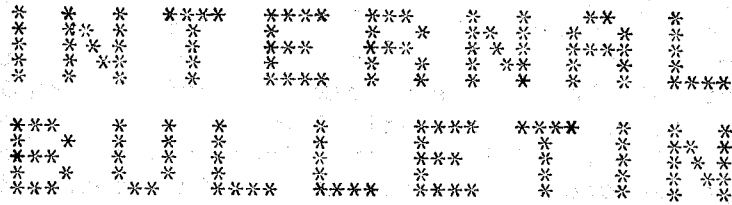


WORKERS' FIGHT



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There is a mass of material almost ready on the OCI (the French organisation which used to be in the ICFI with the Socialist Labour League, but has now split to form its own "Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International".) There is also an article in preparation summarising the politics of the international tendency whose leader is the Spartacist League of the USA. All this will be out in IB 9, within a few weeks.

I R E L A N D C h r i s G r a y .

We should be grateful to John Boyd for asking the questions he has raised. In my opinion the comments in issue no. 11 of WF on "Bloody Friday" were quite uncalled for and were likely to suggest that we as a group were criticising from the sidelines without being in adequate contact with the Provisional wing of Sinn Fein. Nonetheless cde Boyd appears to view the situation from a narrow military angle, when clearly political considerations have a military "effect on ordinary people" which cannot be ignored by socialists or anyone else.

Let's take the question of military tactics first. As I understand it the aim of the Provisional IRA is to make the Six Counties ungovernable, just as in 1919-21 the aim of the IRA was to make Ireland as a whole ungovernable by the British ruling class. So far partial success has been achieved - three quarters of Ireland a nation in 1921 and now "direct rule" in place of Stormont. These tactics may yet succeed, but I submit that this does not mean, from our point of view, that "all targets are justified", because for us it is not simply a question of formal Irish independence but of Irish working class unity as the precondition of real independence, and this involves a different approach to the bombings. How, for example, is the unity of the Irish working class helped on by the bombing of a co-operative store? (Military considerations may take precedence in a particular case, but it's the general principle which I want to discuss here). Cde Boyd is quite right to point out that Protestant workers will be inclined to take as much exception to actions directed at legitimate military targets (eg the British army) as to any other IRA activity, but why is this? The reasons are political, and have to do with the history of the last fifty or so years and the varieties of revolutionary nationalist politics on show, so to speak, in Ireland during that time, which have so far been inadequate. Protestant workers seem to me to have very understandable, if invalid, reasons for their opposition to successive versions of "Home Rule", "Workers' and Small Farmers' Republic", "revolutionary socialism", etc etc - reasons which spring from their situation as workers and which reinforce the reactionary ideology with which they have been saddled. (Anyone who doubts this should read the essay by Jack Gannon on "Catholic Political Culture and the Constitution of Ireland" recently published by the B.I.C.O.) During the last week (October 16 - 23) we have seen this ingrained hatred of Dublin and all its works grow to white heat. In my opinion Protestant workers will not be won for any sort of Irish Republic unless there is an effective movement in the south which shows in action that it can take on and defeat the reactionary forces currently in power - Fianna Fail, TACA, the Catholic hierarchy and all - and set up a true Workers' Republic. Even then sizeable sections of the Protestant population will remain Orange. But this does not mean that Provisional tactics are the ones which are, willy nilly, the ones to adopt, because the Provisional Sinn Fein are not, in my opinion, capable of bringing about a socialist revolution in the 26 Counties. The PD article in WF 14 gives part of the evidence here; for the rest comrades have only to read through 'Eire Nua' which shows (a) that the Provisional Sinn Fein has a rather strange idea of what socialism is, to say the least (b) that they are prepared to compromise with Green capitalism and with the Church; and (c) that they have no strategy for developing a genuine socialist movement. (See forthcoming issue of "Permanent Revolution" which contains an article analysing "Eire Nua").

I very much hope that the Provisional IRA are successful in their military campaign. Purely traditional tactics, however, run the risk of getting stuck in the same kind of impasse experienced in 1921, 1939, and 1956 - 62 - loss of popular support. I am prepared to accept it is not happening yet, but if past experience is anything to go by, it will, and this will be fatal unless Britain pulls out first.

