

WORKERS' FIGHT No 15
INTERNAL BULLETIN

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REPORT ON DISCUSSION WITH SPARTACUS (BOLSCHEWIKI LENINISTEN).

This is a report on a discussion I had with cde. R of the German Trotskyist group Spartacus (BL), on 13 August 73. A short introduction is necessary.

In the middle to late '60s, as comrades will know, the European sections of the Fourth International, one by one, pulled out of entrism work and re-oriented themselves towards the student radicalisation. In the German section the turn was later and more chaotic than elsewhere. Severe criticisms of the practice of entrism were voiced, and led to a split in 1969. The split-off group, the IKD, subsequently broke from the USFI and developed relations with the American 'Spartacist League'.

The IKD then split in its turn - into, on the one hand, the IKD/Spartacus-KJO, and, on the other hand, the Spartacus-BL. The main issue in the split seems to have been the question of orientation, with the Spartacus-KJO arguing for a concentration on youth work. The American 'Spartacists' retained relations with both groups after the split. The KJO have no surviving formal relations with the Spartacists now, as far as I know, but much of their political method and positions seems to me similar. The BL, on the other hand, seem to have made a fairly thorough break from the Spartacists.

Although the German left is quite large, it is overwhelmingly student in composition and heavily dominated by Maoism. All the Trotskyist groups are quite small. The largest is probably the official section of the Fourth International, the GIM, with perhaps 300 members. The GIM has been described to me in the following way: if the IMG is a poor man's Ligue Communiste, then the GIM is a poor man's IMG. My knowledge of German is not sufficient to check the truth of this description.

Some information about the American 'Spartacists' is necessary. In the early '60s, the SWP moved towards reunification with the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, on the basis of their common enthusiastic appreciation of the Cuban revolution. The SWP's former international associates, the SLL and the French OCI, declared that Cuba remained capitalist. Inside the SWP, a faction led by Wohlforth, Robertson, and Mage attacked the SWP for being insufficiently critical of Castro. After some dirty work by Healy, the faction broke up and was expelled. Wohlforth formed the Workers League, the SLL's American satellite. Robertson formed the Spartacist League. Although asserting that Cuba was a deformed workers' state, the Spartacists attempted for some years to get recognition from the SLL/OCI 'International Committee'. Today they assume a position of hostility to both USFI and International Committee, though their attacks on the International Committee are noticeably less violent than their attacks on the USFI.

On first impressions, the Spartacist League is more impressive than groups like the SLL. They do not lie (not usually, at least) and they do not retail philosophical and economic mumbo-jumbo. But if we look closer, we see that their method is basically this: they describe reality, more or less accurately, and then simply paste the Transitional Programme onto the description as a sort of religious cure-all. Real problems of revolutionary strategy therefore simply don't exist for them. For the problem of the deformed workers' states, they have a neat 'solution'. They regard a deformed workers' state as a historically lawful and normal product of petty-bourgeois radical struggle within a weak capitalist state. This fact is supposed to protect them from 'illusions' in Castro, etc; in fact, if interpreted rigorously, it leads to a stages theory, with the deformed workers' state regarded as a natural and valid stage of historical development. Their theory is in fact in all but words a 'new class' theory. But they save themselves from this logical conclusion by retreating into sectarianism - by regarding the programme as an abstract cure-all, divorced from any relation to the concrete steps of the real process.

Their sectarianism is clearly illustrated in their attitude to the Middle East (effectively a line of 'Israelis and Arabs unite and fight') and to Ireland (they support self-determination for Northern Ireland !!). Their day-to-day work is based on polemic against other tendencies with a small addition of allegedly 'exemplary' trade union work, where they organise caucuses on the basis of a full transitional programme.

One final note. In previous discussions with cde. R - including a discussion

with an Austrian supporter of the Spartacist League, in which R supported me on a number of sharp points of difference with the Spartacists - I had found agreement on a number of controversial questions of world politics, on the Middle East, on nationalism, on the latest French elections, on guerrilla warfare, on terrorism. (On Ireland, he was not sure what the position of the Spartacus-BL was). There may, however, be shades of difference that did not come out because of the language barrier. The discussion minuted below was carried out with cde. BR as an interpreter.

Martin Thomas.

* * *

R. Must preface his remarks by noting that the BL is at present passing through a critical period in its political development.

M. What are the BL's relations with and criticisms of the US Spartacists ?

R. The links with the Spartacists date from the period of the united IKD. These links were essentially the personal property of the leadership cliques of the IKD and of the Sparts. It was an unprincipled bloc - the common intervention made by the Sparts, the IKD, and the British RCL at the 1970 Red Europe rally of the USFI had no principled basis.

Differences between the IKD and the Sparts soon became apparent. The Sparts were an academic, student-oriented organisation; the IKD were activist, working-class-oriented.

The Sparts had one member in Bonn. He developed relations with one of the tendencies in the IKD which later became the BL. But, on orders from Robertson, he kept a foot in both camps, though orienting more towards the BL after the split.

The BL were lacking in international experience and were very unclear about the nature of the Spartacists. But it gradually became clear that there were serious differences: at first round the question of the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD). The Sparts said the SPD was a workers' party. The BL and the IKD initially said that the SPD was a "bourgeois party with a tail of workers" like the US Democratic Party. The BL now characterise the SPD as a bourgeois party based on the working class (more like the British Labour Party).

Other differences became clear: on national liberation movements; on trade union work; on the ultimativistic method of the Sparts. It became clear that the pretentious claims of the Sparts meant nothing. There were further differences on the Sparts' abstract formulation of questions of programme and strategy and on work in the army and among youth.

Simultaneously the BL became increasingly aware of the bureaucratic internal regime of the Sparts. A BL comrade attended the Sparts' conference and reported that the proceedings consisted of Robertson laying down the line and then other people getting up to repeat Robertson's line in a cruder form. It became clear that Robertson's motive was to annex the BL as a European junior partner and use it as a bargaining piece to gain admittance to the OCI's "Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International".

Relations grew sharper until the March 1973 conference of the BL and were then broken off. Robertson is now concentrating on cultivating the "Austrian Bolshevik-Leninists" and a recent split-off from the IKD/Spartacus-KJO.

M. Do you agree that the Spartacists are a sterile sect who contribute absolutely nothing to the development of Trotskyism ?

R. Yes.

M. I believe your position on the Fourth International is that it is dead. Is that right ?

R. Today the Fourth International does not exist.

M. When did it cease to exist ?

R. I can give you the position held by the organisation at the time I left Germany, but we are re-thinking.

We must start from this fundamental principle; the International is only worthy of the name when it has a correct programme and general orientation. Organisational impressiveness as such is not crucial. In 1938 the Transitional Programme represented a correct understanding and analysis. But the FI could continue to exist as the FI only if it continued to have a correct relationship to reality and to carry it into practice. The question of programme was the decisive question.

The analysis of the Transitional Programme was based on definite expectations about the Second World War. As reality turned out slightly different, the TP would need constant updating and concretisation, as Trotsky recognised. But after the death of Trotsky no-one succeeded in doing this.

The international leadership fell on the SWP. But the SWP tended to fall into social-patriotism during the war. It applied the Proletarian Military Policy in a sense directly opposite to Trotsky's intentions. It established no coordinating body for the European sections in a neutral country, and equally failed to establish close contacts with the important sections in Ceylon, Bolivia, and Vietnam. The SWP-based International Secretariat did not realise the task of leadership which fell on it, it did not draw the threads together. Continuity was broken in the war period and never re-established. The chances of success for the Fourth International had already been lost in the early war period.

