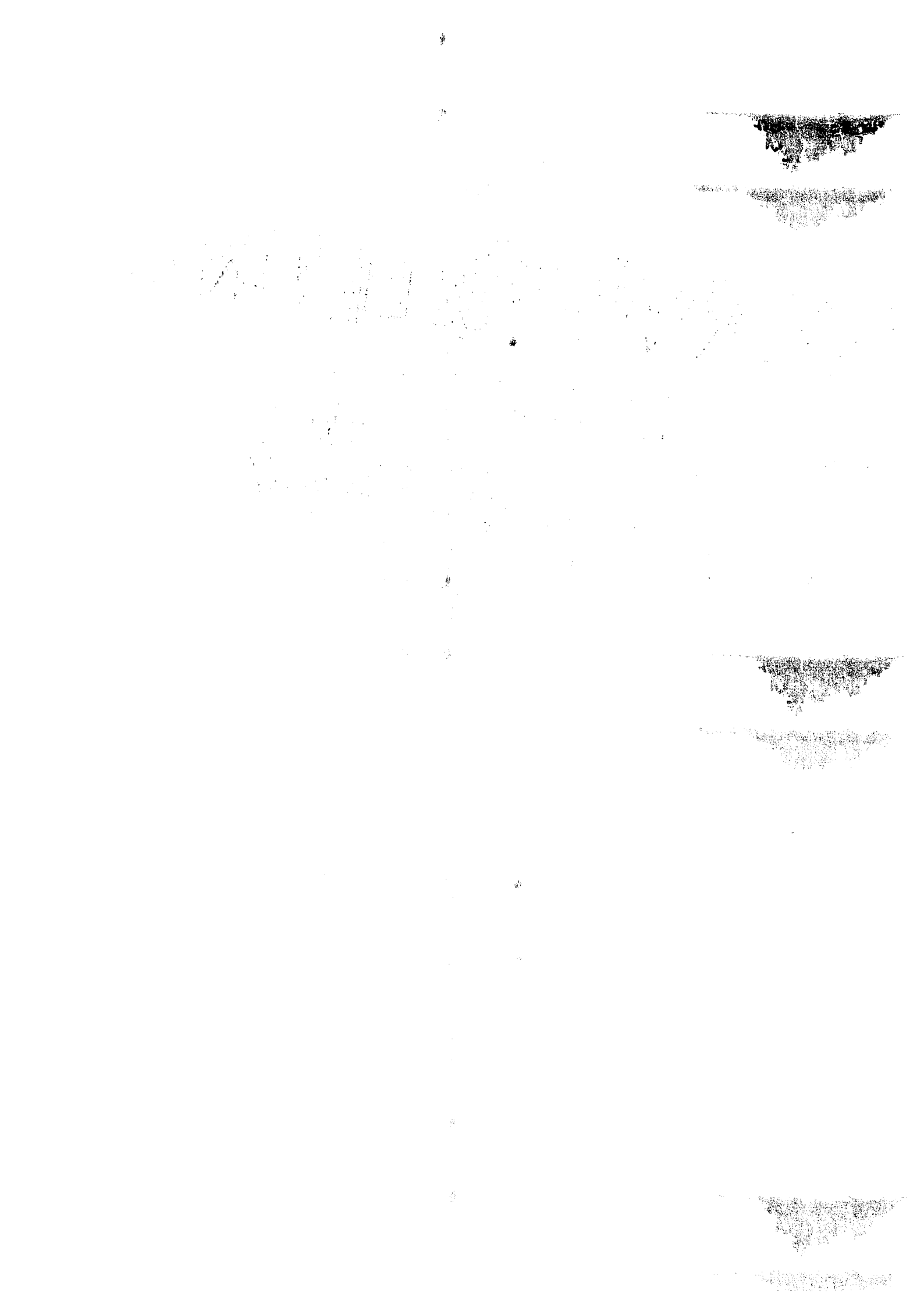


WORKERS' FIGHT

INTERNAL BULLETIN

NO. 12 / FEBRUARY 1973.

Page 1	Tenants' Fraction Report	Roy Ratcliffe
Page 3	'What is a Class Vote?'	from 'Rouge'
Page 6	On Ireland	Sean Matgamna
Page 9	National Committee Minutes (11 February) - including discussion on Phase 2 and on Aggregate decisions.	
Page 14	National Committee Minutes (13 January)	



Roy R a t c l i f f e.

The Tenants Fraction has been unable to function as a living organ of our group. As 'leader' of the group I have been unable to give a lead because the data on the struggle which I have received has been, with a few exceptions, of purely a local nature. Reports from most areas have been sporadic and from some areas non-existent. The almost total lack of coverage by the bourgeois news media plus this sporadic nature of our group's reporting has made the formulation of a national group line impossible.

Having said this, there are still some important lessons to learn from the tenants' struggle, although many will be missed through not being 'known'.

General.

In spite of the tremendous feeling of opposition to the 'Fair Rents Act'; despite the initially good work of many of our comrades; despite the activity of the other left groups; and despite the examples of working class militancy around them which has been unsurpassed since the General Strike (eg Miners, Dockers, Building Workers, etc) , the tenants who should have drawn strength from these examples have steadily, albeit in slow motion, folded up. Very little of the fight is left, and only small pockets of resistance continue to exist.

It is time, then, to begin to draw up the balance sheet and examine the struggle, to draw out the lessons, and formulate some perspectives.

Workers Fight.

To start with ourselves, we must be very critical. As a group which prides itself upon being among the 'conscious' elements of the vanguard of the class, we must examine our failures. We failed to correctly orientate the Tenants - this is not surprising given our size, and was to be expected. We failed to construct a worked out national line - to some extent this has been dealt with in the introduction.

Our Tenants Supplement, which was to be for us a major intervention tool, failed to materialise in sufficient time to be used effectively. Given that despite many requests the branches did not send in reports on a regular basis; given the fact of the complete Press and TV blackout of the tenants struggle, we suffered the same desolate effects of isolation as the tenants did themselves. The difference is this: the tenants had no choice in the blackout. We did. Without reports only a clairvoyant or a fool would have attempted 'to formulate a correct line. Like any other scientists, Marxists work on the basis of their theory, their experience, and an 'updating' of information, on the field of their study. One could imagine a skilled surgeon trying to operate on a patient, with his eyes blindfolded and with thick leather gloves on. Without a continuous 'intake' of information from his eyes and fingers, all the experience and understanding of medical theory would not ensure a successful operation.

The lessons for us are clear. Where the capitalist news media blanket or distort information which we need (which will frequently be the case as struggles intensify) we must see it as our first duty to report regularly to our centre, our fraction or our cell. Where we intend to intervene with a paper or pamphlet it must be produced on time.

Tenants Organisations.