Having said all that perhaps nonetheless cde Boyd is right in saying we shouldn't criticise, because "we do not struggle in the fight for Irish freedom". I'm not quite sure what he means. If he means as we don't give material aid to the struggle in any form we should shut up about it then I think I can understand that but I don't accept it. (Incidentally, I think we have an obligation to give material aid). Two points need to be made: first, even if we don't directly take part in the struggle we are aiding it in so far as we

striving to lead British workers to overthrow capitalism on a programme which includes self-determination for Ireland. That is certainly the best way we can help here - as with any colonial liberation struggle the way to help is to strike against your own imperialist state and overthrow it. Secondly, it all depends on how we criticise the IRA. Criticism of the kind voiced in WF no 11 is certainly wrong: it is worth remembering that in 1939 Bob Armstrong and the Irish Trotskyists of that time stated that one does not denounce Republicans "to affronted humanity at large". They reserved the right to criticise, however, in their own circle and when talking to workers interested in their politics: not to do so would be to abandon an independent political role, in which case the honourable thing would be to dissolve themselves and join the Republican movement. In general I don't think it is our job in Britain to criticise individual IRA actions in the pages of WF: our primary task - and it is one British socialists have fallen down on in the past - is to explain the situation of Irish workers to British workers and get the latter to demand the withdrawal of the British army and the recognition of Ireland's right to self-determination. Hence solidarity work. In the course of this work, however, we are likely to come across Irish workers who must be won over to socialism, which means discussing the Irish situation from a socialist point of view, and as I have tried to show, I don't think "Victory to the IRA" is sufficient here. (That goes for the Official IRA as well). This position is the basis of our work in the AIL: why change it ?

Cde Boyd on Irish Trotskyism.

I must protest at some of the remarks passed by cde Boyd on our Irish comrades. It is not true that the LWR has a sectarian attitude to the republican movement, as witness recent issues of Workers Republic. At the time of the Derry Massacre LWR comrades were active calling for support for the Northern struggle in the trade unions and for the formation of a workers' militia. Cde Peter Graham before his tragic murder made it his business to stir up support for the IRA in Dublin, aid which was certainly appreciated by Kevin Street, as witness the Provo representatives at his funeral. The RMG has to the best of my knowledge continued this work. Even the SWM is not, I suspect, as black as cde Boyd paints it on this issue: at any rate, I do not believe that Irish Trotskyists are only talking to themselves. Some Irish Trotskyists have indeed joined the Republican movement; others have been active in Saor Eire and languish in jail as a result. Surely the job for Irish Trotskyists is to link the struggle of the 26 County workers with the republican struggle so as to build the Workers' Republic in fact: this obviously requires assistance to the Republican Movement and active participation in it, but not at the cost of abandoning Trotskyist politics - which means that the comrades will have to face ejection from whichever Republican Movement they have joined and still carry on.

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NOTES ON THE LABOUR PARTY.

As yet, we have no WF education programme on the Labour Party, and there is no comprehensive and concise book or pamphlet giving the Trotskyist view of the Labour Party with which we can fill the gap. I have therefore thought it worthwhile to reproduce in the Internal Bulletin the following notes from a debate in London between Workers Fight and the "Chartists" on the Labour Party.

The "Chartists" (otherwise the Revolutionary Communist League) originated as a fusion of a group which split from the IMG in protest against the 1968 turn away from the Labour Party, and a group coming from the RSL ('Militant' group). It has about 30 members, nearly all in London, and nearly all in the Labour Party. They have won control of the Socialist Charter Movement, formerly a feeble left reformist ginger group in the LP, and normally use the name "Chartists". Their monthly paper is called "The Chartist" (available from 7 Park View, Olive Rd, NW2)

Their main slogans are "Labour Take The Power" and "Prepare the General Strike". The "Labour Take the Power" slogan is intended to mean, not just "a Labour government", but Labour take power in society, ie Labour smash the bourgeois state, nationalise banks & basic industry. &c &c. The "Prepare the General Strike" slogan was actually put out in a leaflet during Pentonville Five week ! (That is, when the question was one of action there and then, they said "prepare for action sometime in the future").

They support, to their credit, the position of solidarity with the IRA, but combine it with the position that Protestant revolutionaries in N. Ireland should advocate militias for the defence of Protestant workers, and support for better living conditions for British troops.

Their international connections are (or were) with the US Spartacist League, a grouping whose politics will be discussed in an article in the forthcoming IB.

On first (and probably accurate) impressions their positions are nutty. Their importance is that they represent a sort of logical ultimate of the "traditional British Trotskyist" (RSL SLL pre-'68 IMG) view of the Labour Party; their positions throw into sharp relief elements in the position of other groups which are more muted and concealed in the propaganda of those groups. Thus, "Labour Take The Power" is a logical extension of the "Labour to Power with Socialist Policies" position.

However, the "extreme" nature of the Chartists' position did mean that the centre of the debate was drawn away from the real issues, and forced WF into a rather one-sided emphasis in our contributions. As well as the extreme "organic" conceptions of the Chartists, it is necessary to criticise the ultra-left views which have been exemplified on the British left by the present IMG.

M.T.