M. If there has been no development of programme and strategy since 1938, where does the BL get its programme and strategy from? (I explained our position on the Fourth International and the importance of the 1951 Congress)

A. The BL does not have a programme.

M. Surely, if you say there is no theoretical and programmatic basis for an International, equally there is no basis for national organisations. (I explained our views on 'Pabloism' and 'anti-Pabloism').

R. For the BL, 'Pabloism' and 'anti-Pabloism' simply have no meaning. The degeneration of the Fourth International took place long before that.

M. Certainly it is true that there was a crisis of the FI during the war. But it was different from the post-war crisis. During the war, the FI had a basically adequate theoretical and programmatic foundation, but fell into all sorts of deviations and blunders because of the lack of adequate cadres. After the war, the FI was relatively strong organisationally, but was faced with the need to re-develop its theoretical and programmatic foundations. Since the question of theory and programme is fundamental, it is the post-war crisis that is fundamental.

R. The SWP was politically bad during the war. Trotsky once said that Schachtman had been right against Cannon on a number of questions, like Levi had been right in some ways against the KPD.

M. If organisational weakness of that type is crucial, then the FI was stillborn. Organisationally it was a shambles even in 1938.

R. The causes of the collapse may have been organisational weakness and the attacks of imperialism. Nevertheless the important thing is the fact that programmatic continuity was shattered. What WF calls 'anti-Pabloism', i.e. theoretical sterility plus hack politics, was seen also during the war and in the USFI.

M. 'Anti-Pabloism' is something more specific than that - it is a definite relation to the problems of post-war Trotskyism: an explanation of those problems as due to the deviation from an alleged straight line of a particular grouping. Thus the 'anti-Pabloites' suffer from these problems as much as or more than anyone else, but cut themselves off from any rational approach to the problems.

R. WF can't both take the stance of referee between the USFI and the IC, and simultaneously support the USFI.

M. In any debate over a specific political issue, we take our stand independently on the merits of the issue and not by choosing sides. However, we must also give a rounded political assessment of different tendencies.

R. So WF believes the USFI has degenerated ?

M. Yes, the USFI is a degenerated form of Trotskyism; though it would be wrong to say that the USFI as such has gone through a process of degeneration.

R. It is wrong to see any possible regeneration of the USFI as an automatic process.

M. Certainly ! If we believed that the FI would be regenerated by an automatic development of the USFI, we would simply sit back and watch it happen. (I explained our views on 'regeneration').

What are the BL's attitudes to the Spartacist line on deformed workers' states and on guerrilla warfare ? (I explained our criticisms briefly).

R. Found himself in agreement with us on this and similar questions - but thought it was more important to discuss questions of method, of the concept of the epoch, etc., rather than detailed political questions.

M. It would be useful to get clear on a number of particular political questions first. What is the BL's attitude on the question of Black Power ?

R. The question came up mainly in the debates with the Sparts. The Sparts have effectively an Uncle Tom "black and white unite and fight" line; they often come out with sectarian attacks on black groupings.

The BL advocate support for ghetto black movements - but not for middle-class cultural nationalists.

M. On Bolivia, the BL had published an article from the Sparts' paper. Is that still the BL line ?

R. Was not well informed on this particular question - but felt there was no political position that the BL shared with the Sparts !

M. What is the BL's attitude on the question of the women's liberation movement and the family ?

R. The Sparts adopt a line of hostility to the women's liberation movement. The KJO have also been sectarian in relation to the women's liberation movement. As for the BL, they have very small resources for intervention in the direction of the women's liberation movement - and it is made more difficult by the nature of the movement in Germany, being made up of small circles of students or ex-students. Generally, this is an underdeveloped aspect of the BL's work.

M. What is the state of the organisation and activity of the BL ?

R. On industrial work, there is an optimistic tendency and a pessimistic tendency. The main strength of the BL is in print, mainly in Berlin and Essen. But even there the influence of the BL comrades is mainly a trade-union influence rather than a real political influence. Generally they are in a defensive position.

The BL has about 130 members - it was 170/180 a year ago. In some areas there are a large number of sympathisers in addition to the signed-up members. The BL was able to put forward the idea of a four-day week among coal miners in Essen and get it passed through the Congress of the Union.

The class composition of the BL varies from area to area. In one area there are 50 or 60 members of whom only a few are students; in other areas, though, there may be something like 8 students and only 2 workers in a branch.

The tradition of the pre-split IKD was towards work in the youth groups of the trade unions. After the split, the BL turned sharply away from this, and oriented towards large-scale distribution of leaflets etc round various working class struggles. They soon realised this was inadequate - it gave no real contact. Also intervention in the direction of other groups has been inconsistent.

The possibility of intervening in various centrist groups (something similar to the Institute for Workers Control in Britain) is being debated.

M. Asked R to explain the theory of 'Rekonstruktionsperiode' (reconstruction periods). (This theory is apparently at the basis of BL thinking about the question of the epoch and perspectives. The discussion wasn't able to get very far on this question, but I have asked BR to study the BL documents, and I have also arranged for cde R to read the relevant parts of our Theses on the 4th International).

R. It is necessary to distinguish between the epoch and periods within the epoch. Economically, imperialism generally tends towards death. But death can only be guaranteed by conscious political action. Without that conscious political action, new periods of stabilisation are always possible - and those periods of stabilisation are due to political, not strictly economic, reasons. This idea is a fundamental idea of the BL.

It is taken over from the early Communist International, and can be shown clearly in the period after the First World War. (R then gave an account of developments after the First World War which seemed to me to be a reproduction of Trotsky's account).

M. I agree, but that hasn't got a great deal to do with explaining the problems of the period after world war 2.

R. The main difference after world war 2 was the greater strength of Stalinism, which managed to keep the working class subdued right through the period of post-war reconstruction.

* * *

At this point the discussion had to be cut short for lack of time. I hope that we will be able to take up a more extensive discussion with the BL in writing.

Workers Fight NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING. 18/19 August 1973.

Present: DS(chairman), TD, MT, SM, AH, CBy, JS, SCy, RL; plus ST, JStr, FB

Apologies: JW, PS (both arriving late)

Absent: RR (misinformation about venue).

PROCEDURE.

MT proposed a Compositing Commission on resolutions on Economic Perspectives and on the Labour Party.

TD Questioned whether it was necessary

SM, MT said there was great overlapping and lack of clear divisions in the resolutions.

Agreed - that there should be a Compositing Commission - JW, MT, SM, RR.

EXTENDED EDITORIAL BOARD.

SM explained the idea of the extended EB. There was a general lack of feedback and feed-in to the paper. NC was to act as an extended EB to correct this. Also reported that with new machine paper would be size of Workers Press.

MT Explained the ideas from the Midlands discussion (see I.B. 14 part 2).

Read excerpts of letter from AT to the Editorial Board:

"The paper is aimed at the advanced sections of the working class, but not just these advanced sections. Anyway, most working-class people have extremely mixed consciousnesses, being advanced in one respect but backward in another... If the paper aimed only at workers who were militants in the factories, quite politically advanced, conscious of class oppression, and able to understand such things as Women's Lib, the Black movements, Republicanism, etc, we would end up writing for ourselves... Therefore it is important to have articles written in a popular style...

We too often find long 'heavy' articles written in a turgid style and full of political jargon... in reports and/or articles on on-going events (prolonged strikes, NW 24, Clay Cross, Ireland, etc) the writers and/or editors assume that everyone ^{already} knows what has been going on... The question of, e.g. the IRA, must be approached sensitively, without in any way pandering to bourgeois prejudices..."

Comments; We cannot hope for paper to reach whole class; the most important readers are the serious, regular ones; and for those readers articles which do take some basics as given are necessary - but generally would agree that we need to strive for more popular style.

