

WORKERS' FIGHT
INTERNAL
BULLETIN

NO. 16 - NOV. 1973

Political Letter

News from Branches

WF Women's Conference - summary minutes

On the position of women comrades in WF vis-a-vis work in
the working class - CB.

On abortion - FB.

On 'Building the Party' (letter to PR) - MT.

National Committee minutes September 1973.

POLITICAL LETTER.

There is not a proper Political Letter this month... just some notes on the finer points of some major recent political issues, which may not be at once obvious from the coverage in the paper. On Chile, the differences between us and the IMG (outlined in Bas Hardy's separately-circulated pamphlet) have given rise to some heated and long debates in meetings in London.

Likewise on the Middle East.

* The IS and the SWP have taken positions essentially similar to ours.

* The IMG (and apparently the FI majority) have taken a very strange position. They stand for the smashing of the Zionist state and a United Socialist Republic of the Arab East - and after that for the right of self-determination of the 'Israeli Jewish nation'. For explanation, see the latest issue of 'International'; for counter-argument, see the forthcoming second issue of 'Permanent Revolution'.

Briefly. Self-determination means the right to form an independent nation state.. which is then free to be Zionist, to ally with imperialism, etc.; i.e. to deny the national rights of the oppressed nations, the Palestinians and the Arab nations in general. There is no reason to suppose that socialist revolution in the Arab East would automatically, immediately wipe out Zionist consciousness...still less to suppose that a new 'Israeli national consciousness', cleansed of Zionism, would result. Israeli nationalism is Zionism, is the nationalism of an oppressor nation. The road from that ideology to true class consciousness for the Israeli working class is direct to internationalism, not via some hypothetical now cleansed non-oppressive nationalism. There is no question of our position capitulating to bourgeois Arab nationalism - it is precisely bourgeois Arab nationalism which is ready to compromise with the Zionist state, and the Arab working masses who are determined to smash it.

The IMG oppose the demand for a democratic-secular Palestine as reformist - thus taking an ultra-left position of opposition to consistent democratic demands. If this ultra-leftism has any concrete meaning, it is a capitulation to left Zionism. In this connection, it is interesting to study the recent 'interview with a Lebanese Trotskyist' appearing in the Red Weekly. This is a translation from 'Rouge'.. or nearly so. One sentence is cut out, without acknowledgement. This is one of the demands at the end which calls for "total and unconditional withdrawal of the Israeli forces to the pre-1967 frontiers". (my emphasis). So Israeli expansionism was all right up to 1967? So the original Israeli state has a right to exist?

* Lutte Ouvriere initially took an abstentionist position, but later corrected themselves. But a number of items in their paper suggest - implicitly, but very strongly - a similar position to the IMG on 'self-determination'.

* The SLL uses bombast about "Victory to the Arab Revolution". In the first place, this is opportunist; it tends to identify the bourgeois Arab states with the "Arab revolution". In the second place, it opens the way to abstentionism once the true facts are discovered. Of course we support a Revolution against the Zionist state... but once we discover that it is the bourgeois Arab states who are fighting, not the Revolution, what then....?

* The OCI makes its main slogan a Constituent Assembly for Palestine (to unite Jewish and Arab workers...)

Finally, on Phase 3.

Most left papers have reacted to Phase 3 in exactly the same way as to Phase 2 and Phase 1. But in fact it is different. As explained in the article in the paper, it is not a rigid ceiling but a loose net designed to allow the government leeway and prevent big united struggles building up.

Thus a slogan like "Unite to smash Phase 3", though it expresses a worthy thought, does not relate at all to the concrete dynamics of the situation. The call for Councils of Action for example, is less on the agenda now than for almost two years. The perspective right now is, like it or not, and no matter what we do, of fragmented struggles. That doesn't mean we don't make energetic calls for solidarity. It does mean that the fight back must be located round a full, rounded programme, not a simple pious cry of 'Unity'.

NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES.

Not much news this time...

BOLTON. JC is now in London, and RR on partial leave of absence, reducing the branch to three fully-active members. The main concentration of work is round a 'Council of Action', which is largely based on the tenants' movement but gets 20/30 people to meetings. The AIL is in decline after the end of the Blackburn 3 case. The IMG have moved into Bolton in strength, now having six members there.

MANCHESTER. The problems described in the last 'News from Branches' have evidently not been solved; work is still sporadic. The NC is to discuss the problems at its coming meeting.

LIVERPOOL. JSt has moved to Liverpool. IC has joined, and there are a couple of other potential recruits around. Areas of work not much changed.

TEESSIDE. Fortnightly public meetings are being started. The branch does not feel that there are many opportunities for work in the LP, but TD has been approached by a number of LP members (including councillors) saying that they recognise the need for a revolution and want discussions.

NOTTINGHAM. Contact work is getting more organised. A RSN readers' group is to be started at Stanton.

