OPEN LETTER FOR A REVOLUTIONARY REGROUPMENT

INTRODUCTION:

THE CRISIS OF WEST EUROPEAN CAPITALISM

We are already entering the most serious world capitalist recession for decades, and the prospects are that the recession will become deeper and more serious still in the period ahead. It will hit and disrupt a capitalist world already shaken by social and political crises. It will draw larger layers of the working class into struggle against the immediate effects on their lives of the capitalist system It will continue the process of the last half dozen years in which simmering crisis has, in many European countries, mobilised whole layers of militant and even revolutionary-minded workers into struggle, thus partly reversing the widespread depoliticisation of the working clas which was the consequence of the betrayal of the post-World War 2 working class upsurges in western Europe by the 'Communist' Party and Socialist Party leaderships, and then of capitalism's prolonged post-war boom (itself a product of working class betrayal and defeat, and inconceivable otherwise). This simmering crisis offers tremendous opportunities for recreating a mass revolutionary workers' movement, for building substantial revolutionary organisations; and thus for undoing the terrible effects on the working class of the betrayals, defeats, slaughters, and mass disappointments leading to demoralisation which Social Democracy, Stalinism, and Fascism inflicted on our class and on revolutionary socialism, over many decades.

The relative affluence which the capitalists believed had bought off the working class and weaned it irrevocably away from dreams of building a better, socialist, society under its own democratic control, will, now that capitalism demands **cuts** in working class living standards, reveal itself as a double-edged sword cutting at capitalist power, as workers refuse to accept the sacrifices capitalism demands. This generation of workers in western Europe has not know decisive defeat. The waves of factory seizures with which workers, all over Europe, have reacted to factory closures, are only the first proofs of its will and ability to fight. The 'traditional' parties of the working class, Social Democratic and 'Communist', are most certainly still a powerful force and a power to be reckoned with in aiding capitalism to control and beat down the working class. In 1968 the CP was strong enough still to derail the insurrectionary general strike in France. But they face greater difficulties in aiding capitalism than they did in the '30s and '40s. Now they **pay** for their betrayals, as they never did in the past (except by lost support through resultant apathy).

The continued growth of support for explicitly revolutionary candidates since the betrayal by the French CP of the 1968 General Strike shows that. Also it is a warning, "Never Again", to any "workers' party" that would so mislead the working class that any section of it could again allow itself to be crushed without a fight (as in Germany in the '30s) and marched into concentration camps or whatever new horrors capitalism throws up. Since the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy took power in the Soviet Union and seized control of the Communist International, there have been few openings so great for recreating powerful revolutionary organisations which, taking advantage of capitalism's crises, will put an end to capitalism. The building of such organisations, the activity of revolutionaries armed with the science of Marxism, is the decisive question on which will depend the outcome of the imminent major battles between Capital and Labour — revolutionary working class victories or major defeats.

BRITAIN

Britain is one of the sickest members of an increasingly sick Europe. Zero growth or less. Bounding inflation. Increasing polarisation between the classes, despite the existence of a yearning-for yesteryear resistance to it represented in the last election by the six million Liberal votes. The virtual certainty that the process of polarisation will continue, and that the present lull will not last long beyond the election whoever wins it. The inability of the ruling class to muster the strength to either create a non-sectarian superstructure in the Six Counties of occupied Ireland (and increasing evidence since the UWC strike that they are now so weak as to be abandoning even the feeble attempt) or to crush the military resistance of the militia of the oppressed Catholics, the Irish →

Republican Army. The emergence of the Army as a discernibly independent force in British political life, running one whole 'province' of the 'UK'. The continued strengthening of the repressive apparatus of the state, under Labour as under the Tories, in preparation for clashes with the working class and especially for war against that embodiment of working class power, the picket squad. The growth of a Fascist party, small but nevertheless the most powerful since the '30s; together with a mushrooming of 'private' would-be strike-breaking, sometimes para-military, anti-working class organisations in preparation for the expected confrontations. Above all, the still unbeaten and uncowed forces of organised labour, which can, within limits, still be manipulated by the Trade Union bureaucracy and sections of which defer, still, to a Labour Party administration, but which will be forced to fight back, will fight back, and has the muscle to fight back against the big cuts in its living standards which the capitalist class is now forced to attempt.

These are the elements of the gathering storm in Britain, which presents immense opportunities for building serious and substantial revolutionary organisations now and amidst the class battles of the near future. These opportunities will be much more favourable in the event that the class struggles unfold when a Labour government is in office, one trapped by its own — inevitable — attempts to run capitalism for the capitalists when what is needed — and will increasingly be seen to be needed, especially if revolutionaries are adequate to their task — is to destroy that system

But such opportunities will not continue indefinitely, always available. The working class will have to pay dearly in the years to come for weeks and months wasted by revolutionaries now: and our starting point must be the woefully inadequate state of revolutionary socialism in Britain now — inadequate either to seize the opportunities or to perform the duties which the class struggle both offers us and demands from us. The activities of the National Front, on a very small scale as yet and thriving largely on racism, are a mild taste of the dangers in the event that the working class remains under reformist leadership and suffers the grave defeats which are more than merely possible if it does.

