

A question of leadership an open letter to the EC

I have taken this unusual step of writing an open letter to the EC because of the crisis our organ. faces. Fundamentally this revolves around the inability of the WSL to carry out initiatives to their full potential and at this particular point in time to take the next steps in building the organisation. While the present internal dispute has exacerbated the situation it certainly hasn't been its cause. To my knowledge all the NC members prior to the present dispute were worried that we were simply not rigorous enough in prioritising and organising our work. While a substantial element of this problem rests on the lack of members with sufficient political and technical skills (which in turn is a comment on our cadre development) and technical and financial resources, it is also the case that the EC has failed to give a dynamic enough lead and has seemingly been in the grip of a paralysis. This has now in my opinion reached crisis point. The days when we 'muddle through in the best British tradition' are over because as an organisation we will not match up to the task imposed on us by the class struggle.

It would be total naivety on anyones part to believe that the present internal dispute has not worsened an already bad situation causing a further erosion of norms and discipline. I cite the debate on the Falklands at the summer school where a section of our organisation behaved as though they were at an NUS conference (about 15 yrs ago). The growing tendency amongst a small section of the minority towards amalgam of our position on Ireland and the Labour party with the majority position on the Falklands. I would stress this rather crude equation where comrades are fighting a mythical battle with themselves is not emanating from the leadership or the vast majority of its supporters. After all differences on the MP only exist at the level of nuance, with the exception of comrade Morrow's position on registration, and the divisions on Ireland cut right across the present dispute.

On a general level we have a considerable drop out of membership which predates the present dispute and fundamentally relates to the continued failure to seriously organise our work and push it ahead. Balanced against these problems is a bewilderment amongst the membership who have united in the tasks that confront us on a day to day basis and cannot understand the lack of direction from the EC. It might interest comrades to know of a little joke which seems to be doing the rounds: 'The organisation has got a lot of problems, quite a few disagreements but everyone in the branches is working well, what is the EC doing about them? making them worse, let's elect a totally new EC no-one can do as bad the present lot'. A joke! not very funny but certainly indicative. This situation cannot be allowed to continue in a living organisation because unlike a sect our work is grounded in day to day tasks of the class struggle which continually

confronts us with reality and a routine which necessarily takes its toll. If we were not in the present dispute then the situation would still be grim, why be in an organisation which doesn't seem to be developing? If such a failure of leadership continues at the present time then the dispute will become more and more consuming as we turn in on ourselves, it will become the central axis of our existence, such a factional atmosphere will not end with the special conference. Now I certainly don't see myself as neutral in the present dispute and I stand by my vote at the NC against the calling of the conference. However my feelings about the dispute, the sins of the minority that I perceive are neither here nor there, the point is we had a bad situation in the WSL which the internal dispute has exacerbated. The question is how do we proceed from this situation, how do we develop the organisation?

Most immediately, we must organise our work in the two most crucial areas industrial and the labour party. While this is to a large extent a question of the EC beginning to give more central direction and drive to our work, it also means the organisation has to regain a certain sense of proportion in terms of the internal dispute, in relation to the tasks that face us. It is time to restate our central tasks, our political norms (hence the resolution) to turn the movement outwards. The following is both an expansion on the resolution and a concretisation of some of the ways we must develop in the immediate period ahead. It has also evolved into a partial perspectives document based on the methodological experience we have gained over the last period and also on the problem and experiences that the early communist party had in fighting sectarianism in the labour movement and attempting to build an organisation in that movement. Obviously I am aware of the difference in proportion of a couple of hundred people and our predecessors. However we are, not surprisingly coming up against similar problems both internally and in building the movement. This stems from the fact that while they fought on terrain where the labour movement had not hardened out into the bureaucratic form that has existed for decades, we are now in a period where the material basis of labourism under the impact of the crisis is breaking up.

I believe we are entering a crucial period of development for the WSL, decisions we make are going to be absolutely critical to our ability to build a communist movement in the working class. We have to take these opportunities now or we will face a major setback.

We need to lay the basis for a R & F movement. Comrade Smith surmising up at the end of the summer school was quite right when he stated we need to recruit industrial workers. Comrade Carolan was quite right when he stated in the paper the need to build a rank and file movement. Both are obvious but neither industrial workers or rank and file movements can wish into existence. Our immediate task on the industrial front is to lay the basis for a r&f movement. In one sense that has already been done in an ad hoc manner with our work around the NHS dispute, BL and the conference on union democracy. Central to this is the Tebbit campaign because this provides the basis for uniting our industrial work. However the pace,