TD Agrees with AT. AT is not saying that the mass of the class does/should read the paper, but that at the moment many people who do read the paper can't understand it. Not enough historical explanation on (for example) Ireland.

SM Paper can and should be more popular. Magazine should solve some problems in this respect.

AH In the present period we don't just sell to already-qualified militants. Therefore - as everyone agrees - we need more simple and popular material for the paper. Must be balanced by some editorials and deeper articles, which need not necessarily be in difficult language. On Ireland there is a problem. We try to fill the style of our paper with the spirit of class hatred (as opposed to the flatness of the Morning Star or the slickness of Socialist Worker). This is good, in general. But on Ireland, where British workers don't understand anti-imperialist hatred, it can cut us off.

CBy The paper is uneven in what it expects of people. On exposures (midlands discussion) - we should try to get pieces from worker-contacts. Education series should be structured round Where We Stand. We should re-continue 'Review of Left Press' and deal with the Morning Star.

JS People are faced with a mass of literature - we do need to pay attention to front-page style, to catch the eye of readers. We mustn't confuse a popular style with crudity. We should tidy up the adverts section and get branches to advertise their public meetings.

- ST Many readers don't see any relevance of the paper to their day-to-day lives. The paper is not just for the people who buy it - it must also aim to reach to other people through the readers.
- DS Even theoretical articles can be in a popular style.
- RL The question of achieving popular style is largely a question of skill. Weakest aspect of paper at present is the first three pages - coverage of topical news. Insufficient monitoring of press and TV.

Agreed: (1) Proposals from Midlands discussion

- (2) Educational series to be done by JW; overall plan of series to be submitted to EB; to be roughly related to Where We Stand.
- (3) GA's circular on reporting for paper to be reproduced and branches asked to discuss it.
- (4) 'What Their Papers Say' feature to be introduced: cdes. who regularly read 'Sun' or 'Mirror', etc., to discuss possibility of contributing to it.
- (5) 'Review of Left Press' to be re-continued, with more coverage of Morning Star.

THE ENGINEERS' PAY CLAIM.

TD introduced. On the last pay claim, the struggle soon became parochial. The same will happen again this year. Also, basic rates are very often already above the claim - so the existing claim will mean little in benefits for many workers. The claim has aroused little interest, and the officials are doing little about it. Small possibilities for our intervention.

H We must look at question of balance of forces - the line-up of the union leadership - the feeling of the rank and file - the state of order books. Not sure how to answer question of whether we should argue for percentage increases.

TD Last year many people supported strike action simply on the hours question, when they had little to gain from the money clauses. We must stress the hours question this year - it is a unifying factor.

SCy Engineers' claim must be seen in the context of Phase 3. 'Bottlenecks' in the economy (see PS's document in I.B. part 2) mean shortage of skilled labour and a probability of increased investment. Increased investment means employers like strikes less. Communist Party are going to play an important role in the struggle - they control TASS, and the AUEW is moving to greater amalgamation. Proposes:

(a) Reports requested within one week from areas where we have contacts or members in engineering - SCy to prepare list of questions.

(b) Allocate someone to do research on order books etc. JMcI suggested.

Agreed to accept SCy's proposals.

TD proposed an article be sent to AUEW Journal;

SCy amended this to suggest all cdes. in AUEW send letters to the Journal.

Agreed to accept SCy's amendment.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND CO-OPTIONS TO N.C.

Agreed to elect DS chairman. For other officers, proposals were made in 'Proposals For Carrying Out Conference Decisions', and would be taken with that.

Agreed to co-opt JC, EH, and NS.

TENANTS.

Resolution from Liverpool:

"This branch, noting the lack of perspectives in the group in relation to the forthcoming rent increases in October, asks the next NC to do the following:

- (a) Decide, as a matter of urgency, perspectives for the forthcoming rent increases in October, and the possibility of a reactivation of the rent struggles that have taken place over the last year;
- (b) Demand, from each branch, a detailed report on the state of the tenants' movement in their area;

(c) Delegate a cde. the responsibility for reactivating the tenants fraction in the group."

Agreed to accept MT's proposal that (b) be carried and (a) & (c) referred to S.C. with recommendation that Nott'm branch be approached about (c).

Agreed also to accept CBy's proposal that S.C. consider a new Tenants Supplement

CARRYING OUT CONFERENCE DECISIONS.

(See S.C. proposals in Appendix to these minutes).

The proposals were taken item by item.

1(a) JS suggested mention of hospitals work

CBy suggested mention of building industry work.

MT said that hospitals work was covered by 1(b). Omission of building industry from 1(a) was deliberate - setting up a fraction was meaningless unless we could send an able and hardened cde. into the industry.

AH said MT was overestimating difficulties in building industry.

SM said that our previous experience had shown that difficulties were real.

CBy agreed that for a full-scale fraction we would need to send someone in. But even now we need to arrange coordination of what work is done round the industry.

SM - this should be done by the Executive Industrial Sub-Committee (EISC)

JS agrees with MT on hospitals being covered by 1(b)

SM's proposal re. building industry being covered by EISC agreed.

1(a) agreed.

1(b) ST - this must not be interpreted dogmatically - i.e. even though we have a Machine Tools fraction, piddling little Machine Tools factories with no militancy cannot command branches' priority.

CBy - where branches are involved with more than one fraction, ISC must decide priorities between fractions.

1(b) agreed.

1(c) MT explained. Fraction convenors have often not operated very well, because of day-to-day pressure of other work (while fraction work exerts little day-to-day pressure), and because post requires various abilities (political knowledge, experience in the industry, secretarial efficiency) not always united in one individual. 'Fraction Committee' structure to counteract this. ST agreed 'in principle' with MT - but there is a threat that fraction committees will tend to be based on local information and exclude cdes. not in base locality.

SCy - not so; it is a recognition of realities, e.g. SCy can't coordinate docks work from London

SM - ST's objections dealt with by clauses about ISC and EISC.

AH - moved we accept 1(c) in principle to clear ground for discussion re particular details.

TD - agrees in general, but objects on the steel fraction. Steel fraction will have regular monthly meetings in Nottingham, and won't need a fraction committee.

1(c) agreed in principle. All details (e.g. re steel fraction) to go to ISC.

1(d) agreed.

1(e) TD objected to phrase mentioning 2-day NCs, since these were not yet agreed on.

AH proposed that 1(e) be accepted in principle.

1(e) agreed in principle.

JW moved that the clause "(if elected to NC)" after EH's name be struck off. Agreed.

1(f) agreed.

1(g) agreed.

1(h) agreed - also a proposal from AH that the ISC be asked to send out some thoughts on the question of the difference between bulletins for one specific factory and bulletins for a group of several factories.

2 agreed - with amendment from ST that "first place" be altered to "priority".

3(a) agreed.

3(b) agreed.

3(c) agreed - with amendment from CBy that 'British Road to Socialism' be

replaced by 'Time to Change Course'.

3(d) agreed - with proposal from AH that question of methods of education go on next NC agenda.

4 AH agreed with the general drift, but was not happy about being appointed printer - thought pressure of work would be too much.

TD - need to consider public speaking assignments - too many of these lumped on AH - other comrades apart from AH should train themselves.

2 agreed, as regards general line; and with reservation that decision on JC moving to London should be postponed until Bolton cdes. turned up.

TD Proposed that all cdes. at centre should be trained for public speaking.
MT Obviously all cdes. at centre do train themselves in public speaking and undertake speaking engagements when necessary - we must, however, recognise that we should use cdes. with best talents.

SM - proposes amendment to TD resolution - AH to organise a school on public speaking for the 'centre'.

Agreed to accept this proposal (MT voting against).

CBy asked why the magazine was not out and the Theses were not finished.