Unless a revolutionary organisation is built within the working class, restructuring and rebuilding the labour movement, politically and ideologically, then future crippling defeats for the working class are probable. Those who do not learn the lessons of our history and draw the necessary practical conclusions now may yet live to see some of its most tragic chapters re-enacted in Britain. It is not the business of revolutionaries now to indulge in the optimism of 'cheerful idiots', glorying in the elemental social strength which our class **does** have. It is our duty to look at the situation in the sombre light of the experience of other sections of the international working class which lacked neither strength nor combativity but which, nevertheless, went down to defeat when capitalist crisis forced decisive class battles on a class led by vacillators, reformists, or outright traitors. Only by remembering and learning can we change the condition from one where our class is still able to hold its own, for now, to one where it is capable of winning power in society; that is, build a mass revolutionary party.

The importance of the building of a revolutionary communist party does not depend on particular situations or particular periods — it is a constant concern of revolutionaries Nevertheless, there are periods when the urgency is especially sharp or the opportunities are particularly large. There are periods in which the situation on the left is particularly critical.

It is in this light that we must examine the major revolutionary organisations in Britain which are to the left of that redundant second-string party of reformism, the mis-named Communist Party of Great Britain.

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

In 1967 Workers Fight put out its first public statement, condemning the arid sectarian paralysis of the main 'Trotskyist' tendencies, the Socialist Labour League (now Workers Revolutionary Party) and the 'Militant', and calling for a Trotskyist Regroupment.

In the event it was the International Socialists who responded most aptly to the radicalisation at that time. Turning their face towards the working class and their politics towards the left, IS grew rapidly. Yet the old centrist leadership, round Cliff, have kept their hold and defeated and expelled successive oppositions. In the last three years, particularly, IS has degenerated rapidly. Although IS still contains many excellent militants, internal political life has been squashed flat, and the contents of 'Socialist Worker' have become increasingly trivial and shallow. As with all centrist tendencies, strands of apparently revolutionary politics are inextricably mixed with reformism and capitulation to bourgeois ideological influence in the working class.

At the Rank and File conference on March 30th this year, IS called for and secured the defeat of a resolution spelling out guidelines for a vigorous fight against racialism and for equality for women, and for a revolutionary attitude to nationalisation and workers' control — on the grounds that these demands were "too advanced", too far beyond the "minimal" policies a militant rank and file movement should have!

Unfortunately, if IS is willing to leave the more difficult questions of the class struggle aside for the moment, the capitalist class is not. Only weeks after IS had argued that the question of workers' control and workers' inquiries was far "too advanced", the British Steel Corporation announced 1000 redundancies on Teesside. The Shop Stewards' chairman, an IS National Committee member, had one answer: the sackings must be delayed until a Government inquiry....

The IS leadership prefers to have 'rank and file' conferences and 'rank and file papers' held together by the most shallow organisational, trade unionist approach, with a large dose of demagogy and pretence, rather than use its forces in any serious fight for revolutionary politics.

In any situation of sharp conflict, the IS leadership have shown themselves panic-stricken and dithering. When the war in Ireland against British imperialism spilled over into Britain, with the IRA bombing of the officers' mess at Aldershot barracks in February 1972, after the massacre of 13 unarmed civilians in Derry, 'Socialist Worker' retreated into condemnations of 'indiscriminate terrorism' In 'Socialist Worker', the then National Secretary of IS, branded himself and his organisation with infamy, with a classic statement of the panic and cowardice of a centrist in an imperialist country when faced with the revolt of the colonial victims. A Guevara could say, echoing the sentiments of revolutionaries from time immemorial: "When ever death may surprise us, let it be welcome so long as other hands reach out to pick up the rifle that falls from our hands." Mr Hallas reversed this sentiment, appropriately, with the admonition to Irish freedom fighters that for every British soldier killed there were a hundred to take his place!

When a mass strike movement exploded in July 1972, against the jailing of the five dockers, IS nervously waited to see how the workers would move before IS would dare call for a General Strike.

IS may be able to expose the corruption and the hypocrisies of the ruling class — 'Socialist Worker' does it, often brilliantly, sometimes disgustingly (as when it named blackmail victims) — but for **overthrowing** the capitalist class IS can contribute nothing useful.

THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY AND THE 'MILITANT'

The Workers Revolutionary Party and the 'Militant' have continued their sectarian progress.

The 'Militant' has emerged as an institutionalised and licensed 'left', 'Marxist' wing in the Labour Party. They control the LPYS by agreement with Transport House, which apparently believes that, after all its bad experiences with successive youth movements, the present one, with the 'Militant' faction as a built-in sedative, is the best they can get. In reality the LPYS is a stagnant and declining grouplet, under a 'Militant' leadership self-evidently incapable of building a mass working class youth movement. Dominated by the elderly, if not senile, statesmen of the 'Militant' Editorial Board, it is a passive propagandist sect, with about half a dozen stock responses to cover all situations (Nationalise the 250 Monopolies; Working Class Unity; Labour: Act for Workers; etc) It combines absurd nonsense like the idea that the working class rules in Syria with neutrality between Arab victims and the Zionist state.