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Andrew Hornung (for WF): We shall start by outlining main relevant features of the present situation. There has been a tremendous rise the level of class struggle, the main arena being the Trade Union movement. The Labour Party left is not at present generally the main focus of the struggle. The Tribunites have moved to the right, while the Trade Union leaders now represent the left in the Labour Party. (In the '50s the TU leaders like Carron and Deakin upheld the right in the LP against the more leftwing constituency parties). The class has been and is moving into action outside the terms of reference of the LP. In Pentonville 5 week, to stress kicking the Tories out as the main direction of struggle would have been politically harmful. Elections are a prime de-fuser of struggle in a mass strike situation. The class does not, generally, in a situation like Pentonville 5 week, turn round and say to the LP "what are you doing about it?", it does not have faith in the Labour Party solving its problems for it. In such a situation no purpose is served by "drawing the LP into the centre of the arena".

But lack of faith in the LP has not led to a break-up of reformist ideology. It is wrong to see the LP as directly reflecting the class - there has not been a revival within the LP equivalent to the recent upsurge of the class. But that is not to say that there are not times and places where the class does expect achievements from the LP (Fisher Bendix, UCS, Ebbw Vale, etc). In such situations, the posing of demands on the LP is a vital tactic.

But we cannot privilege the route to class consciousness through the posing

of demands as a universal and unique route. The independent direct action of the class is a vital element in the development of consciousness.

Thus, in the present situation revolutionaries should maintain some presence in the Labour Party, should relate in their programme to Labour Party militants, but should not seek to turn militants back to the LP for the sake of an abstract "no by-passing the LP" theory.

The Chartists apparently see the "United Front from within" with the LP as a strategy, not in its proper role as a tactic. The Chartists present dual power as a process in which LP organs gain encroaching power over society. They see the LP as a massive "government surplus stores", equipped with all the machinery for a working class seizure of power, although unfortunately this machinery is under the control of bourgeois politicians. The Chartists' conception is a mechanical, organic one, excluding concrete analysis of the concrete situation.

Chris Knight (for Chartists): WF has no strategy for taking power. But we need a strategy, and the LP is a crucial question for that strategy. "Reformism does not exist except in definite institutions."

We must look at historical experience, especially the experience of 1917. The Bolsheviks placed full responsibility for the war and the oppression and the economic crisis on the Mensheviks, because they had no objective excuse. In July, after the Menshevik/SR leaders of the Soviets had shot down workers calling for all power to the soviets, Lenin withdrew the All Power to the Soviets slogan. Trotsky argued against this withdrawal, and he was right. "Under the slogan of All Power to the Soviets the Bolsheviks took power" *

As a result of this experience, the Bolsheviks developed the strategy of the united front **. Lenin called on the British CP to have the same attitude to the LP leaders, the Hendersons and Snowdens, as to the Mensheviks. "Only in the event that one has a majority of the working class can one cease to apply the united front", it is "not just a tactic".

Let us look at France 1968. Revolutionaries should have demanded "All Power to the CP". This demand would expose the CP leaders and "we would have rapidly become the CP".

If a General Strike occurred in Britain, Benn or someone would call an emergency LP conference or meeting, in order to take matters into their own hands. The LP would be the body in a position to sell out the General Strike. Revolutionaries should attend such an emergency LP conference and put "Labour Take the Power" - we would expose LP leaders and we would say "we are the Labour Party". This is the "only way in which one can carry out the seizure of power".

We must say that it is the LP which is "the leadership of the movement" and is responsible for the Tories being in power. There is a need now to postpone the showdown of a General Strike, and to prepare. A General Strike wouldn't be successful because there is no mass revolutionary party. ***

In Pentonville 5 week the Chartists raised Labour Take the Power, and elections only under the control of the labour movement.

Are workers moving towards the LP? It is wrong to pose the question like that, because the LP is not static, it is moving. The last LP conference included some very left resolutions on nationalisation, but also some moves to right.

We must pose the question of power, and we can't pose it without posing it concretely in relation to the organisations of the working class.

((NOTES: * This account is selective to say the least. At the end of July the Bolshevik "congress decided .. to withdraw the central slogan of the preceding period: transfer of power to the soviets." In early September, Lenin proposed a compromise to the Mensheviks and SRs - "'The compromise on our part', he said, 'will be a return to our pre-July demand: All power to the soviets ..'". "The Compromisers recoiled hastily from Lenin's proposal... By virtue of this fact, the slogan 'Power to the Soviets' was again suspended. However, not for long: In the next few days the Bolsheviks got a majority in the Petrograd Soviets, and afterward in a number of others. The phrase 'Power to the Soviets' was not, therefore, again removed from the order of the day, but received a new meaning: All power to the

Bolshevik soviets." (See Trotsky's "History of the Russian Revolution", vol. 2, chapter 13.)

** Trotsky in his writings on Germany made it clear that he considered that the United Front is properly understood as a tactic, not as a strategy. "At a certain level, the struggle for unity of action is converted from an elementary fact into a tactical task. The simple formula of the united front solves nothing. It is not only Communists who appeal for unity, but also reformists, and even fascists. The tactical application of the united front is subordinated, in every given period, to a definite strategic conception." ('The German Catastrophe'). See also 'What Next', sections 5, 8, and 9.

