It's a question of how to implement the Transitional Programme. Yes, we've got differences with Workers' Power on their work - or non-work - in the class struggle. But the demands they put forward at the F conference were from the Transitional Programme.

An I-CL woman described those demands as 'a shopping list'. That's how the bureaucrats look at the Transitional Programme. The ICL were misunderstanding the Transitional Programme, misunderstanding the tasks of Trotskyists, misunderstanding the crisis of leadership.

This isn't just abstract. It's the daily experience with the bureaucracy. It's crucial to understand what is actually holding working class women back - those same bureaucrats who accuse the women of apathy! F is not challenging the bureaucracy. A lot of F is like NUPE News. So NUPE is a mass working class based women's movement - but what does it do with it?

We don't glory in isolation as we are accused of doing - we base our ideas on the experience of struggle.

O'Keefe. If we set out, even on a limited basis, and are able to organise, that's good. It turns bad if we fail to say what needs to be said in an actual struggle. That's the criterion. Getting feminists in the F group in Leicester is not something that should damn us, but a good thing.

We make propaganda, of course. But we don't go into meetings and say all we know about the bureaucracy right at the start. If we focused on the bureaucracy in that way we could end up in a de-facto united front with anti-labour-movement feminists. Instead, we draw women into the movement and try to help them learn through experience. We also try to organise women's caucuses in the TUs - again initially on a limited basis.

As Trotsky put it, 'The significance of the programme is the significance of the party'. There is no perfect set of slogans. The party chooses which slogan to put forward at any time. We don't just present lists of slogans.

Within that framework, it may be that local F groups are not adequately involved in struggles. It may be that there are women in them we will have to break with. It must be assessed concretely. Success for F depends on our specific communist work. Maybe our women's fraction does not do all it could - but with a strengthened communist nucleus we could do more.

Have we in fact fallen down on an actual struggle? And what do WSL now think about the June conference?

AMS. In June we supported Workers Power, with some amendments of our own. We don't think F has consciously reneged on a struggle. But it has failed to say what was necessary on some struggles - e.g. it failed to call for strike action over St Benedict's.

Landis. The real criticism in relation to St Benedict's is that we wrote nothing on it until it was all over.

AMS. Fisher made no call for strike action to support St Benedict's. But strike action to support occupations is crucial. Without that there is no perspective for struggle. E.g. NUPE has been supporting voluntary redundancies.

Landis. But some of what NUPE has said has been pretty good - and that's why we've publicised it, e.g. on school meals.

AMS. In practice what NUPE proposes on school meals is completely unworkable, e.g. they propose 'no cover' when they know the women will cover. The bureaucracy has agreed to cuts in work and pay, and to temporary contracts.

Landis. That's an argument against spelling out all your demands in advance: You need to know what is relevant in each situation, and you can't get that by reading the Transitional Programme. You need contacts, and we would not have the contacts if we just set out with the communist women.

There are different levels of confronting the bureaucracy. E.g. our women's right to work leaflet was very general, but such things which build up women's confidence also play a role.

Alan. The WSL comrades are talking about struggles they know about, have been involved in; F wrote about those particular struggles without having been closely involved. E.g. on school meals. The real problem is that F has fallen down on getting local groups involved in struggles and learning from them.

In the last discussion, AT pointed out that in relation to BL - where we are both inside the struggle - WSL and I-CL have generally agreed. On school meals F was commenting from outside.

Does this invalidate F? No: it just tells us what needs to be done in F now. As Landis pointed out, if we just started with a few women and proceeded by explaining our full politics, we should still be talking to a very narrow circle. F has put us in a better position to do much more, and to develop answers concretely, without corrupting us or putting us in a false position in relation to the class struggle.

The WSL comrades have pointed to a real one-sidedness in F. But could F have developed without one-sidedness?

AM. In Oxford last year we were involved in a struggle about nurseries. We had contacts in Nottingham. They went to the F conference. At the F conference there was some discussion of this struggle. But the Nottingham women did not get any lead for their struggle from anyone but us. They were disturbed by the F conference - just a lot of talk about the cuts and no lead. They organised a Nursery Action Conference which was much better.

