

## THE CRISIS IN THE BRITISH SECTION.

The debate on the Malvinas has shaken up the Workers Socialist League. It has forced comrades to think and to question the position that we took on the War. Some comrades have since argued that during the debate, other questions started to be formulated and that the dispute ceased to be solely about the Malvinas War with Argentina. In a sense they were both right and wrong, as was the case in the debate about Paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the R.S.D.L.P. in 1903, the debate remained on the topic in question, the Malvinas War in our case, but has far reaching consequences.

This document arises out of that debate in an attempt to understand why we came to the position that we argued throughout the War and is written by one of the few ex-ICLers who voted with the Tendency

### The ICL Conference Debate about the S@ Turn in 1980.

Comrades who were in the ICL in 1980 will remember the debate around the S@ turn. I then, presented a document called "Counter Proposal" to the idea of the S@ turn. Looking back on it, it was a very weak document, but it did however point to the question that was on all the ICL comrades minds at the time, the question of convergence.

The idea of convergence as presented by the ICL leadership, was that the Broad groups around S@, would over a period of time be drawn into being part of the ICL. The argument being that there was a layer of militants in the L.P. who would not be won directly to Trotskyism, but were prepared to work with us. Once we had them organised around us then we could systematically educate them and through joint work win them over to the ICL.

In "Counter Proposal", the question of convergence was raised in practical terms;

"1. Does convergence take place all over the country at one go? If so what about the major differences between local groups, some will be ready to join before others, others will oppose it and could well be totally put off by the manoeuvre.

"2. Do we converge when it suits the local group? Having converged does that prohibit us from setting up another group in the same place? If we do, wouldn't an element of continuity be good? So that the proposal for convergence is in practice dropped. Having now created permanent groups based on minimal activity, what does the League hold out to those in the S\* groups? Increased subs, another national conference, more work or perhaps membership of a cliquey club." (Counter-Proposal, Evington. ICL IB42)

There were no minutes of the conference circulated to the membership and I do not have a copy of the ICL leadership's document which for security reasons, was totally withdrawn. But the ICL leadership argued for convergence to take place within a year at least. The idea that convergence should not take place, was dismissed as dangerous liquidationism, although Cde Kinnell conceded that some comrades were supporting his position from a liquidationist position.

In the ICL IB 43 "S\* Groups and the League- Problems and Tasks", Cde Macauley quotes from the Conference document;

"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 standard of discipline, i.e. convergence."

The perspective of convergence hasn't been heard of in the last year and a half, however the complete liquidation of the League has been avoided because during



and after the fusion, no one bothered to explain through the IBs just what the idea of convergence and the relationship of S@ to the League, actually was. Therefore the rank and file of the old W.S.L. did not readily accept it.

The other reason why organisational liquidation has been avoided, was spelt out in 1979 by Cde Gale in "What was wrong with the S\*\*V and why there should not be an S@\*" (ICL IB29) in which he raised serious doubts about the reality of the existence of the people we were supposed to be drawing around us in the LP. The practise of the last 3 years, has shown that Cde Gale in his document, was largely right, and even where those people have existed, they have tended to create their own organisations such as London Labour Briefing. Cde Gale noted then that such people saw "S\*\*V as just a front for W- especially those who were somewhere on the periphery of the revolutionary left".

What has been lacking in the WSL is that given the understanding of the dangers of liquidationism from the S@ turn, and the fact that it has not followed the ICL leaderships' expectations, why has there not been any analysis of the failure and an attempt to rectify our orientation.

### The Need for Convergence Now !

The S@ turn has of course brought some people around us, certainly not the massive numbers that were expected. But obviously we have to take these people into account.

The idea of convergence is that the S@ groups should become politically closer to us and then they fuse with the WSL. In the present climate it is imperative that this happens. We are in a situation where there is a real possibility of our right to be in the LP at all, being challenged. In such a situation we will obviously need to be flexible, but at the same time and more importantly we need to have a clear profile of how and why we differ politically from the Reformist Left. We need a paper that puts over a trotskyist programme for the present struggles (after the 1937 LP conference when the Left were hammered, 'The Militant' carried its full programme in the November issue. Slightly different from S@?). It is only through having a clear analysis and a distinct alternative programme that we will win those serious people around us in the LP., in a period when we are being threatened with exclusion from the LP.

The alternative to convergence and a tightening up of the paper, is to lose those people we have managed to draw around us, when the going gets tough, due to a lack of a clear perspective or far worse, to sacrifice our political programme and independence and press to stay with them.