*** This conception was taken up and argued against in WF 7.))

Rachel Matgamna (for WF): The Chartists are confusing LP and Soviets. All Power to the Soviets is not analogous to Labour Take the Power. The real analogy is All Power to the Mensheviks !

Chartist speaker: AH said that workers would not look to Foot and people like him - but the big vote for Foot in the LP conference shows that they will. The block in the way of the British revolution is the Labour leaders. We cannot combat them just by propaganda, we must combat them in action. We must be in the movement with the LP. We must criticise the LP, and criticise it for not taking power.

Sean Matgamna (for WF): Analogies with 1917 are the sum total of Knight's wisdom. But Knight doesn't understand what Soviets are. Soviets are not parties or trade unions. The LP is a stable bourgeois political machine, not immediately responsive to the working class. Knight says that elections would be OK in a General Strike situation, if only held under the auspices of the labour movement. Thus Knight leaves initiative in the hands of the established leaders of the labour movement. The real analogy with Knight's line is not All Power to the Soviets in 1917, but All Power to the General Council in 1926.

We must understand Labour Take the Power as it will be understood at present by working class - ie Labour establish a (bourgeois) dictatorship ! At present the question of power can only be raised in a propaganda way; Labour Take the Power attempts to package a propagandist message into an agitational formula. There is a limited radicalisation in the LP at present, but it is on a very confused level, with the phony Common Market issue as central.

Chartist speaker: WF don't understand the nature of the British working class movement, they make a false dichotomy between Trade Unions and Labour Party when in fact the TU and LP are organically linked.

We must put forward the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat concretely, in the form of the dictatorship of the existing class organisations. The LP is not a Soviet, but the organisations of the LP will be transformed into Soviets in a revolutionary situation.

It is most important to put demands on the LP not, for example, where a left Labour council is making a stand on the rents issue, but where a right Labour council has sold out completely. We must politicise the struggle, and for British workers, politics = the Labour party.

Martin Thomas (for WF): The Chartists have an over-organic, undialectical conception of the revolutionary party; they believe that the revolutionary party will be built during the revolution, not prepared and built beforehand. They 'flatten out' everything. A real analogy of their Labour Take the Power line is the line of the American Healyites, who demand here and now that Meany and other 'non-partisan' TU leaders form a labour party. What for - to capture the Wallace vote ? Just as the Healyites ignore the dialectical break that must take place in the US labour movement to create a really independent labour party, so the Chartists ignore the dialectical break in the organisations of the labour movement that must take place for a revolution in Britain.

Chartist speaker: The revolutionary party in Russia was built during the revolution. Revolutionary parties are not built by arithmetical accretion.

Soviets will not spring up completely anew. they will develop from the existing organs of the labour movement, and will be different from Russian soviets. It is not our line to stress forming the revolutionary party while the class is busy doing other things.

R.M.: We must consider the question of whether workers look to the LP and TU leaders concretely. The fact is that the more workers are organised nationally on a rank and file basis (eg the National Port Shop Stewards Committee) the less they look to bureaucrats. So the tendency in a revolutionary situation will not be for workers to look to the bureaucrats for achievements, but for them to see themselves more and more in conflict with the bureaucracy.

Chartist speaker: We must get away from a fixed, dogmatic conception of soviets. Lenin said the Ramsey MacDonald-led 1917 National Convention of Labour was a Soviet, and that the Jolly George incident showed dual power. Ramsey MacDonald supported Councils of Action in the 1920s. We saw dual power during Pentonville 5 week.

WF says the LP is not moving - but look at the last conference. The Common Market is not a phony issue, it is the central theme of the whole Tory attack on the British working class. If we could kick out the 69 pro-Market Labour MPs, it would be a real victory for Trotskyism in Britain.

A.H.: The setting up of Councils of Action does not prove the existence of dual power. In Germany the Ebert-Scheidemann Soviets were denounced by the Communists, because their intention was to divert the working class in the post-world war 1 revolutionary upsurge.

A Chartist speaker said that as far as the British working class is concerned, politics is the LP and perhaps the CP. This may be true - it means that the British working class has a social-democratic concept of politics. The real point is, what do we call politics.

Knight said that reformism does not exist without definite institutions. This is wrong, reformism is rooted at a far more basic level in the social relations and ruling ideology of capitalism, it is not just a matter of its institutional expressions.

Knight(Chartists): In reference to SM's 1926 analogy - it was right in 1926 to say "TUC, take the power". What was wrong was the way the CP used the slogan All Power to the General Council. In reference to 1917 - Trotsky stated that All Power to the Soviets in fact meant All Power to the Mensheviks and SRS. In 1920 we saw the British Soviet.