The 'Militant' subscribes to a totally mechanistic conception of an evolving, organic ripening of the working class towards a socialist consciousness. Some undefined consciousness in history has decided (and let the 'Militant' in on the secret) that it is predetermined that the process will occur within and through the Labour Party, and only the Labour Party. It is the task of socialists, therefore, to 'predict' the course of these events and take up the right position to await them and to relate to them, as a man wishing to collect rain water might place the bucket in the right place. They explicitly envisage a peaceful road to socialism. Such a conception has nothing in common with Marxism.

As the struggle sharpens, the organic **right-wing** nature of both 'Militant' and the WRP becomes increasingly clear. Their reaction to the armed struggle of the Irish people against British imperialism has been a scandalous capitulation to chauvinism, hidden by pseudo-Marxist phrases about 'terrorism'.

The 'Militant' wants British troops out of Ireland – when there is a non-sectarian Trade Union Defence Force. In its eyes, the mass strikes of recent years in Britain are unimportant compared with the paper resolutions for nationalisation at Labour Party or Union conferences. They proudly proclaim "Labour Adopts Marxist Programme" and meanwhile counsel caution to the working class.

For the Workers Revolutionary Party, most important is not the action of the working class, but the conferences, rallies and summer camps of the WRP. The task is to declaim the "socialist policies" of the WRP and thus (somehow) to obtain a Labour Government pledged to those policies. Forever predicting or announcing an insurmountable crisis, the WRP then puts forward minimalist or reformist demands as transitional – "they cannot be met" – and it amalgamates these right-wing policies with extreme organisational sectarianism and gangsterism.

THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

Taking advantage of IS's Little England workerist blindness to a whole number of struggles, the International Marxist Group has recruited many good comrades under the banner of the Fourth International.... only to disorientate them with the kaleidoscopic variety of "theoretical breakthroughs", usually wrong, often bizarre, streaming from the heads of the IMG leadership.

Today, the General Strike – to "kick out the Tories", or to "secure workers' demands against inflation and unemployment" – is touted round as a cure-all. The Trade Unions are painted up as havens of socialist virtue, with the demand for a "Labour government responsible to the organisations of the working class, not to Parliament".

It is important to understand that even the most revolutionary-sounding slogans like "General Strike to bring down the Tories" actually in the logic of real politics and the real forces of the time, had a **right wing content.** The slogan either meant insurrection (by the IMG ...) or a General Strike to put in a Labour administration. But in a general strike revolutionaries would argue for a deepening of the self-reliance of the working class, creation of workers' councils, etc; it would be the reformists who would say, let's settle this thing with parliamentary elections. Then the "ultra-radical" focus on government would, if they had maintained it in an actual general strike situation, lined up the IMG with the reformists.

Likewise, under the IMG's facile counterposing of "mass struggle" against parliamentary politics ("The Tories will not be defeated in parliament or by elections"), under the line of "Labour government based on the workers' organisations", under the description of people like Prentice and Jenkins as representatives of a **different class** from other elements more healthy and more tied to the working class (Benn....) – under this lie great potentialities for right-wing shifts, blunderings and accommodations.

Distinctions **can** be made in relation to groups like the Jenkinsites and within limits are useful. But the nature, role and historic function of the Labour Party is in no sense to be explained by simple sociological, petty bourgeois domination. On the contrary, the base of the right wing has always been the trade union bureaucracy. The current limited 'left' turn of some trade union bureaucrats, favouring a state-capitalist programme of nationalisation, does not outweigh the historical generalisation.

The danger of drawing the line between the petty bourgeois politicians and the trade-union-based elements is that: (a) it glosses up the left trade union bureaucracy; (b) it obscures the problem of reformism as a whole, as a product of the bourgeois ideological domination within the working class and of the trade union practice of bargaining within the capitalist system. It is a view of the Labour Party as a "two-class party", in fact close to the view put forward by the Stalin faction in the mid-'20s to justify their junketings with the Trade Union bureaucracy – a view easily and rightly demolished by Zinoviev and Trotsky. The ghost of the period of the IMG's pre-history represented by the right-centrist publication "The Week" is far from laid – it is still visible within the erratic machine now furiously churning out ultra-left rhetoric for the publications of the IMG.

The principled stand for explicit solidarity with the Republican struggle in Ireland has almost completely disappeared from the pages of the 'Red Weekly'. 'Red Weekly' publicly polemicises now against those (like Workers Fight) who raise the slogan of solidarity and **fight for it** – this from the IMG which once prided itself on the slogan "Victory to the IRA"! The sad truth is that the IMG has learned from the antics of IS that opportunist and evasive politics can 'pay' in terms of gaining the ear of sections of the working class – in the short term. It has forgotten Lenin's definition of opportunism as putting short term day to day interests above the long term fundamental aims of socialism. Lenin was referring to the accommodationist trade union and parliamentary practices of mass parties, methods slipped into over a long period, which had destroyed the revolutionary potential of the Second International. When such methods are employed consciously, deliberately, calculatingly as clever 'tactics' by lilliputian theorists of pygmy organisations, the result is one more example of historical tragedy repeating itself as momentary contemporary farce.