You don't just need a paper, but also activists who can direct the grass-roots struggle.

HF. There is also the occupation of Wandsworth Nightingale Rd nursery. F is avoiding bringing up the issues of these struggles.

Landis. Why do you say 'avoid'? We may miss things, but we've never censored or toned down anything for the paper.

HF. In the women's right to work leaflet, the demands are very inadequate.

Landis. That's a valid criticism.

HF. Strike action to defend jobs is crucial. E.g. there has been a recent

experience with an occupation in Coventry. And the fact that the leadership will do nothing is also crucial.

O'Keefe. The real difference here is on the weight given to denouncing the bureaucracy. It's not a difference in assessment of the bureaucracy. But look for example at the democracy struggle in the LP. The pro-democracy people are a bad lot. But do we get into the struggle, or do we focus on denouncing Moss Evans? We get in, we avoid being disruptive, we maintain our basic positions (e.g. for TU democracy).

We'd criticise the WSL as too religiously regular on denouncing the bureaucrats.

Also you seem to think F should do all the I-CL should do. We disagree. We think broad movements for limited objectives are quite principled. E.g. housewives' price committees, pro-labour-party committees in US unions... Of course the Trotskyists carry on their other work too. You can even ally with bureaucrats for limited objectives. Another example: Engels' support for the ILP as against the SDF.

The WSL don't seem to think that sort of approach is legitimate. We disagree.

But suppose even serious errors exist on our part. Still, there are many women round F. Could we not collaborate? E.g. AMS could write on NUPE and school meals cuts for F.

TR. We don't have a position on F. We're discussing how you relate to that sort of movement. But I-CL seem to be trying to keep it broad at the expense of programme. E.g. the F right to work leaflet's demands are quite inadequate. They don't mention occupations, strike action/support occupations, etc. They are just demands acceptable to the bureaucracy.

AMS. Is it a matter of no differences in intentions, but just ignorance on a particular issue? No, it's a question of the method by which F is constructed. You talk about turning the women's movement towards the labour movement? Does that mean turning the remnants of the Working Women's Charter? Why won't F end up the same as the WWC? Anyway it contradicts basing yourself on struggles. If F had based itself on struggles, it would know what to write about these issues.

We don't just go in to hammer the bureaucracy. But in the process of the struggles the fact comes out that workers are defeated without correct politics and leadership.

TR. Why isn't occupation on the leaflet?

Landis. It's an oversight.

AMS. The first F conference had 500 women, many of them working class. The second was smaller and also less working-class. Why?

Landis. It was a different sort of conference. But there is no evidence that interest in F has declined.

Alan. The WSL seems to believe that limited campaigns are all right locally but not nationally. In a previous discussion TR said that the WSL was against the idea of a limited platform like SO's; yet obviously in local campaigns you do use limited platforms.

In F we have set about building a campaign 'from the top down'. The WSL concentrates one-sidedly on building from local struggles. Of course a national campaign like F must prove itself in local struggles. But the WSL's approach amounts to walking on one foot.

Landis. F is not an I-CL front. E.g. we're a minority on the Steering Committee - and we want to keep it that way, not to kill F by pushing too fast. TR said the demands on the F right to work leaflet are acceptable to the bureaucracy. Yes, but sometimes it is useful to take up what the bureaucracy proclaims but does nothing about. We've got to build a movement as well as

a leadership - build the confidence to stand up to the existing leadership.

AMS. How do you think F differs from the Working Women's Charter?

Landis. The WWC just focused on getting verbal support from trade union leaders.

TR. Yes, it's worth pushing policies which the bureaucrats support on paper but not in action - e.g. occupations. We're not against broad campaigns, but they must be fighting campaigns, and that's quite different from a broad movement which just says women should fight back.

(There was also some brief discussion on the forthcoming CDLM conference, and on the Labour leadership crisis).

@@@