S.M.: In fact the nearest approach to a British soviet was in Durham in 1926. To put demands on leaders is correct, but it must not lead to reliance on leaders. The united front tactic can be reactionary if not coupled with independent agitation. The Chartists have a perspective of "we will become the Labour Party" - but in fact if they gain any strength they will be proscribed. To put all your trust on the struggle in the LP is a nonsense.

Lenin's advice in 1920 cannot be transferred mechanically into 1972. The structure of the LP in 1920 was much more democratic and since then there has been the repeated experience of Labour governments. The primary thing is always the direct action of the class - in practice, today, direct industrial action.

The Chartists criticise us for not having a strategy. In fact we do not have what they conceive of as a strategy - that is, a scenario. We have a concrete analysis of the concrete situation.

Despite the anti-"Pabloite" shouting of the RCL, they are in fact, in their ultra-organic, evolutionist attitude to the LP, the sole consistent heirs of Pablo in Britain today.

Chartist speaker: WF avoiding question of strategy. Does the Labour leadership represent the major block to the working class, or doesn't it?

The Labour Party has the objective means to take power. If we do not demand it of them, we are letting them off the hook.

The Common Market is a central issue for the working class. The Jenkinites are a right cover for Wilson.

It is absolutely right to stress the immediate question of the labour party in the US. Trotsky always stressed it.

M.T.: The last speaker is talking rubbish. Trotsky was against the slogan of a Labour party in the US up to a certain date. When he proposed the adoption of the slogan for a labour party, the leaders of American Trotskyism complained that recruits they had drawn from the Socialist Party on the basis of the anti-Labour Party position would be disorientated. Trotsky replied that it would be an excellent lesson in dialectics for those recruits. It's a pity that the Chartists weren't in the American Trotskyist movement at that time !

We must look at the concrete situation, not satisfy ourselves with abstract definitions of "mass party of the working class" etc. At the beginning of 1917 the Menshevik workers in Russia were undoubtedly in advance of the mass of class; by October they were dragging behind. The same would have happened in any further revolutionary development in France in 1968 - the hundreds of thousands of CP workers would soon have been behind the millions of newly-politically-awakening workers, especially young workers. It would absolutely wrong to subordinate this mass awakening to an abstraction about "mass party of the class".

Chartist speaker: Trotsky said All Power to the Socialist Party in Spain. We must raise the question of the LP with advanced workers even though they may have no illusions, so that they can relate to backward workers who do have illusions. Unless you make the Labour Party central to your programme, you can give no lead to the working class. The LP is the central point of the Trotskyist programme in the US.

Chartist speaker: SM referred to proscriptions in the LP. But they can be fought. Tenants can be persuaded to join the LP and wage "a terrific struggle". Councillors can be forced to vote against implementation.

S.M.: If we ask whether the LP is the main block, there is no answer "in general" At present the TUC is more central. In the future it may change.

Strategy must not be posed as a scenario, a "pick-up point" where revolutionaries can stand and wait for the masses to come along and sweep to power. There are times to be in the LP, and times to be outside - eg in the early years of the British Trotskyist movement. Trotsky advocated work in the ILP. Without a serious approach to building our own forces, here and now, any talk of united front and exposure is empty.

Knight: In Russia there was no pre-existing Parliamentary/bureaucratic machinery. In Britain there is very highly developed machinery. We have a situation of embryonic dual power in Britain at present. Our main stress in agitation among the working class is: we must seize the power.

A.H.: The Chartists have a false conception of tactics following immediately from strategy, without the mediation of a concrete analysis. It is nonsense to say that WF does not favour putting demands on LP leaders. But we consider the question according to what illusions people do actually have. The mass of the working class do not have the illusion that the LP will seize state power for the working class. It is not possible in advance to say that the LP bureaucracy rather than the TU bureaucracy will be the main block to the revolution. What is possible is to analyse the situation concretely so that, whatever the development, we are in the right place at the right time.

In any case, reformism is not just a set of illusions, or just "definite institutions." It is a whole social practice, which will be broken only through the revolutionary direct action of the class.

The Chartists have a static, organic, evolutionist understanding of the class struggle, the sort of understanding criticised by Gramsci when he wrote on "perspectives" *. That is why they are incapable of producing any accurate understanding of the present situation.

((* See, for example, the "Critical Notes on an Attempt at a Popular Presentation of Marxism" in the "Modern Prince" collection and also in the "Prison Notebooks" - both published by Lawrence and Wishart)),

O N R E C R U I T M E N T C h r i s C o r c o r a n .

The purpose of this document is to outline a number of criticisms, which I think can be justifiably made of certain theoretical conceptions held by a number of centre cdes.

I intend to focus this criticism, at this stage, around two articles - 'Recruitment' in I.B. 5 by MT and the circular "To all members of WF" (of 15 Sep 72). These documents reflect an increasing tendency amongst leading members to fall into grave theoretical misconceptions. I intend to examine the matters at length since theoretical questions of importance are raised.