Internally, the IMG has travelled in a bare two years from being a democratic organisation with room for discussion and dissent – despite its serious public political and practical shortcomings – to a point where the internal regime is little better than that of the WRP. Minorities – like the one which supports the SWP-led Fourth International minority – are herded into small 'ghetto' branches of

their own, or subjected to slander campaigns. And all this, together with the political stupidities, takes place in the name of the Fourth International, whose mantle is a major factor in inducing many serious IMG militants to live with such antics! Comrades of the IMG, it is time to face the fact that your organisation is not only bankrupt, there is no hope even of reforming it by internal political struggle.

TOWARDS REGROUPMENT

As the political situation sharpens, critical tendencies have appeared, and will surely continue to appear, in all these major left tendencies. They will come into conflict with the leadership and will seek a new course.

This Open Letter calls for a revolutionary regroupment in Britain.

"In Britain", not because we believe a revolutionary organisation can be built in Britain in isolation from the fight to build a revolutionary International; not because we believe the struggle in Britain can be separated from, or stands higher than, the struggle elsewhere; not because we believe the existing international revolutionary-left tendencies can uniformly be ignored as an irrelevant farce. But we have small resources; there is no adequate, authoritative International; it is in building a serious internationalist cadre in Britain that we can make a practical contribution; and he or she is no internationalist who proclaims an abstract internationalism, or who erects an organisational fetish behind which to cloak the political and organisational abominations of an organisation like the IMG, while shirking, neglecting or botching the duties of an internationalist in the immediate arena of struggle and amongst the immediately accessible battalions of the international proletariat.

THE DANGER OF SECTARIANISM

Before, during and after the First World War, revolutionaries throughout the world revolted angrily against the parliamentary opportunism of the Social Democratic Parties. In their first rebellion, however, many of them simply turned the Social Democratic parliamentary opportunism inside out. They rejected the use of parliamentary elections as a platform for socialist ideas: wrongly, though, to be sure, the "one-sidedness" of those who negated parliamentarism and stressed only industrial direct action was immensely more healthy than the opportunism it reacted against.

Likewise, there is a danger today that the half-and-half politics of organisations like IS can produce a reaction towards "all or nothing" sectarianism. This danger is all the greater in that there is today no authoritative, theoretically-equipped leadership of the stature of the Russian Bolsheviks who led the early Communist International through its 'infantile disorder' of ultra-leftism.

Marxist theory exists today in a shrivelled, undernourished state. The gaps opened up and the corruptions accumulated in decades of isolation and defeat must be made up for or cleared away; and enormous arrears must be made up in terms of serious analysis of new developments. Given this confused, unclear state of theory, there is a danger of sects forming, in this way: casting around for some "answer" to the opportunism of groups like IS, many comrades will seize on particular themes or aspects from the communist tradition. By vigorous proclamation of this or that aspect of Marxist doctrine, they will hope to protect themselves from the danger of similar opportunist degeneration. The development of critical thought inside the larger revolutionary-left tendencies will lead only to a scattering of sects. As each sect is formed, it will need to justify itself, to establish distinctive positions, to develop polemics against all other tendencies .... and thus it will dig itself deeper into the sectarian ditch.

There are tremendous dangers involved in an immature over-reaction by way of simply negation; saying yes where IS says no and no where IS says yes; in a general revulsion against IS which reacts against that very aspect of IS which must be an irreplaceable part of the attitude and activity of any healthy revolutionary organisation — orientation to the working class, involvement with it **as it now is**, at all its levels, attempts to talk to workers in their language and on their own terms (though not **only** on their terms) without purist fears of contamination or the childish belief that **everything** must be said, **always**.

True, IS is guilty of a narrow-minded workerism, of accommodating to backwardness and bourgeois ideology within the working class, and of habitually taking a line of least resistance. True, IS's leaders who are neither cowards nor subjectively opposed to revolutionary politics, think they are being clever in avoiding contentious issues, in muting revolutionary politics rather than fight for them within the working class, as on Ireland, as on the openly opportunist change of line on the Common Market, etc. They believe such 'politicking' will allow them to 'build the party' — not understanding that a 'party' so built, whose influence outside its own ranks is based on evading working class backwardness, parochialism, etc, rather than fighting it, will be helpless in any crisis.

They do not learn from clear lessons, such as the CP's experience in gaining the 'leadership' of London's dockers by avoiding politics and sticking to bread and butter issues. When racism became an issue the CP leaders were swept aside in the sick tide that swept London's dockers into the street in support of Powell in 1968.

The IS leaders believe above all in a model of the party which neglects the ideological struggle in the working class, which builds "the party" not on a cadre basis but by recruiting a raw membership who are dominated by a few leaders and a highly undemocratic 'machine' of 'professional revolutionaries', relying heavily on demagogy and manipulation. The main task of the "party" is to help generalise the class struggle.