SM - SM had had to work on the paper, not the magazine; definite ideological problems still needed to be worked out in regard to theses.

DS proposed publications be on next NC agenda.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE ARRANGEMENTS.

Agreed (on AH's proposals) that NC meetings should normally start with an analysis of the present situation.

TD opposed idea of six-weekly NCs. Instead there should be monthly NCs and every other meeting should be two days. NC must supervise SC more closely.

CBy agreed with TD.

SM Up to now, the Steering Committee has effectively had a dictatorship in the group, because NCs etc poorly prepared. 6-weekly NCs would be more democratic. 6-week gap between NCs was not long by historical standards.

JW moved that it should be "strictly 6-weekly" and not "roughly 6-weekly".

MT discussion on Fourth International had been grossly undemocratic. Not because opinions had been suppressed - on the contrary, those with critical views had been demanded and instructed to put them in writing. But a small group had had a virtual monopoly of knowledge on the question and had been able to dominate absolutely. We must change that. Better preparation of NCs is a start.

RL One-day NCs are little use - and certainly no use if we are to operate extended Editorial Board, Industrial Sub-Committee, and the Editorial Board of the magazine.

TD We can do it, given adequate organisation.

AH Agrees with SM & MT on question of preparation. If a cde. finds difficulties in attending, we should look into helping financially.

Agreed to accept JW's amendment on 'strictly' (MT and SM against).

Agreed to accept 6-weekly NCs (TD and CBy against).

Agreed that SC minutes should be formally moved at each NC - but any questions which cdes. wish to raise on the minutes should be notified in advance in writing.

Agreed that the quorum for NC meetings should be seven full members.

FUND AND MACHINE.

RL presented report (circulated separately).

MT argued that we should use new machine as an opportunity to double the fund target (time to stay the same).

CBy favoured doubling the target.

ST seeing the target recede into the distance would have a depressing effect.

SM After finishing present fund, new fund should be earmarked for a new Varsityper.

RL Suggested that we reduce the paper to 8 pages for a while, ^{with bigger format} and make the target for the new fund restoring it to 12 pages.

Agreed to end present fund early, instead of doubling target (CBy & MT against).

MT pointed out that an 8-page paper in the new format would be 576 column inches, i.e. not much short of the present 624 column inches on 12 pages.
AH we should go to 12 pages on the larger format - with same amount of copy, but less crammed.
RL The 8-page paper would only be for a limited period, and would enable us to get the magazine off the ground.
TD We can't really make a decision until we've seen the new format paper.
SM No: we can't start at 12 pages of big format and then go down to 8.
Proposes we set 1 January as definite date for return to 12 pages.
Agreed to postpone vote to Sunday.

NOTTINGHAM RESOLUTION.

MT proposed that resolution be 'noted'.
AH, JW proposed that NC vote on proposals from Nottingham resolution.
Agreed to vote on Nott'm resolution (MT against).
1(i), (ii), (iii) all agreed (MT, SCy abstaining)
2 - agreed (on suggestion of AH) that Nott'm branch be referred to Steering Committee decision of 26 June 1972:

SUNDAY

PAPER (Decision on size deferred from Saturday)

Two proposals 1. Reduce size to 8 pages and return to 12 pages in new year.
2. Go straight to 12 pages.

JSt What guarantee is there that if we accept first proposal we will be able to go to 12 in the new year. If this is possible why not go to 12 immediately.

RL Would ease the work when starting the new machine and enable us to concentrate on getting out magazine.

SM Was vacillating. Period of slack would favour getting the magazine out on a firm footing and enable JW to get accustomed. However there was a lot to be said for using the new machine to produce a vastly improved paper straight away.

PS What reduction would the new machine mean in terms of time spent printing?

SM This was not the main area of work.

AH Opposes going to 8 pages. The paper is too congested - can be spread out over 12 pages with no extra copy. Give paper a sales boost by new press with no reduction in content.

JC Were there any problems with getting enough copy?

AH Not a problem.

JSt Present 8 page paper (WF 32) is no good. Important article had been left out.

Voting Proposal 1: defeated - for MT,TD
2: Carried - for SC,PS,CB,SM,AH,RL,JS,JW
Abstention - RL

JC moving to London

MT Case for JC moving: Needed more cdes. at the centre - see conference resolution.
JC fits the bill. Centre has not been able to function smoothly due a lack of resources. The strengthening of the centre will have a beneficial effect on the rest

of the group - and for this reason should take precedence over the Bolton branch, Bolton won't collapse - there are other capable cdes.

RL Shouldn't be a matter for discussion. Conference decision - 12 page paper will necessitate JC's move.

RL Had opposed this when it had been raised at the Bolton branch meeting. There was a current idea in the group that Bolton was a strong branch, but this still rests on JC & ME to a large extent. Had been a high turnover of membership. RL was hoping to drop level of work for personal reasons - if JC leaves then branch will suffer.

JSt There was a lack of division of labour at the centre - until this problem was solved extra resources wouldn't help.

SM Centre was the heart of the group. If the centre was weak then the group was weak. Therefore we channel resources into the centre to the extent that they are necessary. The branch that had suffered most by the drain to the centre was London. Had achieved quite a lot towards professionalism, but still had no paid full-timers. JC a reliable cde. and would contribute a great deal. JC has wrong conceptions of the problems at the centre. There should be greater cooperation between Bolton and Manchester. JC's move can be delayed until RL's leave of absence ends.

PS General principle of building from the centre is correct. But given particular problems of Bolton case for putting off the move. Doesn't see the urgency.

RL Had hoped for a long leave of absence but not total.

JC Opposed to move. Many cdes, had been moved but problems outlined by JSt hadn't been overcome. Can't see himself making any dent on the problem.

CB Move should be put in context of NW as a whole. Move would be a loss to NW, but NW was tightening up regionally and this should facilitate JC's move. JC musn't become a dogsbody at the centre. Should agree to move in principle but leave open question of timing.

ME Appalled by JSt's and JC's contributions - had not put forward solutions. If what they say about the centre is true then should remove cdes. from office - otherwise must give resources.

Voting 1. In principle JC moves to London, timing to be fixed later.
This was carried with RL voting against

2. SM's proposal on timing was carried.

* * * * *

Steering Committee decision, 26 June 1972.

"Members of leading bodies (Steering Committee, National Committee) should relate to those bodies first: i.e. if they produce controversial documents they should submit them to the committee first, and take the issue to the membership at large, via the internal bulletin or otherwise, only after discussion with the committee. Steering Committee minutes to go out to National Committee members only. National Committee minutes to give more details of discussions and of reasons for decisions than they do at present. The motivation of this decision is the need to form a coherent leadership in Workers Fight, especially urgent because of the generally low level of experience of the membership."

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING. 13 AUGUST 73.

PROPOSALS FOR CARRYING OUT CONFERENCE DECISIONS.

1) FRACTIONS AND INDUSTRIAL WORK

a) our central fractions are definitely the following: Steel Docks, Machine Tools, Teachers, Students, Irish, Women, Labour Party (in existence, scope up for review at this N.C.)

b) This does not remove the necessity for each comrade, wherever employed, to carry on political activity in his/her workplace and union. Nor does it forbid the utilisation of contacts in other industries. But in each branch's plan of work the fractions must be given first priority.

c) Each fraction should have a 'fraction committee', based in a specific locality, which (i) meets at least fortnightly; (ii) supervises such tasks as producing bulletins, papers, pamphlets; (iii) organises fraction meetings at least every three months; (iv) reports regularly to the National Secretary and to the Industrial Sub-Committee (see below); (v) generally supervises the day-to-day work of the fraction.

Proposed membership of 'fraction committees':

Steel: ST*, TD, PS Cdcs. marked * are secretaries to
Docks: JB*, HY, FB fraction committees.