The crux of my criticism is that comrades, although giving a Marxist analysis of World Events, etc, are failing to analyse the developments, stresses, and current demoralisation of ^{the} left in general and of WF in a Marxist fashion. The failure to do so will inevitably (if not corrected) have detrimental effects on the future of WF.

An examination of Comrade Thomas's article on 'Recruitment' will substantiate my argument: The essence of this section is - "In order to recruit we should concentrate for the medium future on propaganda work around IS, whilst at the same time not ignoring industrial agitation and the development of better contact work." One can only concede that he is not advocating 'ditching' industrial work but nevertheless (and this is important) the emphasis is laid on Propaganda work aimed at other groups. This policy of recruitment is justified by citing the case of London which we are told have recruited more than the two 'best' localities.

The point to note here is the absolutely un-marxist, empirical approach which is made. No analysis is made of the stage reached in the class struggle and the possibilities open for recruitment in general and in certain localities in particular.

The question is examined very superficially without the slightest trace of marxist method and could lead to very serious errors.

The consequence of such a policy would be, I believe, twofold. Primarily it would reduce greatly any inroads into the class which we could make. And secondly: I believe that rather than achieving the objective for which the method was devised (eg recruiting from IS) the reverse could occur.

The present period is one in which the Working Class is moving faster than the 'Left'. Thus the left, especially ourselves, feels it can do very little. Isolation tends to increase and demoralisation sets in.

The tasks of our organisation, in this context, is therefore to understand WHY this demoralisation occurs and the relationship which the Class struggle has to it.

The isolation of the WF group from the working class militants is not necessarily because of our 'politics' but foremostly because they do not see us as a 'viable alternative', we are tiny numerically and have little industrial strength and in no sense are we 'established.' On the other hand the CP and IS and SLL to some extent can seem to a militant worker to be more 'viable' and active industrially. The only way forward for us therefore if we are to build a base in the class and make gains from other groups is to become 'viable'. How we become a serious alternative is dependent upon our orientation.

From the analysis of the IS opposition that Comrade Thomas makes it becomes apparent that he is confusing revolutionaries with militants. He states that the opposition is low level; the leadership being T. Jones and T. Polan who have adopted a conservative RSL position and yet proceeds to comment that "if our analysis of IS is correct (as Centrist) they will be unstable and disintegrate letting loose of hundreds of 'fine revolutionaries'(?)" . This analysis is contradictory. If the opposition is of such 'low' level and their leadership 'conservative' where are the 'fine revolutionaries' ? Whilst a struggle rages inside the IS where are they ? I imagine that what Comrade Thomas/mean is 'fine militants'.

If we are to win militants from IS then it will be a different matter than winning 'fine revolutionaries'. The militant within IS when it disintegrates will look for another 'viable alternative'. He is far more likely to choose the group which is seriously building a base in the class, which 'orientates' towards

the Masses rather than to the other left groups. What Comrade Thomas advocates could be correct if the nature of the period were different from the present one, and more like the '50s and '60s when the class was politically relatively inactive and there would be little intervention revolutionaries could make, other than orientation to other groups. But to advocate such a policy in a period in which the working class is way ahead of the left shows the absolute failure to give a Marxist analysis of the character of the period, our relationship to it, and how we are to develop in it.

The only other explanation which can lie behind such a theoretical error is one of complete capitulation to the shortcomings of our group and of demoralised comrades.

Some comrades will no doubt breathe a sigh of relief when they are told that the 'main' work for the 'medium future' will be aimed at IS! Who can blame them? If they feel that they are getting nowhere, that the masses are passing them by, then it will be so much easier to turn to the other 'left' groups. If comrades are led to believe that this type of activity will pay dividends then the effect on the group in the long term could be shattering.

Now in a period where we can successfully intervene, however ineffective at first, in the class struggle, where we can illustrate in sharp struggles the validity of our ideas, our methods of struggle, and thus start to build a serious base in the class - Comrade Thomas advocates concentrating around IS.

The theoretical misconceptions and lack of Marxist analysis mentioned above is apparent in the circular "To all members of WF". The authors of this document do not give a 'marxist analysis' but again display an Empirical approach not to say 'subjective' approach. Thus they state - "We have been accused of being an Ivory Tower, out of touch with reality. But are we? Of course not. Look at the paper!" If such an Empirical approach is taken from surface evidence and conclusions drawn from them, then we are not Marxists but Empiricists.

One way in which Workers Fight will stumble, and not fight as Marxists, to correct our mistakes and inadequacies, is to adopt such a subjective approach which does not advance the group one iota. Similarly the whole substance of the circular does not give a Marxist analysis but only gives a 'pep-talk' which may or may not achieve results.

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T H E R O A D T O T H E M A S S E S - c o m m e n t o n
C h r i s C o r c o r a n ' s a r t i c l e .

M a r t i n T h o m a s .

Suppose there is a big working class meeting coming up. Let us look at three alternative ways in which we might organise our intervention.