FALSE COUNTERPOSITIONS

To IS's criminal neglect of the ideological struggle and its crude and narrow workerist tendency to avoid "needlessly complicating" its work by giving issues like the oppression of women, or Ireland, the stress in their work that the objective importance of these issues demands — can be counterposed an equally one-sided and no less wrong 'model' of the 'party'. It is essentially a **propagandist** model. Where IS downgrades the ideological struggle and non trade-unionist struggles, the sectarians downgrade the class struggle itself. Inverting IS, some go so far as to shrug off as marginal or unimportant the task which is indeed central for revolutionaries — integrating into and helping to generalise the class struggle. IS can be criticised for approaching this task in a tailist and opportunist way. But the task remains vital! (It was the fact that IS was trying to relate to the working class that made the IS-WF regroupment possible in 1968).

It can be argued — and we believe truly — that IS's practice of neglecting the ideological struggle together with its narrow trade-unionist approach **implies** a spontaneist conception of socialist revolution. In response, the sectarians deny even the existence of a spontaneous **tendency** towards socialism in the working class in a country like Britain. Thus, completing the process of systematically inverting IS, they lock themselves into a propagandist, SPGB-ist, blackboard socialism model of the revolutionary party and of the socialist revolution.

Both the IS tail-endist, left-social-democratic model of "the revolution" and its caricature propagandist inversion are wrong. Comrades who adopt the sectarian caricature, in part or in whole, can discredit and ultimately destroy themselves as revolutionaries — and in the short term they can only appear to vindicate the IS lead-

ership. They pay IS the undeserved compliment of defining themselves by IS politics – negatively, but recognisably.

In reality there is a tendency towards spontaneous communism in the working class – certainly in a country like Britain. If it were not so, and socialism were possible only when sufficiently many workers had attended a full course in Marxism, then the programme of Marxism would be a hopeless utopia. The true statement in the Communist Manifesto that the ruling ideas in any society are the ideas of the ruling class would simultaneously be a sentence of doom on communism – on all attempts to consciously challenge – as the working class must – that ruling class, and take control of society out of its hands. Marxism and Leninism recognise that if the struggle of the working class is generalised and intense enough, then tendencies towards spontaneous communism manifest themselves. To deny it would be idiocy because history provides no lack of evidence – France May 1968 being the most important recent example. Even without the generations of socialist propaganda which certainly influenced events in France, capitalist society with its giant collectivist industry **mechanically** imposes collectivist notions on a working class when its revolt is powerful, widespread, and intense enough to demand general answers to the question – what do we do next – and capitalism regularly drives the working class into such revolts. The uniformity of factory seizures, the creation of workers' councils, and so on, over many countries, despite gaps in time and large breaks in any continuous revolutionary tradition, further prove the point: though to look for 'pure' spontaneity, given so many decades of revolutionary propaganda, may be like looking for a sterilised, microbe-free instrument in normal atmospheric conditions.

THE TASKS OF MARXISTS....

What Leninism denies is that **scientific socialist consciousness** can arise spontaneously, that the communist-oriented revolts, 'generalised struggles' of the working class produce a stable scientific consciousness. It is the task of Marxists to build an organisation possessing that consciousness, disseminating it, trying to integrate itself into the proletariat **whatever its level of struggle** – in preparation for the time when there will be a congruence of the revolutionary tendencies of the working class, imposed by capitalism, and the scientifically derived programme of communism, based on an understanding of the laws of capitalism, including the laws of class struggle and of the innate revolutionary potential of the working class.

The task of communists is to fuse scientific socialism with the class struggle; the legitimate criticism of IS is that it tries to fuse mechanically, as an organisation, with the organic, spontaneous class struggle at its present level, by diluting or ditching much of its formal Marxism – failing to prepare a cadre and thus failing to prepare a cadre and thus failing to prepare to lead the masses in revolt, when they revolt. To turn towards the working class is the essential elementary wisdom of proletarian revolutionists. The day to day working class struggle, even in a crude syndicalist form, is the raw material of communism: it is the task of revolutionaries to transmute it, now into elements of scientific socialism organised in a revolutionary party, as a means of later preparing the proletarian revolution. IS's concern with, even 'obsession' with the working class **could** be right, on the conditions defined above – if IS's politics were different and if its conception of **what** to do regarding the working class and how to do it were different.

The crude inversion of IS which begins by deriding and scoffing at talk of 'generalising the class struggle' could **never** be right, can never lead to correct revolutionary practice, can never solve the central problem of communist practice and party-building: how to fuse our politics with the organic struggle of the working class. The sectarian model is the 31st or 51st draft of the model of the SPGB (founded 1904). ...It is the stuff from which petty bourgeois cults and sects are made, groups cherishing **their** 'theory', **their** 'programme', and their self-satisfied existence. However 'perfect' the programme of such a tendency, unless it is able to relate to the class and its struggles, it is arid and sterile. In certain historic periods, revolutionaries may be isolated through no fault of their own; but in Britain today the 'programme' of people who can't relate to the working class – or, even worse, who deny the primacy for revolutionaries of attempting to do so – is, ipso facto, an abortion; it is like a man with all his five senses missing.