For the tenants themselves, we must consider the effects of the struggle and its collapse. Initially many tenants expected the Labour councils to bear the brunt of the confrontation with the Government (as happened with Clay Cross). These tenants were late therefore in assuming a role in the strike. By this time many felt that it was too late to fight as some had started to pay the increase. Thus large numbers of those who were prepared to fight felt they were split - and they were right! This left a tiny minority who were usually around some group or other who had had the foresight to build associations or committees beforehand. This militant minority could have become a strong pole of attraction, a rallying point for the others. They did not become this - why? They could only have acted in this resolute determined way if they had prepared precisely for this contingency and had reacted with energy and vigour. Instead they (the mil-

itants) were led to believe in the imminent and easy success of their struggle. Inflated figures of those who were going to join the strike were bandied about by some of the left wing press and by many of the Tenants Association leaders themselves, in an effort to boost morale, and encourage the number of waverers to join the fight. Consequently, when the numbers did not materialise the waverers fled and the militants themselves felt set back. Particularly significant in the North West for this magical optimism was the 'Rent Struggle' broadsheet controlled by the IS. It was published regularly and given fairly wide distribution, but despite this it never gained credence precisely because of its inflated figures. Another point here is the absence of any clear political line in the 'Rents Struggle'. In fact there has been no Marxist analysis of what the tenants have been involved in at all, in the 'Rent Struggle' they have talked of 'bad laws', 'we've worked harder for our poulds than they have', etc, but that is all.

Perspectives for the Tenants organisation.

Since the Special Aggregate, only one report has come in (Coventry). But I will attempt to formulate some perspectives for our tenants activity.

We must consolidate all the tenants organisations we can, by formulating a strategy which they will readily understand, which will strengthen those tenants still around, and which will link the tenants with the trade union rank and file.

There may be a move among the strong associations for putting up their own councillors. We should not allow them to be drawn into this diversion from the present tasks. Only in exceptional circumstances could this be encouraged. Read Workers Fight no. 21.

Among the weaker groups there will probably be a mood for retreat in the face of failure. We must fight against pessimism and dissolution. Retreat can only enter OUR thinking as a tactic, which preserves the strength of our forces in order to regroup for further struggles. Therefore, where this is the prevalent mood, it MUST be accompanied by a programme for regroupment. Wherever links have been forged between tenant and tenant or tenant and Trade Unionists, we must not allow them to be broken. On the contrary, we must begin to strengthen them and build further links. Only on this basis can we think of or advocate retreat, otherwise the retreat will become a rout, leading to demoralisation and paralysis at the outbreak of future struggles. If a tactical retreat is decided on, it MUST be ANNOUNCED publicly as a tactical retreat for regroupment and further struggle. Circulars should be sent out to Trade Union branches explaining the nature of the retreat. It should be announced to the local press as a tactical retreat. In short, we should announce it to the broad labour movement, we must make clear the analysis of the failure of the tenants' struggle and the nature of any retreat. These circulars must reach all those who have at some time been involved in the strike and have perhaps given in. They should be encouraged back into the tenants associations on the programme of building links with trade unionists, etc.

Where the struggle against the Act has collapsed or has remained tiny we should sound out the idea (sensitively) of tactical retreat. Despite what some might say, a regroupment for a programme of retreat is a much more disciplined and positive step than a gradual disintegration and TOTAL defeat.

Where there is a split in the tenants over whether to retreat or stick it out, we must patiently point out the possibilities and consequences of both actions and declare ourselves willing to continue to fight along with them should they wish to, but that we consider a tactical retreat and an active building of links the correct position to adopt. If, in spite of this, some do want to continue, then the rest should draw up plans to assist them if they are victimised, and at the same time begin the forging of links.

We must consistently point out the weaknesses of the tenants movement and the reason for its failure to the tenants themselves is its isolation (nationally), its reliance on mass media for reliable communication, its attitude to left groups, its "keep politics out of this" attitude, its failure to build links and get rank and file industrial support.

Where the rent fight has folded we must try to regroup the dissipated

forces by calling for tenants delegates to councils of action where they exist or tenants speakers to Trade Union branch meetings. Where we have the possibility of getting numbers of tenants and workers to a meeting using a Clay Cross speaker we should do so. But we should prepare carefully beforehand and know what we want from the meeting. Such a meeting should be used as a first step for regroupment of forces and at the same time a call for the links to be formed from the Trade Unionists present.

Where we achieve a regroupment, however small, we should work out a program of regular discussion meetings at which we should raise the political level of the tenants, analyse the failures of the tenants movement, and begin some political education of the tenants.

Liverpool and Clay Cross.

In certain areas where our comrades are active the above suggestions may not be correct. They must therefore relate to their own areas intelligently. The immediate examples spring to mind of Liverpool and Clay Cross. These two areas will necessitate special consideration.

* * *

WHAT IS A CLASS VOTE?

From the 'Rouge' supplement on the 3rd Congress of the Ligue Communiste (French section of the Fourth International).

NOTE: This is an excerpt from the LC's discussion of its tactics in relation to the 'Union of the Left' (see WF 22 and 23 for background, criticism, and the attitudes of the other Frenchleft groups.) The whole supplement - some 18 pages of typescript - has been translated by Stoke-on-Trent IMG, and copies can be got for 10p plus postage from Roger Blackmore, 28 Bailey St, Newcastle, Staffordshire. The IMG translation has a large number of serious errors, which are corrected in the excerpt given here.

Following on the decision of the last NC, I hope to make items of discussion and information on problems facing Trotskyists in other countries a regular feature of the Internal Bulletin. This can help to fight the tendency to British parochialism which inevitably affects a group without international affiliations. M.T.

* * *

On the question of tactics to be adopted in the 1973 elections, the Ligue was faced with three separate positions at Congress: the tendency of 'Bolshevik-Leninists for Proletarianisation' called for abstention in the first and second rounds. A minority of the outgoing Central Committee was in favour of voting in the second round for CP candidates only. The majority defended the position of voting for UG* candidates in the second round **.

Each of these positions reflects a different assessment of the political conjuncture and of the Union of the Left.

.....

Vote CP only?

The Tendency 1+ resolution was defeated by 262 votes to 12. But immediately a new debate arose within this anti-abstentionist majority on the question of what tactics should be adopted in the second round.

Supporting the minority of the outgoing Central Committee, certain comrades proposed refusing to vote for SP and radical left candidates in the

+ abstentionist

* UG = Union de la Gauche (Union of the Left).

** In France elections occur in two 'rounds'. If one candidate has an absolute majority at the first round, he is elected. Otherwise, those candidates with less than 10% of the votes are eliminated (& others may withdraw), and the candidate with most votes on the 2nd round is elected.

second round, and voting only for the CP.