Machine Tools: DS*, EH, BR

Teachers: MT*, DS, IW (this isn't locally based, but that can't be

Students: AH*, BH, TP..... helped)

Irish: BH*, SM, CG

Women: FB*, LY, SA

Labour Party: under control of S.C. for now } these don't come under the Industrial Sub-Committee.

d) The Irish fraction operates through a 'front' called the 'Phoenix Club' and a broadsheet called 'The Red Republican'.

e) An Industrial Sub-Committee shall meet at every two-day N.C. Members to be SCy, AH, SM, TD, RR, JS, HY, EH (if elected to N.C.). National Secretary to sit in on meetings. SCy to be secretary of I.S.C. Each fraction should send a representative (not necessarily a member of the fraction committee) to report to each I.S.C. meeting. The I.S.C. should coordinate the work of the fractions, oversee industrial work not coming within the scope of the fractions, and report to the N.C. when it considers that any matter needs N.C. decisions.

f) 'Executive I.S.C.' should also operate on a week-to-week basis between N.C. meetings. Membership = SCy (secretary), AH (responsible for overseeing industrial bulletins), SM, plus National Secretary to sit in.

g) For each fraction, a member of the S.C. shall be regularly responsible for liaising with the fraction committee:

Steel: AH; Docks: SCy; M/Tools: MT; Teachers: MT; Students: AH;
Irish: SM; Women: MT; Labour Party: JW.

h) Bulletins to be approximately as follows:

Bolton - engineering; Liverpool - Dista; Manchester - print, docks;
Coventry - machine tools; Teesside - Lackenby; Northampton - engineering

2) BRANCHES.

First place on each branch meeting agenda, after finance, to be given to T.U. report. Cdcs. to report on and discuss (a) upcoming T.U. branch, Trades Council, etc meetings; (b) T.U. meetings which have taken place since the last W.F. branch meeting.

3) EDUCATION

a) The concentric circles system, with appropriate modifications, seems to be working or workable for every major branch with the possible/exception of London. Where it is not workable, a system of regular meetings with cdes. taking it in turns to give educational talks should be adopted.

b) On the experience of Bolton, London, Reading, a system of regular (fortnightly or monthly) public meetings or semi-public meetings is useful and workable for any branch with more than the smallest handful of members.

c) MT during his leave of absence from the centre will have some time for literary work and should be commissioned to produce the following: a series for the magazine on the 'British Road to Socialism'; an education programme on stalinism; a guide for processing new members.

d) The following schools should be scheduled:
'Work in Progress' school, December 1973; School on stalinism and the CP, to be culmination of education programme, Easter 1974; Trade Union school, Whitsun 1974; Week school and conference, July 1974.

An education programme should be produced to lead up to the July 1974 week school.

4. THE WORK OF THE 'CENTRE'.

Fairly detailed proposals have been worked out. It is necessary, however, (we think) to point out that a National Committee decision on these proposals can only be a decision on the general line. There are a number of 'unknown quantities' (e.g. cdes. moving to London - we don't know how skilful they will turn out to be at various branches of 'centre' work). So the detailed decisions must be made on the spot by the Steering Committee.

a) Publications. A large experience has accumulated regarding work on the paper. Our opinion is that regular production of the paper can be secured given a team of two or three people who work well together, each of whom is competent at most of the basic skills required (including writing and editing), and at least two of whom are devoted full-time to the paper in alternate weeks. They must have suitable 'support services' of people who have specific jobs to do and can do them well and reliably. People who haven't got the basic skills and work casually and unreliably are as much of a hindrance as a help.

If we can just get this team together, the work of the organisation can be given a tremendous boost.

The following proposals are made about personnel. Again, we would stress that for the purposes of National Committee discussion they can only be taken as for illustration; full discussion of personal allocation of work is only possible 'on the spot'.

SM to be overall responsible for publications and for the magazine.
JW to be editor of paper* and RL managing editor. RL and JC to be responsible semi-full-time for the 'office work' of the paper - routine sub-editing, typing, paste-up. AH to be chief printer, & run printshop work, with a team of trained printers and people to work on negatives including TB, SM. Editorial Board = JW, JC, RL, AH, SM. SC SM to regularly discuss editorials with JW.

& BH

Magazine EB = SM, PS, AH, JW, MT/ To meet at two-day NC meetings. SM to have day-to-day responsibility, with assistance from AH, & to be editor.

b) Business managers. (Here as always, personal allocations are, for purposes of N.C. discussion, for illustration only). TB to continue as business manager for our publications (though responsibility of getting people to parcel the papers, send off subscriptions, etc. to go to JC).

JC to be business manager for commercial work for the printshop.

c) MT to be liberated from the paper (apart from writing articles) and concentrate on the job of National Secretary.

d) Some cdes. seem to be sceptical about the idea of JW, AH, and JC moving to London. "We are always told you need just one more" they cry. It is true that cdes. have moved to London - but (i) what else do you suggest - daily readings of the Little Red Book to boost productivity? (ii) we have also lost, for various reasons, cdes. useful at the centre - KS, PLs, CL, CC (at one time), AH; (iii) we now have a functioning Steering Committee and a more active national secretary; (iii) we now have a London branch (bad though it may be now, it simply didn't exist until SCy came down) and a functioning London organiser. In the meanwhile, we have probably had fewer cdes. working on publications in the last few months than previously - and at the same time the paper has been as regular as it has ever been (which is, of course, not good) and we have greatly expanded our work in terms of pamphlet publication.

The conference approved the N.C. report-back saying "we still need more resources at the centre, in terms of comrades moving to London", and also approved the resolution calling for a monthly magazine and stating that two more comrades at the centre would be necessary. Let us move from words to deeds - the N.C. must approve these three cdes. moving to London.

* Starting after the end of MT's leave of absence, during which JW will be Acting National Secretary.

Present SC, PS, CB, TD, LL, SM, MT, AH, RE, JS, JW Absent DS (family commitments)

Alternates Present EH, JC Absent NS (holiday)

1. ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

PS Outlined what he thought were the shortcomings of RE's approach. No one is questioning the basic conquests of Marxist economic theory, but it was necessary to understand how Marxist categories applied concretely today. Economics cannot be divorced from human relations - e.g. the post war expansion of capitalism was dependent on the post war upsurge of the working class being defeated. Thinks that RE has a catastrophist perspective but doesn't specify the nature of the crisis he foresees. RE's chronology in IB article is highly misleading - it wasn't true there had been uninterrupted boom pre-1914. There had been a regular 10 year boom-slump cycle. In fact Engels had predicted the final crisis of capitalism in 1844. Neither was the pre-war period all slump - 1934-1938 had seen expansion on the basis of production of new consumer durables. Capitalism can continue so long as it isn't defeated by the working class.

PS's perspective was one of stagnation. There was now a definite boom but this would be temporary. Didn't see any possibility of 1928 style crash rather creeping stagnation. The question was: why had the boom-slump cycle post-war been less sharp than was true previously - PS and others were working on this for the second part of his article. Monetary sphere - this had relative autonomy, the the monetary problems had been problems of expansion not problems of slump. The effect of the joint float will be to internationalise recessions. One doesn't need to see an immediate crisis in order to see the urgency of building a revolutionary party. Stagnation would bring big class struggles.

RE Has bent the stick in order to counter the vagueness of PS's document. It was necessary to spark an interest in the group on economic questions. There have been long periods of capitalism when the boom-slump cycle hasn't been pronounced and others when it has been very sharp. RE's thesis was that we were entering such a period. Must oppose vagueness in economic perspectives - they must be used as a guide to action. Vagueness was OK for those had developed a knowledge of economics but this meant the development of an elite.