the profile, the resources we have put into it are ludicrous. Quite simply it has to be prioritised by the EC and given resources to become a campaign rather than a nice idea. It is through this that we will recruit industrial workers. Our immediate task in achieving this is an amalgam of what the SLL did after Hungary and how we developed the mobilising committee in the LP. Quite simply we have to campaign to recruit our industrial contacts and amongst the SWP not on the basis that we have all the political answers but on the basis that we are going to build a communist movement within the Trades Unions, we have that basis in the Tebbit campaign, join us in that task. The transparent betrayal of ASLEF, the upturn in the class struggle, the SWP turning their back on the industrial struggle and the Tory legislation let alone the general situation mean that the consciousness of militants will have been shaken, we can offer them a way forward. Let's not make an obstacle course for them to join or be ~~inadequate~~ lackadaisical in our approach. Now it is my guess that the majority of branches will not be up to making such a turn, such a campaign needs to be centrally directed through the OC who will have to overcome the problems of conservatism in the branches, other comrades with the relevant industrial and political experience could be drawn into this work. That has to be worked out by the OC which must also designate responsibility for tasks to be carried out. The second prong of developing the Tebbit campaign is the fact that through the Tebbit campaign we have an 'in' to a whole range of 'important' militants and bureaucrats who we will not recruit (and probably in some cases wouldn't want to) but we must start using them, not only are they important in themselves as regards Tebbit but they also provide a road to other people who have not even heard of us. If this work is done we will have been able to regroup a number of militants into the WSL provide a real basis for the Tebbit campaign and begin albeit in a limited way to be seen as a pole of attraction for a wider layer of militants as the SLL was in the late 50s and IS in the early 60s.

Recruitment from the labour party and the building of a communist movement in the LP.

... In the ICL ~~was stated~~ it was stated right from the outset of the S. turn that if it was going to be successful then to a large extent it would depend on our own conscious actions in attempting to develop the movement. We are now faced with a situation where a witch hunt is almost upon us, we are not sufficiently prepared to fight it or to seize what could be a major opportunity to break a sizeable section of the labour party activists to communism. While the tempo is different in many respects the situation in the LP is akin to the process militants are going through in the TUs. For a number of years there was unity on the left. For a number of years there was unity on the left, the CLPs were in the ascendancy were winning i.e. labour activism like r&fism seemed enough. When Benn failed to win the deputy leadership that unity was broken, it has been fragmenting ever since and with Foot going over to the right last December and the emergence of a regrouped right in the TU trying to back them, the witch hunt has gained momentum. Now it may well be that a compromise is reached, I doubt it but it is certain.

to say either way. Predictably Militant are not going to put up a fight, they are resigned to losing members, their organisational defense is developing into a classically sectarian one, they hope to recruit out of it but this will be done at the expense of developing a movement, which in this case means objectively weakening its ability to stand up to attacks from the right. We should not take this attitude. We have quite rightly said that the fight is on now not only against registration but also to unify the CLPs which are our base now and our potential recruiting ground. Now this presents two immediate tasks for us, firstly the paper must begin to orientate itself more to this struggle just as it must be able to speak to industrial workers, it has to give direction and speak the language of this milieu whom we hope to turn towards communism. At present the paper is consumerist it seems to be published for WSL members and other left groups, such a propagandist approach is totally out of order in the present climate. It reminds me of an old 'our norman' cartoon where Norman asks the steward about Trotskyism, it ends up with Norman dozing off. Secondly we have to become more aggressive in recruiting S. contacts. As with the industrial militants the situation has become more transparent, labour activism in itself is not enough a hard centralised organisation is necessary to fight the present battle. Well intentioned lefts on councils e.g. the GLC are simply not equipped for the tasks that face them not least because they haven't got a clue about the TU movement let alone the tenacity or political understanding to know what and who they are up against. We on the other hand have. Now all this seems pretty elementary, the point is we are not doing it. The development of a higher profile in the struggle through our publications and taking the organisational lead will be the way in which we recruit people, not by simply saying we told you so. Such a central direction and leadership has to come from the EC if the work is to be carried out properly. -

The above organisational profile and turn outwards to recruitment provides the basis for us to be up fighting the witch hunt. If the right decide to go for broke and the logic of the faction fight is allowed to develop every decision and action we take will become of major importance. Of course if the right are defeated over registration then a very major victory will have been won which will once again open up the party to the left; however I think we will lose and we must prepare for the ensuing struggle. This means clearly seeing that the fight while centred on registration at the moment will ultimately become a fight over expulsions. This means that issues such as registration will have to be seen as tactical and will depend on the balance of forces at any given time. Immediate plans have to be made for who we want to keep in the party and thought has to be given as to how the two halves of the WSL will function. Our basic concern must be to maintain the unity of the CLPs, our objective must be that the CLPs will not carry out expulsions. If it comes to expulsions we must be very clear on the tasks we set for our comrades working in a larger expelled tendency. Namely we would maintain a broad group profile attempt to win such an necessarily unstable bloc to

the WSL, give such a grouping our class struggle perspective have an orientation back to the LP ie. we fight to rejoin we see ourselves as an expelled tendency of the party. We have to be quite clear on this point because we may well be faced with an ultra left rejection of the LP from sections of the WSL as well as others expelled; also all the sectarians who have never done a days work in developing the movement, will undoubtedly come rushing to declare the revolutionary party. The arguments we use against such ultra leftism are straightforward - we don't quit the fight in the TUs if the going gets tough for us, likewise we don't quit in the political wing of the labour movement. Also we just have to have a sense of proportion as to who we are and who the expelled elements will be at best we are talking about a few thousand activists who have a very one sided political development, we have to make communists out of them. The only revision of such an approach is if a split looks like breaking the hegemony of labourism, however I don't believe in fairy tales.

While the above can only act as a very general guideline the situation may well not develop that far and there will obviously be certain nuances which will demand a different approach, the point is that the organisation is neither geared up to the immediate tasks ie the witch hunt or fully politically armed to take on the tasks which will confront us if the right do 'go for broke'.