These comrades made a lengthy denunciation of the political project of the SP; in the context of sharpening crisis of the régime, what the SP was working towards was a new political solution for the big bourgeoisie, which would involve integrating the working class via its most representative institutions, the CP and the CGT.* The institutions of the 5th Republic and the semi-presidential character of the régime ** more than make up for the weakness of the SP in terms of its base and capacity for organisation. At this point in time, Mitterand is in fact preparing for the 1976 elections for president, and the elections of 1973 are merely a stepping stone to them. The first secretary of the SP*** intends to emerge an unopposed leader of the united left. This implies not simply imposing himself as a figurehead, but actually creating within the Union of the Left the favourable balance of forces vis a vis the CP necessary to obtain acceptance of this political solution by the bourgeoisie. And afterwards, in the perspective of the coming presidential elections, there will still be time to make room for the Centre-Right, in order to consolidate the balance of forces and ensure the confidence of the ruling class. At the head of the SP, Mitterand is thus endeavouring to win hegemony of the working class in pursuance of a policy of bourgeois-technocratic reforms, of the Wilson-Brandt type.

Revolutionary Marxists must in no way support such an operation. Their recommendation to vote must allow the workers to express their distrust of the Union of the Left, a new bourgeois solution to which it is appropriate to oppose an authentic class vote. In calling for a vote for the CP only, the Ligue Communiste would be asking the workers to break completely with the bourgeois parties. By responding to this call, communist voters would be saying to their leadership: "Break with the left radicals and the Socialist Party ! Break with the bourgeoisie ! Put your programme into practice ! Struggle for power on a class basis !" A withdrawal in favour of the Union of the Left as a whole, on the other hand, would mean giving approval to the Mitterand operation, would deprive us of the political means of denouncing him, and forces us to recommend a vote for bourgeois candidates like De erre, Faure, and many others. In short, it would be opportunist, and would reflect the pressure exerted by the Union of the Left on our organisation.

A Global Reformist Alternative.

This line of argument did not convince the Congress. Many speakers pointed out its weaknesses and incoherencies. In the first place, it is not valid to characterise the Union of the Left by the project of Mitterand alone. And it is only this project that minority comrades denounce. But it is neither the sole, nor the dominant project. At present a number of mutually contradictory projects (that of the CP, that of the SP) confront each other in the Union of the Left, with an uncertain balance of forces. The ambitions of François Mitterand are one thing. The political and social relations of post-May 1968 France are another. The Union of the Left cannot be analysed as if Mitterand and the SP had already won hegemony, when in signing the joint programme and publicly repudiating the centre alliance, they have in effect put themselves into the hands of the CP.

The class realities underlying the Union of the Left must be analysed on a more profound level than that of journalistic commentary. It must be made clear that the Union of the Left is to be distinguished from the classical frontist experiences (Popular Front, Liberation)[†] in that it represents, not an alliance between the proletariat and a leading section of the big bourgeoisie under the leadership of the latter, but a global reformist alternative of the traditional workers' movement. There is no party in the Union of the Left which actually represents big capital, as with the Radical Party in 1936 or the MRP in 1945. The 'left' radicals and the SP are relics

* CGT - trade union confederation dominated by the CP.

** The constitution of the "5th Republic", imposed by de Gaulle and the Army in 1958, gives very wide powers to the president.

*** i.e. Mitterand; † In 1936 a Popular Front government led by the SP and the Radicals, & supported by the CP was elected. Post-war, until 1947, the CP participated in a government led by de Gaulle.

and marginal groupings, not parties of the big bourgeoisie. Within the Union of the Left, it is the CP, a reformist workers' party, which has hegemony at the moment. And it is this hegemony of the CP which defines the terms of the alliance and gives it its class character, not the presence of this or that bourgeois politician⁽¹⁾

The entire ruling class makes no mistake about this. No section of the ruling class gives any support to the Union of the Left at present. On the contrary, as it exists in 1973 the Union of the Left is bringing about a polarisation of the classes: on one side, the working class (represented by its political and trade union organisations - CGT, FEN, CFDT, etc), polarising various layers of the petty bourgeoisie. On the other, the different sections of the ruling class, likewise polarising various sections of the middle and lower middle class. That is why the ruling class fears and fights the dynamic of the Union of the Left. It does not, today, constitute a "new solution for the bourgeoisie", despite the fact that the bourgeoisie may be forced to turn to it in the event of a catastrophe, just as it resigned itself to the presence of the CP in the 1945 government. In this situation it is clear that to criticise the Union of the Left in the name of the 'United Workers' Front', ie. with the slogans "Comrades of the CP, put your programme into practice ! Break with the bourgeoisie ! Break with the SP and the left radicals !" makes no sense. It implies that the CP has betrayed its proletarian programme and capitulated to the bourgeois programme of the SP, when in fact there is little to choose between the two programmes, and when signing of such a joint programme constitutes a radical break with the traditional politics of the SP.

The Majority Position.

For the majority of the former Central Committee, the Union of the Left is thus an expression of a global reformist solution, which has been taken up, for better or for worse, by the whole of the organised working class. They see it as a working class alternative to the present regime. And so their vote will have a class character. For these reasons, an electoral victory for the Union of the Left, in the present political situation, will be an important element in the sharpening of the political crisis of the regime, and at the same time a powerful stimulant to popular militancy. It is in the interests of the working class (and of revolutionary Marxists) that the majority coalition (identified by the masses as the bourgeois camp) encounters the biggest possible defeat, and that the Union of the Left (identified by the masses as the working class camp) wins the greatest possible victory.

That is why, if the Ligue Communiste must launch an intensive campaign in the first round, denouncing and explaining politically, in particular, the reformist blind alley of the Union of the Left, then based on this campaign of clarification by calling nationally for a UG vote at the second round, ⁽²⁾ because the outcome of these elections will undoubtedly have an impact on the balance of forces between the classes, and because we are certainly not indifferent as to whether that relation of forces turns in favour of the working class or of the bourgeoisie.

This position was finally accepted, with 191 votes against 71 for the Central Committee minority and 12 for the abstentionists. Henri Weber.

(1) With all respect to the Lambertists, the coming over of the left radicals does not affect the class character of the UG, the marginal character of their affiliation is proved by the fact that they did not even take part in the discussions on the joint programme to which they put their signature!

(2) This does not exclude certain exceptions, on proposal from local level and decision of the Central Committee. (Rouge footnotes).

O N I R E L A N D .

S e a n M a t g a m n a .

John Boyd's contribution to the IB (no. 6) on Ireland, raised a number of questions which it is useful to discuss in detail. This organisation has, since October 1966 when we numbered 4 individuals and had just resigned from the RSL, devoted a very considerable part of its resources (from November 1966 to April 1968 the vast bulk of its resources) to Irish work of one kind or another. We founded the LWR. we played perhaps the major part in getting the original faction of what is now the RMG started. we have been active in the ISC and AIL. A review and an accounting is long overdue. Of necessity it has to be critical (though not, I think, with John's criticisms). The lessons should prove useful.