MT There were two separate questions: 1. the vagueness of language. 2. vagueness of content and ideas. Two mustn't be confused. PS may be guilty of former but not latter. RE had fudged the issue - had predicted definite slump.

SM Had criticised PS's document for being too wooly, but if PS's wooly style was to be overcome then this required edes, who had mastered Marxist economics and that took years of study. As for the content a lot of qualifications didn't mean vagueness at all - very often unqualified definitive statements could be a lot more vague. Economics was inevitably a specialised subject and inevitably there would be an elite who were able to master it. However for the non-economists there was a problem of breaking down ideas.

JW Thought that RE in his document had either misunderstood what had been said or else was misusing quotations. E.g. on forms of money the theoretical possibility of European monetary union could not be excluded by the quotation given from Marx. Monetary union wouldn't alter the basic nature of money or the basic inherent contradictions but it could solve specific 'evils'. What stood in the way of this was the competition between the various national capitals, but if there was a period of expansion of world trade, then monetary union couldn't be excluded. In quote from Trotsky, it was of course true that the development of capitalism was also a development of class contradictions, but one couldn't on this basis deny that new inventions and a wider range of use values had resulted in expansion. RE had said that the post war boom was coming to an end, but neither RE nor WF as a whole yet had a theory of what had sustained the post-war boom.

SC It was arrogant to predict a crisis like 1971. Question of phase III, a large factor in whether there would be a crisis or not depended on the outcome of class struggles which had yet to be fought. I.e. would the ruling class succeed in asserting a measure of control over wages. Rate of growth was high compared with the 50's but low compared with other countries.

JSt RE's analysis is superficial - thinks that slump will come from long term cycle, but no specific analysis. Long term decline in the rate of profit would indict stagnation as PS says rather than crash. Slump-boom cycle is the normal functioning of capitalism - a slump prepares for a boom. Agrees with PS's specific perspective of medium term stagnation, but most important is to relate this to the upsurge of the working class which is a part of PS's perspective. No crisis which capitalism cannot solve at the expense of the working class.

PS Had make definite prognoses in perspectives document - agrees with criticisms of presentation, but can't dilute the content to make it more digestible. RE has stated but not proved the existence of long term cycles. Wanted "worsening periodic crises, increasingly feverish economic fluctuations" deleted from MT's resolution. (This was accepted by MT).

Voting: Resolution 1(a) Carried For: PS, CB, RL, JS, JW, AH, MT, SM Against RE
Abstentions: SC, TD
Resolution 1(b) Defeated For: RE Against PS, CB, JS, SM, MT, SC, JW, AH
Abstentions RL, TD

2. LABOUR PARTY

SM The composite resolution that was being presented to NC was not a compromise patch up - rather pre-conference discussion had been confused. The general strike slogan had been raised because there was a possibility of a general strike - i.e. logical development of events. The idea of the general strike slogan had come out of an earlier struggle within WF about the GS. If a general strike was called then massive responsibility would rest with the workers' organisations calling the strike - i.e. would be faced with the problem of partial administration of society. Opposition within WF said it was ridiculous to call for GS since it would undoubtedly be sold out and defeated. However with the 'Pentonville five' the GS became an immediate agitational slogan. Must not confuse GS with relating to normal bourgeois politics - the major weapon of the ruling class during any GS would be the call for a return to normal parliamentary politics. The GS is a current idea in the minds of the class and in no sense ruled out in the future. How can this be reconciled with a governmental slogan?

At the NC no one advocated that we should apply to GS slogan to the wage freeze but no one wanted to drop the slogan either. Two positions developed on the NC - 1. SM arguing for a more programmatic approach relating to normal bourgeois politics and MT for a sliding scale of wages. Both lines were defeated at the NC and came to the conference in confusion.

Confusion was this: MT objected to a parliamentary slogan when the GS was still possible. But 'Kick the Tories Out' was not at all comparable to GS as a slogan. Rather a turn back to normal working class politics which is dominated by routine bourgeois parliamentary politics. Under no circumstances can this be placed above the self-reliance of the class. But we need a programmatic approach to relate to the problems of the working class and to pose alternatives on existing working class organisations. A programme connects up with the experience and needs of the class - it is on no sense a propagandist manifesto. We reject the passive propagandist approach and the SLL jamborees, but we should not be afraid of relating to the anti-Tory sentiments of the class. Ultra-leftism in WF - had taken a stand on the optimum outcome of a general strike but as this had receded as a possibility had still focused attention on the slogan. Should remember that for the working class politics still means parliament and we will have to relate to this.

TD Disagreed with making demands on the LP. Working class has no illusions in the LP, by putting demands on labour bureaucrats we led them credence.

MT It was not true that the working class had no illusions in the LP - majority of working class still votes labour, by saying 'Kick the Tories Out' are essentially saying put labour in power. Of course the working class doesn't think LP is great, but they just don't see an alternative. See interview in the paper with D. Nuttall who in effect says that LP is just as bad as Tories but is still a Labour Councillor. It wasn't a case that we were simply going to call on the LP to defend the IW 24 - this by itself would be useless. We carry out our own independent activity. SM and MT had discovered that they had been arguing at cross-purposes - GS and 'KTTO' were not polar alternatives.

PS A GS can't be called at will - it springs out of the living class contradictions. MT's idea of continuing propaganda snack of this sort of voluntarism. Can only make propaganda and agitation for a GS based on the real situation. Significant that there had been nothing in the paper for sometime about the GS. Can now only make the most general propaganda on the question of the GS.

In the event of a general strike it is certain that the LP would be pushed to the fore. It was true that GS and KTTO were contradictory but it was a matter of tempo - i.e. in Germany the working class didn't turn to the Spartacists but to the right wing social democrats. Must recognise that Labour is now the governmental alternative. How do we present this? Not 'Labour to Power with Socialist Policies'. On entryism, it was not a question of rigid alternatives. Should not have overall entrism policy - no possibility of overall co-ordination. But LPYS was different - could seriously orientate to LPYS - shouldn't assume that all those grouped around the Militant were hard Grantites.

AH GS was not intended as a programme for the whole of society. Elements of the general strike had cropped up previously to the Pentonville five but couldn't be seen as such at the time. Could now see them as a whole - i.e. flying pickets, solidarity strikes. Need to bring these fragmentary acts together and show how they constitute the class acting in cohesion. As for the idea that the class has no illusions in Labour, this wasn't true. True workers may say 'there all as bad as each other' but this just means 'we're the losers'-it doesn't mean that there are no illusions. Should remember that the illusions in Labour were in fact illusions in parliament and bourgeois politics.

JW With the GS slogan it was easy to see how it linked up with the everyday class struggle and provided it with a strategy. But 'KTTO' just expresses a mood and doesn't provide any concrete connection with the class struggle on the industrial front, apart from SLL jamborees.

TD The working class is against the LP. They don't turn away from the LP because there is no alternative. We are guilty of not building an alternative. LP bureaucrats are our class enemy.

FB All TD was saying is that we haven't built a revolutionary party.

LY We didn't yet have the material for a revolutionary party. Would build the party in struggle against the LP - i.e. in Salford there was a councillor who had been opposed to any action against the Fair Rents Act. Would have to combat him.

RE The working class did have illusions in the LP, but these had been largely overcome. The problem was one of no alternative - we should be building that alternative rather than recruiting to the LP.

EL Agrees 'KTTO' is just a mood and proposes alternative of 'Smash the Tory Government' - implies a whole process of action rather than just parliamentary.

ST Question of reformism in general was getting muddled up again with the question of entryism. The lack of an alternative was itself due to parliamentary illusions. very little revival in LP.