... AND OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

To face up to the demands that the class struggle places on revolutionary socialists, we call for a revolutionary regroupment. A united revolutionary alternative could draw into activity many comrades who will otherwise be lost to the movement. It could have a significant practical effect on the balance of forces. It could provide the possibility of fruitful theoretical discussion and clarification alongside practical collaboration.

Many people sympathetic to revolutionary politics remain altogether outside the organised tendencies. Others find their way into the Communist Party. They are not blind to the fact that the CP confines its politics to the role of a left pressure group for the trade union bureaucracy and the 'Labour lefts'; but among the divided, squabbling groups to the left of the CP, they see no clear alternative. A serious, sincere effort for unity on a principled basis could draw many of these comrades into revolutionary work.

What is needed, of course, is not an alliance held together only by dislike of some particular tendency (IS,IMG,WRP, etc), a federation of the discontented. There must be a serious commitment to practical activity and practical collaboration, anchored firmly in the class struggle, a serious will to work out questions of theory and policy through honest discussion, conscientious study, exchange of ideas, and confrontation of ideas with the test of practice.

For this co-operation to be possible, some basic political guidelines are needed for a revolutionary regroupment. The signatories of this letter propose the following points for discussion.

(We put these points forward as a first contribution to discussion, not as a catechism which must be agreed to, every word, before discussion. Workers Fight will be opening the pages of the magazine 'Permanent Revolution' to discussion around and arising from this Open Letter. In addition, Workers Fight also declares that it is open to proposals to accept on the Editorial Board of 'Permanent Revolution' representatives of any other tendency seriously interested in theoretical discussion as a guide to practical revolutionary action).

POLITICAL GUIDELINES

1. Active involvement with the struggles of the working class, recognition that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves. An orientation to the rank and file, recognising the fundamental role of the labour bureaucracy as 'labour lieutenants of the capitalist class'. We fight for workers' democracy in the trade unions, for their complete independence from the capitalist state, and for a communist leadership in the unions, recognising that this can be achieved only through open, harsh struggle against the reformist leaders. Opposition to any trade union fetishism; recognition of the need for independent ad hoc organisations in periods of exceptional upsurge.

2. Commitment to the basic guiding ideas of Marxism; the historic necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat; the impossibility

f socialism in one country; the need for proletarian internationalm.

: The most complete codification of the strategic and tactical ethods of communism was worked out by the first four congresses f the Communist International. Subsequently Trotsky and the eft Opposition fought to defend those basic conceptions of evolutionary communism, struggling against Stalinist bureaucratm, against the opportunist distortion of the united front tactic to a strategic alliance with bourgeois and bureaucratic forces, gainst 'third period' ultra-leftism, against Popular Frontism, and gainst social-patriotism. To the national-reformist conception of ocialism in one country', they counterposed the programme of ermanent revolution'. After concluding, in 1933, that the Commist International was unreformable, they forthwith set about ilding a new revolutionary international. The political positns, and the strategic and tactical methods, worked out and defded in that struggle, are our fundamental political tradition and ir starting point for further development of Marxist politics.

In relation to the USSR, Eastern Europe, north Korea, north ietnam, China, and Cuba, the position of the signatories is that ese are degenerated and deformed workers' states. Two politil conclusions follow from this assessment:

) support for the struggles of the working class in those states, gainst the bureaucracies, up to and including revolutionary overow of those bureaucracies. We advocate political revolution ainst the Stalinist and Maoist bureaucracies, recognising that, the USSR and Eastern Europe particularly, that political revolion will have a very serious 'social' content, and will involve stroying and radically reorganising the existing state machine.

) unconditional defence of those states against imperialism efence, that is, irrespective of the policies of the ruling bureauacies, and against those policies). In any conflict, or apparent nflict, between defence against imperialism and the proletarian ruggle against the bureaucracy, we believe in the primacy of e workers' struggles, and side, unequivocally, with the workers.

is these practical conclusions which must form the basis of a volutionary regroupment. Sociological assessment is necessary r theoretical clarity, it must be fully and honestly discussed; t it is not the basis for political demarcation, in present nditions in Britain(3)

ne question of defence of the USSR and Eastern Europe (as stinct from China, Cuba, north Korea, north Vietnam) against perialism is also, in the concrete conditions of today, of signifance more for its theoretical implications than for its immediate actical conclusions. The signatories believe that those theoretal implications are extremely important. They cannot just be nelved. But a political split on the basis of those theoretical plications cannot be justified where there is sufficient agreeent on practical conclusions.

Commitment to the building of a Leninist working class combat rty, fighting rigorously on the ideological as well as on the polical fronts, This must involve a sharp struggle for communist nsciousness, not just (as with IS) a gathering together of militts on the basis of shallow workerist agitation.

Communist internationalism does not counterpose itself to the ruggle of oppressed nations for national rights of self-determinion and independence — any more than the communist programme counterposed to the fight to preserve democratic rights. Revolionaries, on the contrary, must champion and aid by all means ssible the fight of oppressed nations against imperialism, partilarly against our own imperialism. For revolutionaries in Brith today, most important is a clear line of solidarity with the sh Republican Army, and with other republican and anti-imperist forces, against British imperialism, coupled with a call for ops out of Ireland and for self-determination for Ireland, with counties as the only possible unit.