1. John Boyd's criticisms.

John is right when he says the serious question is one of our attitude to criticism of the IRA. I think we can agree that any criticism in Britain which allows us or which is used to get out of the line of fire is not permissible. We have the best record on the left for taking an open, clear and unambiguous stand for the IRA against British imperialism; (and we are for the former only in its relationship to the latter).

Even in the criticism, immediately after 'Bloody Friday', there was no ambiguity on this and our headline said 'British Troops Out' and 'For the IRA against British imperialism'. The truth is that we have hardly taken account of the pressure from the British working class at all and have been only receptive (perhaps over-receptive) to the pressure of the need for unambiguous solidarity.

But the fact that the IRA is in the front line, while it inhibits criticism and imposes rigorous discipline on anti-imperialists in Britain itself, cannot exclude the right of WF to make an independent assessment of the Irish situation, including the IRA and its performance. It is only within that assessment that we support the IRA.

What is the IRA? It is not only a military arm opposing British imperialism. It is a political organisation, with a definite outlook and politics, as well as a history and traditions of its own. Very much of what it does, how it sees the struggle, its perspectives, strategy, and tactics - all affect the way it fights the British army, what it does and what it neglects to do. Though the unquenchable heroism of the Irish republican movement is a great part of the international revolutionary tradition, and though the Irish Trotskyists need, in my opinion, to fuse Trotskyism with the republican tradition and aspirations, nevertheless that tradition is not our tradition. The Republican movement is not our movement. The way it does things is not necessarily how we would do them. (I agree absolutely with the P.D. article in WF 15 in their criticisms. Incidentally, when I proposed to the EB that we republish that article I wasn't aware of John's piece for the IB. The appearance of both together is a coincidence).

It follows therefore that support for the military struggle against the British army cannot mean we suspend any attempt at an independent judgment, nor that our view of the struggle, identical with the IRA on one aspect, can fuse entirely with that of the IRA in all aspects. The imperative need to be careful in our assessments exists but it does not override everything else all the time.

'Bloody Friday' and the criticism it evoked from WF was just the final point in a growing uneasiness with certain aspects of the campaign in Northern Ireland. It is true that the very existence of the IRA is a provocation to the hardline protestants. It is also true that unity is virtually impossible. Nevertheless, unless the policy is to bomb 1 million Protestants out of Ireland as the Algerian pied noirs were driven out of Algeria, then there are certain limits to permissible - or defensible - actions in Northern Ireland. Actions which hit primarily at civilians (or as P.D. puts it which 'might' kill or maim civilians) can only drive the wedge deeper and totally polarise the communities into rigid blocks: moreover they push masses of protestants who would otherwise hesitate into organising a 'militia' and 'justifies' them

publicly. The difficult situation, the problem of the Protestants, is made five times worse. And even assessed from a purely military point of view, such bombing is counterproductive: world war 2 proved that, I think.

In reality there are at least 3 distinct strands in the IRA campaign: the war against the army; the war against property, the economic war (of course closely connected); and an undergrowth of sectarian activity. The record of the Catholics is better than the protestants', but there is a record of sectarianism there too. The most spectacular examples of this sectarian strand were the shooting at Protestant factory workers. Here it is not a matter of recoiling, unthinkingly, like outraged worker-fetishists, but of understanding why the Catholics do this (the sectarian basis of unemployment) and why it is suicidal and stupid - unless the perspective is to drive the protestants out or subjugate them according to the most 'nightmarish' of Shankill Road scenarios.

Add this to the confinement by the Provisional IRA, which actually leads the revolutionary upsurge, of the struggle to the Northern Ireland beararden, and the absence of anything but the vaguest talk of socialism, and it is surely obvious that there is a major need for socialists to differentiate politically from the IRA. In Britain, of course, the major aspect of our work is not this differentiation but solidarity. Solidarity is to the fore, but we have a duty and right to make the whole picture known to our cadres and our periphery - at least to reprint the analysis made by Irish socialists. This view should also inform our solidarity work.

The disgusting, unctuous, and degrading use to which IS, the SLL, and the 'Militant' put their 'socialist' solutions and even their legitimate criticisms of the IRA, to ingratiate themselves with British workers and side step the backward side of their opposition to the IRA is inhibiting. A legitimate criticism of WF would be that we allowed ourselves to be so inhibited and so to confine ourselves to the single point of solidarity, like a stolid batsman, standing his ground and concentrating on swinging at the balls as they come, ignoring every thing else, that we failed to present a rounded picture and failed to put the IRA in its context and perspective. Better that, in this situation, than IS, the SLL, and the 'Militant'. But better still a rounded picture adequate in its contours and principles in placing solidarity to the fore.

2. What is our perspective for Ireland ?

There are two variants of the Permanent Revolution 'perspective' on Ireland: IS's and the IMG's. One says that the national struggle will be resolved through the initiative of the workers in the south (IS). It tends to ignore the struggle in the North, almost entirely, as an irrelevant and troublesome diversion. This position was developed initially in the Irish Workers' Group (by me) as an attempt to cut through the nationalist skirmishings which then were, and had been for ages, a diversion, and a disruption. Those were its merits and it corresponded to the real situation, then, and opened up a perspective of clarification and constructive work which, had it been done, would have been an invaluable base to intervene in the events from 1968 onwards, and might have changed the course of developments. Though based on nearly 50 years of experience, it failed to allow for the present upsurge and how to relate to it. For IS in Ireland it is now a recipe for head in the sand confinement to the direct workers' struggles in the South.

The other perspective is the IMG's - that the national struggle in the North will inevitably grow over into the social revolution north and south. It ignores the protestant workers and is terribly incoherent. (At an ISC meeting in London, Gery Lawless and Bob Purdie, the leading 'Irish' authorities in the IMG, talked of the prime task in the South as being to organise 'solidarity' work, as if it were a separate country. Even when pressed, and the implications being pointed out to them, they insisted on the formulation !)

Given the present upsurge in Northern Ireland neither of these 'perspectives' is other than a caricature so one-sided as to be utterly useless. On the

level of social pressures they reflect the fact that the border really has truncated Ireland into two very different segments: the South increasingly complacent and integrated with Britain, with all the social tensions and unsolved problems isolated in the infected and indeed septic area of the North. Ideologically it represents the extreme muddle about Permanent Revolution current in both IS and IMG.

WF has accepted neither version. We recognise the great limits to the movement in the North of Ireland. We also recognise the irresponsibility of the Southern Irish workerism of SWM, IS's Irish offshoot. We believe the programme of the national democratic revolution is a necessary part of the programme of working class communist revolution in Ireland and of the need to fuse the programme of Trotskyism with the genuine revolutionary tradition of Irish republicanism.