A) We turn up at the door of the meeting to give out leaflets and sell papers. One of our comrades makes a speech in the meeting. Afterwards our comrades cluster round and exchange comments - "wasn't that CP speaker terrible", "that was a good meeting", etc.

B) We turn up with leaflets and papers, but concentrate our main effort on talking to the various other leftists standing beside us with their leaflets and papers. We go into the meeting and sit with the other leftists in the back of the meeting; afterwards we go off to the pub with them.

C) We prepare beforehand by discussing the main points we want to make in the meeting. Before the meeting, we visit as many as possible of our contacts who may be going to the meeting (if necessary, we persuade them to go the meeting) and argue carefully, and in detail, the case for the points we shall be pushing. At the meeting we may give out leaflets and certainly will sell the paper. One of our comrades (if able to do so) speaks, and if our contact work beforehand has been effective, some of our contacts also will speak for our line. At the end of the meeting, we follow up with individual discussion with contacts who have come along and with anyone we don't know yet who has made a good contribution in the meeting.

Quite possibly some of the contacts we work on will be members of IS or

some other left group.

(A) is a method which, I fear, has been too common in Workers' Fight. (B) is, I think, the method which Chris Corcoran fears that I may be arguing for. (C) is the method which I intended to argue for.

Obviously my contribution to IB 5 was not clearly expressed, and Chris Corcoran has done a useful job in pointing this out. If the point was left ambiguous, it could help to legitimate sectarian tendencies. For example, student comrades could sit around all day in union coffee bars chatting with other leftists and think they were "doing propaganda work".

But there is, I think, an unresolved contradiction in Chris's article. He says "the only way forward for us therefore if we are to build a base in the class and make gains from other groups is to become 'viable'"; on the other hand, the reason why we are not 'viable' is that we are "tiny numerically".

So: we can't recruit until we are numerically viable, and we can't be numerically viable until we recruit. Vicious circle! What is the way out?

Chris, is, I believe, absolutely right to say that in the present situation of stormy working class militancy, with sharp and uneven development of class consciousness, it is necessary for revolutionaries to have an orientation to the mass struggles of the working class. But if we just leave it there, then we have no way out of the vicious circle. If we were a mass party, we could build our party primarily through mass, agitational work; putting over the basic ideas of revolutionary socialism simply to large numbers of people, and validating them through our intervention as a substantial material factor in the mass struggles of the class.

But we're not a mass party. If we hope to build primarily through agitational work, then CP or IS or the SLL - the 'viable' groups - will beat us every time.

One solution is 'base-building'. That is, we concentrate not on "the masses" at large, but specific limited areas - this housing estate, that factory, etc. This approach has some validity, but taken as a universal solution it leads to economism and what we have called 'localism'. It was stressed in the discussions at our Aggregate, but now we need to go further.

The same problem of the disproportion between the tiny forces of Trotskyism and the scale of the mass struggle was faced by the American movement in its early years. J.P. Cannon wrote:

"What concrete task should we set for this group of 100 people scattered over the broad expanse of this vast country? The problem was to understand the actual situation, the stage of development at the moment. Of course, you have to find a road to the masses in order to create a party that can lead a revolution. But the road to the masses leads through the vanguard and not over its head. That was not understood by some people. They thought they could by-pass the Communist workers, jump right into the midst of the mass movement, and find there the best candidates for the most advanced, the most theoretically developed group in the world, that is the Left Opposition which was the vanguard of the vanguard. This conception was erroneous, the product of impatience and the failure to think things out. Instead of that, we set as our main task propaganda, not agitation". (History of American Trotskyism, p. 86 - 87).

And further:

"Our first task, as we saw it, and correctly, was to build a cadre; only then could we go to the masses. The old-timers can well recall how we were pestered in those early days by ... Weisbord ... who promised us a short-cut to the mass movement if we would only abandon our 'conservative' propagandistic routine, substitute a grandiose programme of activities for the modest tasks we had set for ourselves, and in general take up 'mass work' - as though it were a simple matter for our decision..... By sticking to our modest propagandistic tasks we recruited a cadre on the basis of fundamental principles. In the next period, when new opportunities opened up, we were prepared for a decisive turn to more expansive activity in the mass movement, and made it". (Struggle for a Proletarian Party, p. 59).

Now it would be quite wrong to simply equate America 1928-34 with Britain 1972. To an extent we have no choice in the situation but to combine "building a cadre" and "going to the masses" at the same time. That is the reason for the style of our paper, far more popular than would be normal for a group of our size.

But a basic point still remains. As a tiny group, we have very little chance of demonstrating the superiority of our overall politics "in practice". We simply haven't got the forces for it.