MASS STRIKES AND THE LABOUR PARTY

7. The most influential political force by far in the British working class is the Labour Party. Despite the tremendous fall in active Labour Party membership after 1966, the Labour Party still has a strong, deep-rooted ideological hold over the major sections of the working class. This hold cannot be broken simply by denouncing the Labour Party from the sidelines. Such tactics as pressing demands on the Labour Party leadership and on Labour governments are necessary.

However, such slogans as "Labour to power with a socialist programme" must be rejected. By suggesting that the Labour Party, with a leadership and organisational structure such as it has at present or is likely to have in the foreseeable future, can (with suitable 'pressure', etc.) be other than a defender of capitalism and an enemy of socialism, such slogans serve only to confuse the nature of socialism, the question of the state, and the nature of the Labour Party itself When such a policy — "Labour to power with a socialist programme" — is put forward as a **strategy**, this is in fact a conception of the **united front with the bureaucracy as a strategy**. This opportunist conception helped to make easier the betrayal of the 1926 British general strike. The fact that in the hands of the tiny left groupings of today such a conception has only an impotent, rhetorical character makes it less practically disastrous for the class as a whole, but no less disorienting for the revolutionaries.

8. Any attempt to relate to the problem of the Labour Party is, however, empty if it fails to recognise that the basic raw material of socialism is found not in lists of demands or in literary exposures, but in the independent activity of the working class. In that activity, tremendous strides forward can be made in times of crisis; years of political education can be telescoped into days.

Particularly important in the present period is the question of the general strike. The general strike is the most important industrial weapon of the working class, a weapon the working class must be prepared to use if it is to effectively resist the attacks of the capitalist class in crisis. Revolutionaries should advance the call for a general strike in a serious manner when and where the immediate tasks of the working class warrant it. The general strike can, and at times must, be proposed as a tactic to win limited demands, short of workers' power. But a call for a general strike must always be coupled with explanation of what a general strike involves — paralysing capitalist society and directly raising the question of power (which the general strike in itself cannot resolve). We must reject light-minded and trivial use of the general strike call (as with the IMG recently, the WRP previously, and IS at various times), use of the general strike call as a cure-all, or subordination of the general strike to a formalistic political curriculum ("we cannot call a general strike until there is a fully-formed revolutionary political leadership", or "general strike to kick out the Tory government and bring in a Labour government pledged to socialist policies").

9. United front activity along the lines of Anti-Fascist committees, solidarity committees, etc., should generally be supported. Revolutionary organisations

can be of value to the working class only by seeking to develop the widest possible activity, with the most precise, practical policies – not proclaiming their own **organisation** to be "the alternative" and crying "join us".

Likewise we must be clear that a revolutionary party will not be built simply by steady additions of ones and twos, or even dozens, to an existing nucleus. Only through splits and regroupments, with tendencies willing to learn from the working class and from each other, will such a party be built.

10. In Britain, racialism is one of the most important ideological weapons of the capitalist class. Yet many on the left take the attitude of simply wishing it away, under the slogan of "Black and White Unite and Fight". That is not enough. We must uphold the right of black workers to organise independently, for example in black caucuses in the trade unions. We must actively campaign for the physical defence of black people under attack from racists. We must undertake a conscious struggle against racialism in the white working class, and not simply rely on racialism melting away as the temperature of economic struggle rises. (2)

11. Likewise a conscious struggle is necessary on the question of the oppression of women. This struggle must take up not only such questions as equal pay, but also the question of the family. This will involve challenging bourgeois ideology on questions of sexuality, and in particular opposing the notion that homosexuality is 'abnormal'.

We must demand the socialisation of housework (as a mobilising **class** slogan).

We recognise the need for women to organise independently against their own specific oppression. We actively support the women's liberation movement and its six demands, and fight within it for communist ideas.

12. Opposition to narrow trade-unionism and workerism, to that political tendency which seeks to confine the attention of the working class to its own immediate economic struggles and the political struggles arising directly from those economic struggles. In any period less than one of giant revolutionary upsurge, these organic struggles remain trapped within the limits of bargaining as an 'interest group' in the capitalist system. In the revolutionary upsurge itself, the grouping which has previously based itself on passive accommodation to existing trade unionist struggles will be left floundering and trailing behind as the class demands serious political answers. We must wage the struggle for socialism as an all-sided struggle, striving to relate each partial struggle to an overall revolutionary-socialist perspective.

FOR REVOLUTIONARY UNITY

We invite discussion on regroupment and put forward these 12 points as a starting contribution to discussion. We do not believe complete agreement on the 12 points should be a precondition for discussion. Nor could discussion be confined to the 12 points; obviously there would (at the least) be a number of questions of practical orientation to discuss, too. However, general sympathy with, or general rejection of, the political trend of the 12 points should be some indication of whether there is a principled basis for regroupment.