That means two things: 1) advocacy of the building of a working class based revolutionary Trotskyist movement in Ireland, which centralises and fuses the various parts of the struggle which concern Irish workers - the direct economic struggle as well as the direct war against imperialism. The IRA is not such an organisation, though major forces for its building may come from the IRA.

2) In Britain opposition first and foremost to British imperialism in all its military and economic domination of Ireland. This does not imply any illusions in the Republican movement - thrown up not only by the positive side of the Irish national struggle, but also by the parochialism and the backwardness of Ireland the now 50 years old eclipse of communism in Ireland

I hope to take the discussion further in a future article.

1 October 1972.

Absent: DS (got the wrong day for the meeting), PS (ill), PL (ill), JW (distance prohibitive).

SM reported SC decision relating to PL, that he should be asked to take a leave of absence. Agreed.

P H A S E 2.

SM introduced. The chronic problems of the capitalist class continue. They have had some small success, but they have failed in their attempts to physically hold down the demands of the working class.

Even habitually non-militant sections, such as the hospital workers, are moving into action.

We must stress that the Freeze is a weapon the ruling class and its State and the working class must fight against that State and that ruling class.

The question of solidarity alliances is vital. We stress that the working class can break the Freeze. A deepening of anti-Freeze mobilisations to General/mass strike proportions is feasible.

Clearly the Industrial Relations Act is becoming a norm for State-unions relations. But only 'becoming', so far. The potential for mass strike explosions continues. We should continue the 'General Strike to Smash the Act' slogan - using it to link and focus struggles against the Freeze.

At previous NCs SM had argued that 'General Strike to Smash the Act' was of declining relevance, and it would be necessary to move over to a 'Kick the Tories Out' slogan. But really it needs a series of important defeats for 'Kick the Tories Out' to supersede 'General Strike'. The Act cannot and must not be considered as an isolated issue.

A General Election may be upcoming - there will be a big Tory/middle-class mobilisation - "who rules, Unions or Government?" - and even a serious possibility of a Tory victory. The process inside the Labour Party is shown by the decision of the NEC of the Labour Party last July to support the TUC's general strike call - and by Prentice's anti-strike pronouncements. We should not stress Kick the Tories out as of yet.

People like the SLL say 'General Strike to Smash the Act' is "syndicalist" - that just shows their own parliamentary cretinism. And we should remember that historically syndicalism was a healthy - and still is a healthy - working class response to parliamentarism.

MT Why stress general strike to smash the Act rather than general strike to smash the Freeze?

SM The Act leads to outrageous Government actions and sharp class-wide responses like over the Pentonville Five. The Freeze is not so clear and so sharp - struggle against it is inevitably, at least initially, sectional.

AH The Act is a class-uniting issue - cf. the unity of lorry men and dockers in July - the Freeze does not have the same effects. Thus the stress on general strike to smash the Act.

Moreover, because anti-Freeze action is, at least initially, sectional, there is a real danger of counterposing the future, big, general action to the immediately possible sectional action. This danger doesn't hold if general strike is linked primarily to Act.

RR A big mobilisation against the Freeze is a mobilisation against the law.

The clinching phase for the ruling class is Phase 3, not phase 2. In Britain there is a split between industrial capital and finance capital - finance capital is against the present policies.

The background is a situation of international monetary crisis. The Government's plans are likely to be necessarily rushed, telescoped, disturbed by external pressures; therefore there will be mistakes and crises on their side.

SC The Freeze is in itself not the object of a clear class focus - can lead to a split between higher and lower paid.

RR Phase 2 is a nearly exact copy of Nixon's Phase 2. Nixon's plan was a success

- in its own terms. But that success led to good results of the Japan export (10 trade ! - and a dollar crisis ! Even success for Phase 2 does not lead to capitalist stability.

MT We must consider the mood of the working class. Of course the Tories are making efforts to split the class - but it's my impression that the Tories and their incomes policy are very widely discredited among the working class. Class is not very worked up as yet about Phase 2 - but clearly is not overawed by it, it is prepared to take direct action. In relation to this, we must consider the slogan of automatic cost-of-living wage increases, contained in the Transitional Programme, and at present being raised by every single 'Trotskyist' group except ourselves. It seems to me that in the present situation - as contrasted with that of 1938 - the CoL increase demand cuts across the best development of the struggle, the possibility of direct action to smash the Freeze outright.

SC There has been a tremendous development of consciousness among hospital workers.

RR The government's treatment of the agricultural workers' claim was a mistake on their part - has helped to discredit them among the working class.

TC Among miners there is demoralisation, because they have been educated in the 'special case' argument for wage increases, and can't see a special case argument for themselves now.

SM MT is right about the CoL increase slogan. But it is important to relate to the mobilisation of housewives around price issues. Is terrorisation of supermarkets the appropriate tactic (pickets, browbeat manager, etc) ? We must stress solidarity action by higher-paid with lower-paid, against the Tory splitting.

RR On prices - we must attempt to direct housewives against supermarkets, not small shopkeepers.

AH Importance of drafting a programme for LCDTU.

SC In Manchester we intend to set up a Liaison Committee - put a resolution to the national conference - and fight for it to be adopted at the national conference (at present, only the resolution from the platform is put at the LC conference !)

SM We must raise the question of a new Minority Movement - put out a pamphlet on the question - RR to write.

MT We must raise the question of Councils of Action and Public Sector Alliances

RM, RR The trouble is that so many councils of Action are not councils of action at all.

SM The name Council of Action is probably a bad one at this stage. But we must be aware that the idea of councils of action (in general, whatever the specific name chosen) can rapidly pass from the sphere of propaganda to agitation to organisation.

MT SM is absolutely right. NB example already in Hackney of joint CPSA - NUT committee.

AH There are dangers with councils of action of ending up with harmful talking-shop.

MT Dangers ? There are always dangers in doing anything except staying quiet at home!

AH There is a danger of devaluing the idea of councils of action and miseducating people.

MT Proposal - the way ^{we} should pose it is this: if there is a council of action, it should turn its resources to solidarity with the present struggles. If

there isn't, we should stress Alliance councils of those sectors in struggle

SM We should put it as a call for United Fronts against the Freeze.

SC We should stress the Industrial Relations Act as a framework for the Trade Union bureaucracies.