EH Opposed to entryism. WF came out of IS and is now confused - at end of lollypop. Has been through LP. ILP had 30,000 members but went down to 4000. Bureaucracy so entrenched it is impossible to remove them. Would leave WF if it meant joining the LP.

JSt Re illusions in LP - TD gives game away when he says that the class see them as a lesser evil. Must have a clear line. IS's 'Vote Labour with no Illusions' is ridiculous - if you haven't got illusions then why vote Labour anyway. Need to find out more; the LPYS is a completely different kettle of fish. Should send in comrades for reconnaissance. Shouldn't be like 'Charter' and see entry as a whole strategy. Against MT's proposals. National strategy needed.

MT 'Smash the Tory Government' confuses the issue - worse than 'KFTO'. Don't use 'KFTO' by itself but with other demands - i.e. nationalise the docks. Keep our own programme. True LP bureaucrats are our class enemies but so are TU bureaucrats, but we still work in the TU's. Bolsheviks worked in police unions. Would enter the LP to build WF. Can't counterpose shop stewards committee to LP. Can't counterpose ourselves to LP - jumps over the whole problem.

SM 'KFTO' means put the LP in the hot seat. Can't say Workers Revolution, must relate to the governmental alternative. Even with consistent militancy cannot hope to change society. Illusions in parliament are expressed through illusions in the LP. EH correct that we can't defeat LP leadership but no one should have thought for a minute that we could. We enter the LP, particularly LPYS, in order to build WF. Proposed national fraction within LPYS, linking up with Clay Cross, with the aim of building Workers' Fight. Should be able to transform certain LPYS branches.

oting 2(a) Carried TD against.
2(b) Unanimously carried.

5(a) Procedure moved that the resolution be noted. This was carried, with EH voting against.

5(b) Sentence 1. Unanimously carried.
2. " " " " "
3. " " " " "
4. Carried, EH against, JW abstaining.
5. Unanimously carried.
6. Carried, TD, EH, JW voting against.

5(b) As a whole: Carried, EH abstaining.

3(a) Carried, EH against.

3(b) Amendment from CB was accepted (replace 'all areas' by 'some Areas') Resolution as amended was defeated 5-6.

3(d) Carried, EH, MT, JW, TD voting against, CB abstaining.

3(c) Therefore fell.

(My apologies for the incomplete voting record and the fact that the vote of non-NC members wasn't recorded. As far as the latter is concerned the vote went the same way as the NC vote, except for 3(d) which went the opposite way).

REPORT OF RESOLUTION COMPOSITING COMMISSION.

1. ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES.

Resolution (a)

PS's Thesis 1 (as in conference documents), followed by MT's draft
(in IB 14 part 2) as a Summary. Prop. Commission

Resolution (b)

RR's Theses 1,2,3 (as at conference).

2. PROGRAMME AND PROPAGANDA THEMES.

Resolution (a)

The proposals from MT's document (IB 14 part 1), section 3, with
second sentence of section c ("I still think ... National Committee")
deleted.

I.e. questions of inquiries; registration; price committees;
minimum wage and sliding scale for people on state benefits; nationalisation;
flying pickets. Prop. MT

Resolution (b)

We must conduct extensive propaganda on flying pickets, on trade unions
and the state, on workers control, and on dual power. Prop. MT

3. LABOUR PARTY - ENTRY WORK.

Resolution (a)

Any entry work in the Labour Party or LPYS must be fundamentally
directed outwards, towards involvement with strikers', tenants' (etc)
struggles, and not focused on how many monopolies we can nationalise on
paper. The entry work must be geared and subordinate to the basic task of
building the industrial fractions. Prop. Commission

Resolution (b)

Last paragraph of PS's Thesis 4 (from conference) - i.e. proposal of
reconnaissance work. Prop. PS

Resolution (c)

We should deliberately orient ourselves to limited work in the
Labour Party as outlined in the section 'On Entrism' of MT's document.
Prop. MT, JW

Resolution (d)

We must form a national fraction, primarily in the LPYS, but also
including work in the Labour Party. We must allocate the minimally
necessary resources to make this fraction more than the token it has been
for the last year. Prop. SM

4. LABOUR PARTY AND POLITICAL ORIENTATION

Resolution (a)

RR's Thesis 5 (from conference).

Resolution (b)

1. The present situation is one of relative downturn in the class struggle
from the mass explosions of early '72 to early '73. The fighting ability and
spirit of the working class has not, however, been broken, and any success for
the Government in holding down wages tends to stoke up militant action in the
future. Our main task, however, is not to speculate about the possible vari-
ants of future militancy, including general strike, but to relate to the
actual conditions here and now.

.../...

2. There is a relative, but not an absolute, contradiction between the general strike slogan and slogans relating to Parliament. The built-in dynamic of a general strike is to overflow ~~the~~ ^{and} break through Parliamentary limits; in that situation of outflowing and breaking through, slogans for elections and for a Labour government are reactionary.

But to fear to raise slogans round Tories out/Labour in now on the grounds of the possible reactionary effect of similar slogans in a possible development of a possible future General Strike would be to stumble over the events of today by fixing our gaze on speculations about tomorrow.

3. We make propaganda for the general strike slogan - i.e. relatively complex, many-sided explanation of how it is possible, need for preparation, demands on TUC, etc. Right now it is not possible to use the general strike slogan as a single idea chiming immediately with the instinctive responses and felt needs of masses of workers, as "the answer" in the present situation.

4. Simultaneously we should take up the question of Tories out/Labour in and utilise it as a weapon against reformism, by use of a rounded political programme and by directing specific demands against the Labour Party, as illustrated in section 5 of NT's document.

Tories out/Labour in can be a focal point for a whole number of political campaigns, on various issues. It cannot, however, be made the centrepiece of our agitation and propaganda, ~~even~~ in the sense that general strike was last year.

5. We always stress the question of self-reliance; we never allow the parliamentary questions to stand higher than the direct action of the class.

6. Through our concentration on the general strike slogan, a definite ultra-leftism has developed in the group, a definite fear of dealing with the question of the Labour Party, and of focusing on Parliament and government. This must be resolutely combated, including day schools and educationalists. We must carry out a resolute turn towards involvement in the official labour movement.

Prop. Commission

WORKERS' FIGHT AND THE STRUGGLE
IN EDUCATION - SOME NOTES ON POLICY.

Communism and education.

The communist programme in the sphere of education is summed up in the formula of the "Unified Labour School". The chief features of the Unified Labour School can be summarised as follows:

- a) Comprehensive, common, and compulsory education up to and including higher education. Extensive adult education with preference for working-class students. Free access to education.
- b) Education integrated with productive labour, and of a polytechnical character, calculated to give students an all-round training and to lead them to identify with the life and the interests of the working class.
- c) Education not limited to a narrow functional and practical conception, but aimed at equipping everyone with a grasp of the world round them and of human culture sufficient to enable them to take a full part in political and cultural life. Ultimately, this education aims to help in breaking down the distinction between mental and manual work.
- d) Schools controlled democratically by those involved in their work, within a democratically-decided state economic plan.
- e) Ultimately, as education is more and more integrated with labour, and part-time education becomes more and more extensive, the education system will cease to exist as a separate, partitioned-off part of society - it will simply be part of the overall creative activity of mankind.

Until real experience has been gained with this system, large parts of it cannot be defined precisely. To date there is only the experience of the Soviet Union in 1917-29 - in conditions of extreme economic and cultural impoverishment. Our ideas must in any case be constantly brought up to date to take account of the best developments in bourgeois educational thought (the early Soviet ideas were very largely based on Dewey's writings).