We do not propose the 12 points in the spirit of the "lowest common denominator". Within a framework of practical cooperation and respect for majority decisions, each of the signatories intends to fight for their specific views. We do not propose to just dump our specific ideas, beyond those covered by the 12 points. We would prefer to contribute those ideas towards the clarification of a serious revolutionary organisation, rather than cherish them as the prize possessions of a sect. To refuse to unite until agreement is reached on every dotted i and crossed t is the act of a sectarian, not a principled politician. It is the act of one capable of pulling down the blinds and soundproofing the room to keep out the sight and noise of the class struggle in the streets outside and let the petty bourgeois circle or clique get on with the 'serious' business of 'discussion'. It is the act of one who believes that **his** group is the source of all wisdom, who believes that no other tendency has anything of value to offer.

The signatories openly declare that, should the discussions show a real political basis for a regroupment, they will dissolve previous separate organisations and put their resources at the service of the regroupment.

Concretely, we propose that the signatories should immediately take steps towards collaborating on a joint weekly paper. This must be coupled with an intensive process of political clarification through debates, a joint discussion bulletin, etc. Where tendencies supporting the Open Letter feel it essential (and only then) there should be a transitional period in which independent publications, etc., are also maintained. But this should be within a fixed time limit; the aim is clearly not a perpetual discussion club, but a definite unification on a Leninist basis.

It may be that debates following unification will eventually lead to new splits. So be it. Even such a development contains more possibilities of progress than the simple multiplication of self-satisfied sects, or of various groupings hesitating to take political action until every theoretical question is resolved.

Any unification would obviously have to include the right of organising tendencies and factions. If any theoretical clarification is to be gained, though, such tendencies or factions must be based on definite, spelled-out political platforms, not merely on previous associations. Otherwise we have no unification, but only a number of cliques loosely strung together; no theoretical development, but only a sectarian polemic. Moreover, it should not be the case that every difference of opinion becomes a cause for tendency or factional line-ups; only those differences which appear persistent and deep-going warrant tendency and faction-fighting. The briefest glance at the recent history of the IMG – which reads like a burlesque version of the Wars of the Roses – shows that excessive factionalism harms democratic discussion, rather than helping it. Nonetheless, while we

are opposed to casual or light-minded factionalism. we oppose any attempt to bureaucratically lay down regulations (as IS has done) for what sorts of tendency and faction platforms are permissible.

We call upon all serious revolutionaries to consider this Open Letter and give us your reply.

Editorial Board, Workers Fight

Sept.'74

NOTES

(1) Recently a grouping, publishing 'The Bulletin', has emerged in Britain from the WRP milieu, a late product of the split three years ago between the WRP (then SLL) and its French 'sister', the OCI. Essentially it stands for the rightist politics of the WRP, demanding that the WRP be formally wound up. It pretends that the declaration of the WRP marked some sort of change for the worse in the organisational sectarianism of the SLL/WRP, trying to show that some sort of change took place after the international split. But there has **not** been any qualitative change in the public organisational sectarianism of the SLL/WRP for at least 10 years, nor in its internal regime for 25! The 'Bulletin' tendency seems to have sounded a trumpet which has reawakened a few comatose ex-SLLers who, over the years, dropped out under pressure, never coming to any understanding of their own political experiences in the SLL, and who are now, as the class struggle intensifies, eager for a rationalisation, a pseudo-explanation. Appropriately it is led by one Robert Black, the author of a large book, 'Stalinism in Britain', which, in its imaginative account of tendencies like the IMG and IS in their relationship to the CPGB, deserves a special "Stalin prize for mendacity".

The Bulletin's international mentor, the OCI, has a worse record than the SLL – if it be meaningful to discuss which is worse, Goneril or Regan. On the duty of revolutionaries in imperialist countries to support colonial uprisings, the Communist International published, in its Second Congress manifesto (written by Trotsky) the ringing declaration that those who welched on that duty deserved to "be branded with infamy if not with a bullet". Trotsky might content himself with branding the majority of the British groups with 'infamy' for their attitude to the present Irish struggle. He would certainly have resorted to the more lethal 'brand' imprinted by a bullet on the OCI for their role of active collaboration with the MNA during the Algerian war of independence. The MNA were the Algerian stooges of French imperialism; the assassins of militants of the anti-imperialist force leading the struggle, the FLN – which eventually repaid them in their own coin, with interest added.

The OCI and its international associates, including its British spawn, can offer only another, marginally worse, blind alley to WRP dissidents.

(2) Not only solidarity but also serious ideological discussion is necessary between the predominantly white organisations and "black groups", despite the considerable theoretical divide. Our starting point in such discussion is that we do not advocate exclusively black political organisations in British conditions, but we need a recognition that such organisations, as well as the development of groups for cultural, economic, and defence struggles are a contribution to the development of our class as a whole. They can play a transitional role in rousing, organising and mobilising doubly oppressed sections of our class, now for the most part alienated from the organised labour movement.

(3) Comrades adhering to a 'state capitalist' assessment of the USSR, or other states, will add a note of reservation on point 4.