The following resolution was agreed (amendments, etc. noted in right hand margin):

1. Having, despite some partial successes, failed to achieve the required results with either the policy of pushing down wage increases bit by bit (power workers, post workers, miners) or the Industrial Relations Act, the Government has resorted to a tactic previously rejected - the various phases of the wage freeze. They are bound to pursue this policy with some determination. In addition, the international economic situation means that they are subject to important instabilities beyond their control,
2. The working class has generally retained a high level of combativity and confidence. New layers have entered militant struggle. Massive partial mobilisations against the Freeze are already underway. There is definitely the possibility of smashing the Freeze through direct industrial action.
3. Mobilisation against the Freeze will necessarily be sectional in the first place at least. It is vital to fuse together the various struggles into a coordinated offensive against the ruling class, the State and its laws. In particular, the most important weapon against the Tories' attempts to split the working class will be the mobilisation of the better-paid, better-organised sections (eg Ford) in solidarity action with lower-paid (eg gas, hospitals).
4. We therefore raise the slogan of a 'United Front' based on a short but precise programme against the Freeze, the Act and unemployment.
5. We advocate the formation of alliances, like the Public Sector Alliance, to fight the Freeze. At the same time, however, without in any way counterposing ourselves to these formations, advocate their generating the United Front on the programme we set out.
6. Such advocacy can be made in relation to the LP wards and Trades Councils as well as other political organisations. The LCDTU can be urged to accept that programme and co-ordinate the united fronts so realised
7. Our paper raises the question of the United Front, Minority Movement, Housewives' Committees and Councils of Action.
8. In trying to realise the united front and in particular trying to generate this development from a temporary alliance of struggle we make every effort to draw in those elements, like housewives, tenants, etc, often left outside the struggle. To the extent that this last development is successful it will be possible to go beyond the level of general propaganda in relation to housewives and tenants committees and waging a struggle on all the fronts of attack.

Deleted (MT against):
 We must raise the idea of militants' united fronts, at various levels. We call on union leaderships to organise a united front of those in struggle, and on the YUC to aid this. We agitate, and, if possible, organise for rank-and-file united front committees locally. We call on the LCDTU to support this, & campaign for democratisation of the LCDTU. This work to be based on a precise, though partial, programme against the Freeze, unemployment, and the Industrial Relations Act. The working out of that programme to be a chief priority of the group.

9. Through such developments we should try to lay the basis in the event of any class-wide struggle of a mass/general strike nature of real organs of struggle having the capacity to raise themselves to the level of embryonic organs of dual power.

10. Obviously the Government will make attempts to split the working class, and obviously these attempts will have some effect, especially if they are to take the form of drawing the Trade Union bureaucracy into a position of being able to play its traditional role of acting as a brake upon militancy, eg Fisher of NUPE acting to prevent solidarity action. The chief notable feature of today, though, is that previously very backward sections are precisely those in the forefront of the struggle, uninhibited by any thoughts of "it's against the law". And the credibility of the Freeze is very low, given the Government's failure on prices and its obvious meanness with the farm-workers.

11. The Industrial Relations Act has to some extent been accepted as a framework for trade union activity by the bureaucrats. But the 'penal' parts, certainly, are not firm. The issue is still explosive.

12. There is a serious possibility that solidarity action against Phase 2 can escalate to general strike proportions - especially if the Tories use the penal clauses of the Industrial Relations Act, which remains a vital weapon for them to assist Phase 2. We must clearly link Freeze and Act under the general theme of independence of the Trade Unions from the State in our propaganda. We stress that a general strike could go ahead to rip up both Freeze and Act.

13. Thus we attempt, at each stage, to forward the most variant of the development of the movement. In the present situation, agitation round such demands as cost-of-living increases cut across the logic of that most favourable development, towards class-wide and implicitly political direct industrial action. Housewives' committees, however, may be valuable in drawing further layers into the struggle. But, for them, too, we should put forward a perspective of direct action, for example action (pickets, browbeating managers, attempting to get support from cashiers) against supermarkets that raise prices.

14. There is a serious possibility of an election at a near date, with the possibility of a Tory union-bashing victory. To place stress on kicking the Tories out at this stage is to adopt a defeatist perspective (implicitly). It is to accept that the decisive battle is to be, not the industrial battle here and now, where the working class has tremendous strength, but an electoral battle sometime, a battle waged on conditions much more favourable to the ruling class.

15. Even if Phase 2 is completed with some sort of success for the ruling class, that will not solve their problems. For them, the crucial stage is Phase 3.

* * *

DECISIONS OF THE AGGREGATE.

The following proposals were agreed. (TD's resolution, forwarded from the

Aggregate, was considered to be absorbed by the first item). (13)

1. A follow-up programme of education.

To be carried out through (1) cadre school, linking to individual educationals in the branches; (2) branch discussions and weekend schools with SC/NC speakers - branches to be asked to work out schedules for (2).

Education programmes and/or discussions in IB to be started on five main headings:

Stalinism (education programme, MT)

Permanent Revolution (education programme, SM)

Perspectives/ Transitional Programme (discussion in IB; AH also to write up his article on Party & Class).

Reformism, entrism, Labour Party, workers' government (education programmes, JW and MT)

State capitalism (education programme, PS).

2. Theses to be completed promptly as a priority.

3. An NC member to be appointed to overlook international connections; getting the Theses translated (at least into French); circulating our material internationally and getting contacts; coordinating material on tendencies in other countries and reporting regularly in the IB. Particularly, and immediately, to contact Spark. To arrange WF participation where possible in international conferences. MT to do this job.

4. Offensive against the IMG: brief reply to Tariq Ali's letter, plus previous correspondence with Ross, to be circulated.

5. Fund. RM's proposals to be accepted (RM will circulate branches).

6. Cadre school scheduled for Easter (April 21, 22, 23). Main subjects to be - trade union work; reformism; permanent revolution.

* * *

TRADE UNION WORK

SM proposed that - SM should do a detailed report on the group's TU work for the next NC;

- a commission, comprising SC, SM, and RR should be set up by the NC to survey the group's Trade Union work and to prepare the Trade Union school (at the end of May).

Agreed.

* * *

WORK OR FULL PAY

AH introduced, outlining the arguments of his IB article. Decided that:

- we raise instead the slogans No Redundancies; Cut Hours, not Jobs; National Minimum Wage; All unemployed to receive at least that minimum wage.

- we explain the question (with a self-criticism) in the paper.

* * *

Present: HC, SC, AH, RM, SM, RR, MT, JW

Absent: PL, DS, PS, KS

Also present: NS, ST

1. FINANCE

RM Reported that the group financial position was serious. There was no money to pay debts which would have to be paid off in the next few weeks (e.g. £58 phone bill). Response to the levy had been poor.

RR Making sure that the levy got in was the responsibility of the local organisers. In the Bolton branch finance was the first item on the agenda and they didn't move on to the second item until finance was dealt with satisfactorily.

SM We need to make more commercial use of the press. Also we should be able to make a profit from pamphlets and from the journal provided they were handled properly - i.e. in future no pamphlets should be sent out without a firm order from the branches. This should be put into practice with the first issue of the journal.

Agreed - i) To circularise branches re. the financial situation.
ii) SM's proposals re. more rigid control of circulation of pamphlets.
iii) Session at special conference to deal with finance + meeting of local organisers.
iv) The levy to be in by the conference, with half of the outstanding debt in by 20th Jan.

2. DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST KS & HB.

Reported that KS & HB were starting up their own journal

Agreed - Expulsion of KS & HB was ratified unanimously

3. LEIGH BRANCH

RR Reported on the recruiting of two members in Leigh and the possibility of a branch. The branch had been made possible through pub sales and we already had a strong base in the buses and a good periphery with possibility of more members. Proposed ratification of Leigh as a branch and that RR concentrate activities on Leigh rather than Bolton. Bolton were prepared for RR to move. Financial difficulties in getting new recruits in Leigh and Bolton to conference.

JW Centre should give financial aid if necessary. Problem with new branches and probationary membership. A branch full of probationary members can be a bit of a nonsense. Should we waive probationary membership in this case?

RR No. Problem was solved by new members initially attending Bolton meetings.

SC Could DI (new member in Bolton) help with work in the building industry nationally?

RR Need to develop the comrade first.

Agreed - That the Leigh branch be ratified.

IMG

SM Reported briefly on negotiations with IMG.
Reported that PL had joined the IMG, therefore IMG would have full set of internal documents. Impression was that IMG were on 'unity offensive' against us.

SC Attempt to play off one branch against another - i.e. M/C IMG had hinted that internal documents came from Coventry.

AH Didn't think that IMG leadership had been reporting negotiations accurately to their NC. Rumours within the IMG that WF was about to fuse seemed widespread.

SM Should circularise membership explaining the leak of internal documents - thus counteract attempts to set branch against branch

ST Raised criticisms of MTW - a) On the EEC b) Protectionist c) demands were Possadist d) Nothing appears on general political topics outside the MT industry. Had written to DS expressing these criticisms.

JW Nothing formally wrong with passages criticised by ST - e.g. we are opposed to EEC in as much as it is a capitalist alliance; the question of the working class jumping on the bourgeois anti-EEC movement is a separate matter. However felt that MTW lacked perspectives and programme for action.

MI Confession, MT had written demands - agreed with criticisms.

SC There was a need for comrades in the other areas where MTW was sold to write for it.

MT Possibility of a national meeting of Cdeo. involved in MT industry to work out perspectives?

SM Disagreed with economic analysis in MTW. Need for the group nationally to be more involved.

Agreed - To reemphasise that sales of MTW are to be continued in areas outside Midlands and that the branches involved should also write for MTW. To see Midlands branch re involving the group as a whole in MTW and strengthening the fraction.

6. STUDENTS FRACTION

1 Reported non-functioning of the fraction.

SM Convenor, PLe, had been inactive since moving out of London.

Agreed - NS/RC to take change of fraction. Student fraction meeting to take place at the Conference. SM to contact PLe.

7. THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL (Continued from last NC meeting).

Discussion was around the original Theses and amendments which were published together with the minutes for the NC meeting of 16/17 December.

Thesis 1.

MI Moved amendment. Need to be more specific about the basis of international organisation. Must state explicitly the idea of international as an organisation fighting for an international programme as opposed to the 'epistemological centralism' of the IMG.

MI's amendment agreed to.

Theses 12.

MI Moved amendment 2.

JW Agreed with amendment. 'Big Brush' method had been consistent trait of USFI. Parallel with pre-'17 Trotsky.

SM: Stupid to father USFI on pre-1917 Trotsky. After 1917, no-one understood subjective factor better than Trotsky. See 'Lessons of October'.

SM MT is largely correct, but can't leave a theoretical vacuum. Used intelligently the theory of PR is still an immensely powerful weapon. The whole subject of PR and China belongs to the post-conference discussion.

MI Wasn't saying that China negated the PR theory - merely that the USFI was wrong in its method of application.

JW Method was one of general laws with no specific analysis. E.g. Trotsky's 'purely national revolutions are a thing of the past' is generally true but doesn't of itself lead to correct political conclusions - in fact had led to wrong conclusions (SLL). Another example is PR in relation to Ireland.

SM Still China can only be explained with reference to the PR.

MI Analogy. If a dart is thrown out the window it will gently float to the ground. MI wasn't denying that this confirmed the laws of gravity - he disagreed with such formulations as - "it plummeted to the ground like a stone". I.e. the theory of PR had to be given substance and content.

(16)

NS How to apply theory to new reality. USFI method: theory - 'All swans are white'. A black swan appears so you call it a deformed white swan. Instead of this sort of dogmatism it is better to be honest about not knowing all the answers.

MT Cf us and the PAE.

SM Different from PAE. Need to relate to traditions of which PAE is not a part. Need for caution when approaching the theoretical conquests of the movement.

MT Question of a generalised explanation of the theoretical destructuring. Line 25 of thesis 12 seems to suggest that 'to assimilate reality to the theory of Trotskyism' must lead to 'ideological disarray'.

SM Just confused formulation.

SC However there is a need for generalisations re ideological erosion.

SM JW and SC show dangers of theoretical scepticism. Similar scepticism in post-war RCP but there the leaders had as a result engaged in a thorough debate and rather than proclaiming their scepticism to the world, they decided that it was misplaced. Need for similar caution.

SC Didn't think that this sort of caution could deal with problem of scepticism.

Composite agreed - to include MT's points about concretisation re FR, but with the qualification that FR still provides a valid framework.

Amendment 3.

AH Previously we've said that the virtue of USFI vis-a-vis ICFI is that the USFI is 'open' to reality - but in a different way USFI is also blind - i.e. Pablo on the war. Destructuring came from dogmatism.

SM Agreed with substance of amendment but quotations were not good examples. Danger of LWR method - i.e. giving a list of isolated quotes, which you think are self-evidently wrong, whereas in fact you don't understand what they mean and in fact they aren't so wrong.

MT Agreed with SM.

RR Surely we can't agree with the quote about China being the centre of world rev.

SM At the time it was not absurd to suppose that capitalism would be undermined by the colonial revolution and China provided ideological leadership of the colonial revolution.

RR Not convinced.

JW Surely the 3rd quote about Workers' States 'appearing' is a valid example of MT's point.

SM This refers to Algeria where there was a possibility of a Cuba type development.

JW Then should hear something about Algeria and not about Workers' States appearing.

SM Agreed - but DWRT was not the only document - others dealt specifically with Algeria.

Agreed - to keep the substance of MT's amendment but with fuller and different quotes and more explanation.

MT Wanted explanation about Cuba "is a special case".

SM Castroism was a genuine revolutionary movement right up to 1968 (at least). There is bonapartist formation in Cuba, with a functioning bureaucracy. But this is much less than is the case for USSR now and possibly less than USSR in 1920's. The masses have been armed and mobilised. There is a populist type democracy but no genuinely accountable workers democracy. It is not foreseeable what will be the degree of the bureaucracy's resistance to workers power. Therefore:

- a. A political revolution is necessary.
- b. Not clear whether it will be massive anti-bureaucratic workers movement or more like the 'police action' formulations of Trotsky on the early Stalinist regime.