Virtually all the material elements of the Unified Labour School have been realised somewhere and sometime under capitalism - which goes to show that there is nothing utopian about the idea. We must remember, though, that those elements of the communist conception can be used in an extremely reactionary way (e.g. using schoolkids as cheap part-time labour). As important as the formal measures themselves are the class nature of the state power under which they are carried out and the question of whether they are carried out with the active involvement of the people concerned or in a bureaucratic manner 'from above'.

Education and control.

There is a long record of Labour Party and TUC resolutions, going back for decades, on such questions as comprehensive education. But education, dominated as it is by the bourgeois state, is not a sphere where the major working-class organisations can come (or have come) to grips with it very easily. The implementation of comprehensive education owed more, it seems, to coldly-calculated bourgeois self-interest than to all the decades of resolutions. Even where teachers' unions have radical and revolutionary traditions (e.g. France), the education system may remain very conservative and hierarchical. To think that the education system is the lever by which society can be changed is nonsense. The ideological domination in any case exercised first and foremost through day-to-day social life in capitalism - the education system as such is only a supplement.

That doesn't mean, though, that questions of the content of education (as distinct from the forms of organisation and administration) can be considered as mechanically determined by authority relations (as IS would have it) or by capital/labour relations (as IMG would have it). Wherever possible we should take up questions of which subjects are studied, how, and why.

As Lenin explained in 'State and Revolution', our support for a centralised proletarian state system does not in the least rule out a large measure of decentralisation and local control. All the more under the capitalist

state should we support measures of local control and democracy.

We support any moves to break down hierarchy, e.g. abolition of head-teachers (also exclusion of headteachers from staff associations and from the NUT). Moreover, we support moves for sections of people involved in education to control conditions which concern only (or principally) them. For example, if teachers are to have a room where kids can enter only by invitation (which is not unreasonable), then the kids also should have a room where teachers can enter only by invitation (in secondary schools, at least).

Generally, then, we should support any demand on school or curriculum organisation favoured by kids, parents, teachers, and ancillary staff, as against the capitalist state. (Even though we may possibly disagree with the content of the specific demand in question, we will support the principle of democratic control). However, those different sections - kids, parents, teachers, ancillaries - may well not be in agreement. Now there is no god-given principle that says that each of these sections should have 25% share in control, or whatever other percentage. We are not against having school committees with representation from these sections (and from local working-class organisations), but the proportions for representation can be determined only through experience of specific issues.

In New York there have been cases of black communities winning considerable control over education in their areas - and being fiercely opposed by teachers who feared resulting loss of security of tenure. The Socialist Workers' Party supported the black communities against the teachers' union. It may not be a very popular message among teachers, but there is after all no reason why teachers should be virtually immune from supervision (including, if necessary, and after due procedure, removal from their posts) from kids and parents.

Generally we can say that the kids have proved to be by far the most advanced and progressive force in schools - in secondary schools, at least. Unlike teachers or parents, they are not concerned to defend a position of superiority and privilege. They are far more disposed to take a broad, balanced view of questions of school running (given the opportunity to do so) than are teachers or parents. Cases of pupils supporting victimised teachers are numerous; cases of teachers' collective action in support of victimised pupils almost non-existent. The whole of the present education system is a daily act of aggression against the kids - so we are not shocked when they retaliate, nor do we retreat into pious pleas to direct their efforts against the "real enemy" (as if we are to advise them to seek out some big businessman and attack him as a remedy for outrageous oppression in schools!) We should support the independent organisation of schoolkids and the development of links between such organisations and teachers' organisations.

The question of organisation is crucial for any democratic control in schools. At present, parents often tend to be more active on educational issues just where they are more reactionary - it is middle-class parents who are more at home in the field of pressure group politics and working through the bureaucracy. Collective organisation is necessary in any attempt to combat this.

Clearly we are in favour of staff associations including all teachers from any union or no union. But we cannot allow them to neutralise effective union organisation and links with the labour movement by encouraging 'professionalism'. We should support, for example, the idea of the union being represented as a matter of course in any complaints between teachers and the authorities, including headteachers.

Our attitude to any proposals for 'participation' in joint governing bodies for schools is this: We demand that the representation promised for teachers, pupils, etc is actually granted; but we insist that the representatives must be mandated and recallable representatives of teachers', pupils' (etc) organisations, responsible to those organisations rather than to the governing body.

Finally - on 'free schools'. At present 'free schools' normally exist as a very small and marginal phenomenon, often supported by the authorities because they cost little and take a number of troublesome kids off the authorities' hands. It is clear that the road to changing the education system is not

through the piecemeal setting-up of free schools. Moreover, free schools can even act against real change, by taking radical forces out of the main area of struggle, the State system.

But, in the same spirit as Trotsky "discussed with Lenin more than once the possibility of allotting to the anarchists certain territories where, with the consent of the local population, they would carry out their stateless experiment", a workers' state would undoubtedly allow all sorts of experimental schools to flourish on the margins of the state education system. (Though Marx argued - I think correctly - against the anarchists that one should support compulsory education). On condition that free schools associate themselves with the labour movement, the NUT, the NUSS, etc, any dogmatic or harsh hostility to them is mistaken.

The Union and Rank and File.

We work in the NUT because it is the largest union and the other unions certainly have no advantage from the point of view of policy or militancy.

On salaries, we support demands for one basic scale, for the sake of unity. Naturally the question of unity in action is the principled question, and the question of scales as such is a tactical means to an end.

We are not in the union, or in Rank and File, to work exclusively or even mainly round purely educational or salaries issues. As in any other labour movement organisation, we seek to put forward our full political programme, including such issues as the Irish question. Of course there may be particular circumstances where raising a particular political question could be diversionary or could provide an opportunity for the right to boost their morale. We do not aim to be the people who put the issue of Cambodia on the agenda just when a struggle is brewing over victimisations. But we are entirely opposed to IS's attempts to limit the NUT and the Rank and File to bourgeois trade unionism ("the rate for the job"), excluding such questions as Ireland on the grounds that NUT/R&F are "not political organisations" - arguments more commonly heard from the right wing of the TUC General Council. (Though even the TUC has a stated policy on Ireland ?)

As well as IS's trade-unionist politics, there are tendencies in Rank and File which see it more as a discussion group for libertarian-minded teachers. While not denying the need for such discussion, and the need to attract the libertarian-minded teachers, who are often good militants, we must seek to orient Rank and File towards action in the union.

We seek also to orient the union towards the labour movement. Any strike or similar action by teachers should be explained to parents by leaflets etc. We should seek to get union support for workers' struggles, and affiliation to Trades Councils and similar bodies. (We should ourselves seek to get delegacies).

We are in Rank and File, or in the NUT, not primarily to build R&F or to build the NUT, but to build WF. (And we should not raise shrieks about 'sectarianism' when it becomes apparent that IS are there to build IS, and IMG there to build IMG - we should simply fight them). Obviously, though, we can work better to build WF if the NUT is an active, fighting union involving its membership, and if R&F is a flourishing militant rank and file movement - and to that extent we seek to build the NUT and to build R&F.

The IMG has a generally principled line on democracy in education and on Ireland. On anything else their line is erratic and usually wrong. Our opposition to IS within R&F must be completely independent from IMG's. However, we defend IMG against IS's witch-hunts - which amount to an attempt to silence the most vocal criticism of IS's (wrong) policies and to emasculate R&F as an organisation in which the membership have conscious control. (Arguments about whether R&F is or is not a 'united front' are illiterate logic-chopping).

The school students' organisations (NUSS and SAU) are often sixth-formers' pseudo-intellectual discussion clubs. The important thing in evaluating a particular organisation is whether it has got through to broader sections of pupils, rather than its formal politics. NUSS is CP reformist, SAU is Maoist, though by no means always red-book-waving Maoist.

MT. 6 Sep 73.