There is of course a serious problem here in that convergence isn't something that can be done cold, without a material basis for winning the local groups to us. This was something that was completely lacking in the understanding in the ICL debate of 1980, and it has been lacking in the understanding of comrades since then, although unconsciously. It has been recognised by the failure to carry through convergence. Convergence can only be based on joint work outside of the LP, in struggles such as the NHS dispute. The reason being that the majority of the people in the S@ groups are from the LP. To break them from reformism, we have to demonstrate the weakness of their political ideas through struggle. The LP is their ideological home. The struggle inside the LP is about the rights of revolutionaries and specifically democratic centralists to remain in the LP. The people in the S@ broad groups do not face, at this moment the same attacks directly, and may not understand the importance of democratic centralism, unless they can be won to our politics in other situations. In these circumstances, we need to take them into struggles and fight with them for our programme. The fact that we haven't developed a specific programme for the major dispute of the class at the moment, is not accidental but part of the same overall problem - namely that we have allowed ourselves to become an organisation which has abandoned the method of



Marxism and the direct fight for our programme, and replaced it on the one hand a regurgitation of the "great theorists"; Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and to a lesser extent Engels and Cannon, and on the other, drifting into political accommodation to reformism in practice, for example substituting for the United Front tactic the idea of "staying with the Left" and gaining agreement to organise with them, by limiting our politics, instead of "marching separately and striking together."

### Revisionism and Entryism.

It may seem bizarre for a group which is operating inside the LP to ask itself, what it thinks it is out to achieve by entryism. It is only more bizarre when the group in question doesn't really have an answer. So what are we doing, as Trotskyists, working inside the LP, the party of reformism, and what do we hope to achieve?

The standard trotskyist reply is that we are working inside the LP, because it has the active allegiance of the mass of the working class, and is open, to a certain extent, and will allow us to argue our politics openly. This is very much in line with Cde Lenin's reasoning when he pointed out that "The B.S.P. can openly say that Henderson is a traitor and still remain in the Labour Party" and argued that "In the case of the Labour Party, it is a question of cooperation of the advanced minority with the great majority of British Workers". Lenin does however also make the point in the same speech "Prove to me ... that we will be prevented from exercising our right of criticism in there. Only if you prove that will you be able to prove that Cde McLaine (who supported working inside the LP) is wrong" (Lenin speech at 2001 New Parks p70).

The reason we are carrying out this tactic is, of course, to break workers from Reformism,

Such a tactic is not however, overriding. In International Communist no1 (the theoretical journal of the ICL), the relationship of our present entryist tactic and our revolutionary principles was summed up very clearly:

"Such work must be seen as a TACTIC not a STRATEGY. Its guiding principles must be the idea that the direct struggle of the working class is primary, above any parliamentary or Labour Party considerations. That idea determines both the political CONTENT of such work - the revolutionary PROGRAMME must never be subordinated to the TACTIC - and the method of work - always trying to turn the Labour Party OUTWARDS". (IC1 p12).

It is of paramount importance that this is not forgotten, in the present period, because there are disturbing signs of confusion inside the League, as to how we should orientate ourselves. The old ICL was of the view (as was the old WSL, but my concern is with the old ICL), that the central focus at all times, was the work place. That the working class, congregated by the needs of Capital, is strongest at the point of production. The reason being that at the point of production, workers congregated together can act together and as part of the class are able to attack directly the returns on capital investment through strike action, etc. It is this power and the fact of the congregating of workers into small areas, where they are able to organise, that distinguishes the urban proletariat from all other exploited and oppressed sections of society. While other exploited and oppressed sections may indeed play major roles in struggles, it would be wrong to look to such sections for the backbone of the revolutionary cadre. Obviously it would also be wrong to assume that the proletariat is male and heterosexual and white, and often those sections that aren't are at the forefront of the struggle, for example the only section of the S.P.D. in 1914 to take an Internationalist stand was the Women's Section.

It is also to the actual workers on the shop floor rather than even those who hold positions of effective leadership in the labour movement, to whom we orientate, not the union bureaucrats and Labour M.P.s and Councillors, however



useful and beneficiary that sympathetic Officials can be. It is obvious that the shop floor workers have a qualitatively different relationship to Capital than that relationship to Capital that Union Officials, who are better paid and tend to have a managerial lifestyle on the one hand and M.P.s and Councillors who are committed in most cases to managing the British Capitalist State.

As it is put in International Communist 1 "The central focus of the League's work is the work place and the Trade Unions. We orientate towards the rank and file, recognising the fundamental role of the Labour bureaucracy as "Labour Lieutenants of Capital"(p11).

It is with this in mind that the question of what we are doing in the Labour Party and where we are going should be answered.

We are working inside the LP because it allows us to argue our politics in the very heart of organised Social Democracy. It is obvious and has always been obvious that Social Democracy wasn't going to allow this to continue indefinitely and the experience of the SLL not to mention earlier expulsions are only confirmation of this. What we are beginning to see now, with the Right Wing in control of the NEC is just that, Social Democracy moving to defend itself.