MT This should be made explicit in Theses - agreed.

(17)

Thesis 15

AH Explained ammendment 5. SLL's non-political fetish of party in fact added up to spontaneism since it implicitly assumed spontaneous class consciousness.

RM Couldn't see it. Use of 'spontaneism' imprecise.

Agreed to clarify ammendment.

MT Our pamphlet on the SLL is either wrong or incomplete. Fundamentally SLL is a rightist organisation.

Thesis 16.

JW Re. LSSP - is it reasonable to expect USFI to have strict Democratic Centralist discipline. USFI doesn't have the authority of 3rd. International.

SM DC International is possible but not likely in coming period. Need for concrete analysis. Cannon was correct in opposing Pablo's ultra-centralism.

AH Question of democracy. FI not always democratic - e.g. Pablo's collusion with Clark.

JW Experience confirms forced necessity of a 'loose' international.

SM DC is not a fixed organisational formula but flexible and always related to the actual tasks.

RM Any contradiction between FI as a propaganda group and being federalist?

SM Question is one of USFI's theoretical stability - not organisational weight.

RM But the attraction of the USFI is international organisation not theoretical stability.

MT Proposed ammendment 6. On many questions SWP was correct against the European based centre. E.g. On Vietnam the Ligue Communist had talked about the PRG preparing a massive political offensive in connection with the peace agreement. SWP line of cautious criticism was correct.

JW Did MT know that LC's statement was incorrect?

MT Not the point. Point is politics of PRG - e.g. demand for coalition government based on block of four classes theory.

J PRG had in fact been forced to retreat from coalition government. Didn't think that they had ever justified it in terms of 'block of four classes' but rather as a breathing space.

MT PRG is block of four classes itself.

JW If we accept right of PRG to retreat then we have to have some alternative to interim political agreement if we are to criticise it. Given retreat, JW thought coalition govt. best alternative.

SM Democratic Republic is most favourable alternative.

JW Just not possible. Moved deletion of reference to Vietnam - defeated.

SM Moved deletion of last sentence of ammendment. Gave too much to USFI. LO had had to a greater or lesser extent, healthy political practice within a different (incorrect) world view.

MT Didn't agree - LO was conservative not revolutionary.

AH Didn't think generalisation was even true of 'new class' groups - what about IS.

Agreed - to delete last sentence of ammendment.

MT Moved ammendment 7. No such thing as a typical section. Even within the European side of USFI there were vast differences - i.e. 3 different positions on Workers Control.

RM Queried MT on this

SM Last sentence is speculative. Doubted that IMG would develop a dynamic of its own - depends too heavily on International.

MT Change 'seems to' to something more definite. Agreed.

* * *

Priorities for next few weeks.

Agreed that priorities should be

1. Conference documents
2. Journal
3. Paper.

* * *

Fourth International (continued).

Perspectives.

SM A perspective which fails to predict the future is not necessarily invalid. To think so is to misunderstand what a perspective is - future can be foreseen inasmuch as one acts upon the perspective. Was FI guilty of wrongly estimating the guidelines within which they could act? Did they overestimate their own forces a la SLL? No. Did they misestimate the upturn in the class struggle - no - the big upsurges came. Did they misestimate the crisis of capitalism - no, there was such a crisis. What do we mean by the crisis of leadership? 1. the concept of the epoch; 2. the eruption of the masses; and 3. the subjective factor - i.e. the FI. This has been interpreted didactically, ~~and~~ by some 'Trotskyists' as the hitch hikers on the road to workers' revolution. But a perspective is a framework for intervention. In fact Trotsky predicted very well the objective trends - the only fault in his predictions being the continuing strength of Stalinism.

RM The key to a perspective is the subjective factor. Without this it is mere speculation.

SM The stability of Stalinism - 1. the effect that the war had in unifying the USSR. 2. The annihilation of the subjective factor, the opposition. These factors couldn't be foreseen. What other perspectives could the Trotskyists have had? If the mistake on the stability of Stalinism is a political one (rather than one of estimation), then we shall need a new theory of Stalinism.

MT On the Q. of the epoch. Fundamental is 1. the relation of class forces - the way the ruling class rules; 2. the sudden revolutionary upsurges of the class 3. As far as the CI was concerned it wasn't just the objective factor - the CI itself was part of the mechanics of the epoch. Today the first two factors hold, the third does not. The deep entry tactic shows that the Trotskyists themselves had the perspective of being a small group.

AH Is Stalinism a machine for atomised civil society? (?)

SM The state is always finally the instrument of a class - no matter how Bonapartist

AH We must determine who the perspective is for - the masses or the party.

RM Defeatist expectations do not necessarily lead to passivity. Eg initially we thought the miners' strike would probably be defeated - that didn't make us passive.

SM The relation of WF to the miners / the relation of the Fourth International to the world situation. You can't build a movement on a defeatist perspective.

RM What happened was that the reversal of perspectives from 1939 led to demoralisation.

AH FI could not foresee events during and after war. RM's formulation leads to 'capitulation in advance'. The balance of forces cannot be taken as fixed in advance.

MT Can we all agree that the 1939 perspectives of the FI were essentially correct, as perspectives ?

AH, SM, NS Yes.

MT The post-war degeneration is essentially represented by an attempt to operate with the traditional concept of the epoch without understanding & coming to terms with the change in the 'subjective factor' within that concept.

SM The 1951 perspectives were really a reversal to the 1938 perspectives, in a changed situation.

MT There were major differences between 1951 and 1938, in terms of the perspective of building a new leadership - in 1951 there was a perspective of the FI being a small factor in the foreseeable future.

SM Yes, there was a difference there.

AH In the earlier period, there was a conception of the Trotskyists fusing their programme with the masses. In the later period, the conception was one of a 'detour' to the masses.

MT The FI saw the concept of the epoch as something 'objective', irrespective of themselves, in the later period. Hence a 'triumphalism' or a self-cancelling-out. In the '30s, the classical 'French turn' was based on an existing mass centrist radicalisation; the '52 'entry sui generis' was based on the possibility of a mass centrist radicalisation some time in the future.

SM Substantial agreement seems to have been reached.

MT There still remains the question of where the turning-point in the FI's conceptions is located, between 1938 and 1951.

SM After 1933 Trotsky shifted the emphasis from 'switching the points' of the workers' movement to the possibility of mass spontaneous upsurge breaking with the bureaucracy. During the war and after events necessitated re-assessment of the perspective.

What is wrong with the LO-type 'heads down and into the factories' perspective is that it does not attempt adequately to relate to the general class struggle - which must be coupled with routine work. Thus they do not take into account sufficiently the dynamic of the class struggle, which may radically transform the balance of forces.

* * *