Engels wrote: "Socialism, since it has become a science, demands that it be pursued as a science, ie. that it be studied". If we were a mass party, with a firm cadre base, we could attract recruits on the basis of a generally revolutionary instinct, and educate them in scientific Marxism within the party. We are not a mass party. We will attract workers to WF, rather than the 'viable' groups, only on the strength of our (complex) ideas - ie, on the basis of study, not through a "lick it and see" method. This study - education, contact-processing - must be linked with our agitational work in the way outlined under (C) above. The point is not that we do no agitation - any more than a mass party does no propaganda - but that for us, the agitation work must flow from the propaganda work, and not vice versa.

Let us go back to our meeting. Many left groups - IS and IMG certainly, and also WF sometimes, I fear - will intervene in the leaflets/speech manner (method A) even when they know of not a single person in the audience whom they can convince in individual discussion! One crazy example is that of the IMG in Reading - who decided to "go to the masses" on the rents issue. So they leafletted the whole of Reading - and, surprise, surprise, got not a single tenant to the meeting.

Underlying this practice is what Andrew Hornung has called "audio-visual aids economism". The comrades who work in this way apparently do not believe in their ability to convince anyone through systematic education. But if they just use the 'audio-visual aids' - leaflets, speech - then sympathisers will somehow spontaneously leap from the amorphous mass.

For a mass party, of course, the problem does not arise. They are guaranteed in advance a sizable proportion of the audience.

So: an emphasis on propaganda work should not mean a retreat from agitation. Correctly understood, it leads to better and more effective mass work. What it certainly means less of is diffuse and ineffective mass work.

Finally, to clear up some points about IS. I do not and did not advocate that propaganda work round IS should be our main activity. I do believe that there are fine revolutionaries inside IS - when the struggle rages inside IS, they are generally on the right side (37% against our expulsion, 42% against the Aldershot editorial, large numbers for the general strike slogan, etc). They are revolutionaries - comrades whose aim is not just improvements within capitalism, but workers' revolution. Many of them have the education, the knowledge, and the talents we are desperately short of. They are not entirely clear politically - they are uneasy about Polan and Jones, but see no alternative. Surely we should put our politics forward as an alternative, not just abandon them for "the masses". In some areas, until recently, our comrades had virtually no contact with IS at all. Surely, therefore, a limited turn to IS was worthwhile? To argue otherwise is like scraping away at the ground with your bare hands instead of taking time out to make a spade.

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A NOTE ON
ORGANISATION.

I am reproducing here some excerpts from the Bolton local organiser's reports in the hope that other branches may find them useful.

(9.11.72) "At last meeting at Cattle Market 4 new contacts showed up - 2 bus drivers from Leigh, members of the TGWU, and 2 students from the college.

I don't know if I've told you in detail about these meetings, but we're now holding them every fortnight for our contacts and any contacts they bring along. They aren't public meetings for obvious reasons - we don't want the IMG along fucking all our work by their stupidity. The first meeting attracted 5 contacts and from this we're developing the 3 I mentioned in my last report, 9 attended this last meeting, so if we can maintain this development things will get really interesting."

(30.11.72) "Report on meeting held in Leigh (21.11.72).

10 people attended including 2 women, all were members of TGWU, either bus drivers or conductors at the Leigh bus depot. This meeting was organised by 2 of those who attended and was in fact solely on their initiative that the meeting was held in the first place. They booked a room and then asked us to come and speak which was a promising development. The people who attended seem very enthusiastic and we're going to hold a series of meetings, similar to the ones in Bolton.

Report on meeting held in Bolton (22.11.72).

8 attended including 2 from previous night's Leigh meeting. RR spoke on Wages Price and Profits. Those attending included the chairman of the local Builders' Charter, a CP hack. When asked after what he thought of the meeting he thought it was very good and said he would be coming to the next one. It remains to be seen how he will respond to further 'Trot' meetings. We didn't intend to invite him but we always ask the people present to bring along work-mates etc and this is what one of the building workers did.

The main point is that he is a close friend of DI (a WF contact) so we can 'use' him to expose CP tactics to DI (in a very subtle way of course) or by our influence with DI (once very close to CP) bring him nearer to us - it remains to be seen which will happen".

Perhaps it is worthwhile to draw out two points. (1) The same results could probably not be duplicated elsewhere, since Bolton is the only place in the country (except presumably Heage) where we are stronger than other left groups. But there are plenty of places like Leigh - working class communities with no left groups in evidence - scattered across the country. In fact, IS owe a lot of their recent growth to their ability to get into these places before other groups.

(2) Perhaps the best way to organise meetings is not always to find a speaker on "fighting the Tories" or suchlike, issue thousands of leaflets to the world at large, and rest content if you get one person along for each thousand leaflets issued. Open, publicised meetings do of course have a function, but more explicitly educational meetings aimed at actual individual people whom we can attract may be more appropriate as a staple. We are running similar meetings in South East London, there are plans for such meetings round Stanton, and as I understand it something similar is being done on Teesside.

Martin Thomas.