In a period of witchhunts, it is imperative that we are clear as to exactly what our purpose and tactics are. It is not a period when careless mistakes can be made and got away with. Firstly, a withhunt is above all else a heightening of the struggle between reformism and revolutionary socialism, with reformism being on the offensive. As is normally the case, reformism being primarily pragmatic and subjective, the struggle is started not on the theoretical plain but on organisational grounds, since it is weakest on theoretical back up. It will win if it can silence us, and thereby avoid having to fight on the theoretical plain. Whether or not expulsion follow would depend on how successfully we are silenced, after all why destroy perfectly good slaves once you have enslaved them, which is basically where we would be if we were effectively silenced. Social Democracy will loose if it is unable to expel us or silence us and we are able to fight for our programme. It will also have lost if in the course of expelling us it is forced to expel part of its own left flank, since that is the major part of the entryist tactic, breaking off the left Social Democratic workers and winning them to revolutionary socialism. It is only through a political struggle that such a break would occur. The M.T.s attempt to fight the bureaucracy on organisational grounds and shelving the programmatical differences has played into the hands of the NEC. M.T. have scorned the political capital to be made out of the Register and now have turned to the BOURGEOIS courts! Something that many of their own comrades must realise to be in total contravention of the rules of the Labour Movement.

The importance of fighting the Register is that it is over this question that a clear split has occurred inside Social Democracy. It is clearly seen as a witchhunting manoeuvre by the Right wing. There has been a massive reaction to it in the CLPs, and it is this that is of importance. It is of course true as was pointed out in Socialist Organiser 103 that "According to the letter of the Register regulations, the Socialist Organiser Alliance is perfectly lawful". That of course is all well and good for the comrades in Socialist Organiser Alliance. It would however be politically wrong for anyone considering themselves to be revolutionary socialists to accept registration, just because they were able to. It is also obvious that the WSL is not able to register, since we are a democratic centralist league with our own national and international organisation.

However the politics of registering is to concede to the reformist bureaucracy the first battle, and to politically confuse our potential allies. Inevitably the second battle would be quick as the registered group found the rules suddenly changed and that they could no longer register and are therefore expelled. In such a situation, the ability to fight back politically would be hampered, because registering would have, not only compromised the group but also



compartmentalised off from possible allies. As the saying goes "divide and rule".

It was suggested by Cde Kinnel and has now been endorsed by the NC that in the event of S@ being prevented from being in the LP, then we should wind up S@ and instead involve ourselves with Tribune!! (WSL 121). Nothing shows the political confusion of our leading comrades more than this idea.

In International Communist 1, the ICL correctly stated that "Strict ideological clarification and self demarcation and an active struggle for communist consciousness was to mark the Communist International" (IC 1 p10). Selling a Left Reformist paper, even with articles from our own comrades, will provide the exact opposite, total political confusion about the distinction between ourselves as revolutionaries with a Transitional Programme for achieving Socialism and the reformist with a minimum programme for alleviating Capitalism's crisis. In the same theoretical journal the ICL recognised that the Left Reformists did not represent a proletarian wing (p11), given that the idea of selling their paper and building their groups is to put it mildly - total liquidationism. It would be wrong for us in such a situation to consider ourselves even as principled Trotskyists.

Back in 1979, Cde Kinnel wrote "We do however maintain an independent presence as the ICL; we do however continue to see the spontaneous mass action of the working class - mainly at the point of production - as the key to socialist politics. If it becomes impossible to argue open revolutionary politics in the official movement or if the class struggle develops to a point where there is a real contradiction in resources between relating to direct action struggles and steady work in the official movement, then we will have to reassess tactical allocations" (ICL IB28 The SC & S@ Results and Prospects in our orientation to political reformism). No ICL comrade could have thought or agreed that our reassessing tactical allocations would mean closing down our independent presence - at least in theory. Cde Kinnel should reread some of his earlier writings and realise that the need to "swim against the stream" has always been part of being a revolutionary.

Finally since the WSL still stands by the first four congresses of the Communist International, here is the first theses on the conditions of admission to the Communist International:

"1. All propaganda and agitation must bear a really communist character and correspond to the programme and decisions of the Communist International. All the Party's press organs must be run by reliable communists who have proved their devotion to the cause of the proletariat. The dictatorship of the proletariat must not be treated as a current formula learnt off by heart. Propaganda for it must be carried out in such a way that its necessity is comprehensible to every simple worker, every woman worker, every soldier and peasant from the facts of their daily lives, which must be observed systematically by our press and used day by day.

"The periodical and other press and all the party's publishing institutions must be subordinated to the party leadership, regardless of whether, at any given moment, the party as a whole is legal or illegal ....

"In the columns of the press, at public meetings, in the trade unions, in the co operatives - wherever the members of the Communist International can gain admittance - it is necessary to brand not only the bourgeoisie but also its helpers, the reformists of every shade, systematically and pitilessly."

(2CCI Vol1 p304. New)  
(Parks.)

Evington.  
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