BIRMINGHAM. KC has fallen victim to the IMG 'unity offensive'. In discussion, he said that WF was right on all major political differences with the IMG, but these differences were relatively 'minor' and the IMG was bigger...

COVENTRY. Serious work has been started in the LP and LPYS, and has already born fruit in terms of contacts useful in work round the Triumph Meriden occupation. (Our comrades have produced posters for the occupation and arranged for representatives from the occupation to speak at a 400-strong meeting at Enfield College). Regular fortnightly open meetings have been started.

NORTHAMPTON. The success of the defence effort round Joe Gallagher is reported in the latest issue of the paper. (The Defence Committee built by our comrades has got some 30 or so people to meetings). Work in the LP is also being started.

OXFORD. BR and BS are now back in Oxford after being in London for the summer. So far their efforts have been mainly taken up by student work (an occupation may already be underway as I write), but definite plans are underway to bring more system into the work.

LINCOLN. AH has moved from Oxford to college in Lincoln... he is keeping in contact with the Nottingham branch.

BRISTOL. CW is now working in Bristol Royal Infirmary. Work is still mainly on individual contact level.

READING. HP has joined. In Bracknell SMC is active in the LP (he is now secretary of the LPYS) and is planning to build an R&F teacher group.

LONDON. EC, IH, and DR have joined, and we have a number of working sympathisers. Regular industrial work has been started.

ON ABORTION

I have found from the discussions on abortion that the different opinions on this subject held by WF comrades have not yet been solved, therefore I think it important that this be taken up in the I.B. All comrades must feel free to air their views on this and must not in any way feel inhibited. So would comrades please reply to this article in IBs.

One of the reasons I support "free abortion on demand", "the woman's right to choose" - besides it being entirely for the woman to decide whether or not she has a child - and not for the state or any other person - is because this demand more than any other from the women's liberation movement strikes at the roots of the slave mentality that is forced on women from childhood, when they first dress her in pink, when she is given her first doll, when she is taught to "help mummy" to cook, sew, all in preparation for her role in the family, in society, in the factory.

The family being one of the pillars that capitalist society rest upon and this demand shakes that pillar to its very foundations. That is why some of the most reactionary and dangerous elements within capitalist society are "digging in their heels". Because the struggle for "free abortion on demand" challenges bourgeois ideology of "a woman's place is in the home", the religious and mystical prejudices, institutions, etc., of class society.

For thousands of years women have been burdened with these concepts that permeate society, concepts that keep the woman in her 'place' and also keep the man in his - as the breadwinner, the dominant man of action, while the woman is passive, obedient, seen as part of nature. She as well as the foetus are seen as sacrosanct.

It is with this 'sacredness' of the foetus comes the reaction against abortion on demand, and the logic of such beliefs leads to arguments as to whether the foetus is a human being. Well then we have to define what a human being is - which is such a complex question, with so many different views, I believe that we cannot do this. We cannot define a human being in isolation i.e. as an individual, we have to define such things in relation to society, we see man as a social being, part of society - which clearly the foetus is not. One of the things we learn from Marx is that nothing is sacred. Take the whole question of whether or not abortion is murder, that is at what time is it designated that abortion is taking the life of a human being - this concept stems from Christianity, especially Catholicism - which has endowed the foetus with a soul, has endowed nature with mysticism.

The Catholic Church has declared (it may still be true today, I'm not sure) that in any choice between the saving of the foetus and saving the life of the woman, the latter must be sacrificed. Yet the Catholic Church teaches its followers that woman is 'sacrosanct', she is something that must be nurtured and protected from the 'sins' of the world, and then it violates its own concepts. It can do no other because it is a 'moral' concept and such theories of morals are "designed to suit all periods, all peoples, and all conditions, and it is precisely for that reason it is never and nowhere applicable". So much for 'morals'.

Some comrades believe that in a 'socialist' society women should be prevented from having an abortion on the grounds that the need for abortion (economic) will disappear in a socialist society. That I don't doubt. But the fundamental question is: should the woman's "civil, political, and cultural rights" be stopped by the state or the man who is the biological father of the child? Is she to be forced into the "joys of motherhood" by "law and order", just as he is today under a capitalist state. Will she be punished by imprisonment or will she just get a heavy fine? Or maybe this 'socialist' society will start to hand out medals for motherhood! To quote Trotsky - "the philosophy of priests endowed also with the powers of a gendarme" Instead of helping to free the woman from the clutches of the family, from the clutches of bourgeois ideology, we would be tightening these chains ever tighter on her mind. Besides pushing any progression to a socialist society further back.

Some comrades have said I have no 'love' for mankind, because I believe we will all cease to exist, and that life is not sacrosanct. Surely it does not mean that we do not 'care' about mankind because we one day will cease to exist. (I will one day cease to exist, does that mean that I should stop eating, living, having children - because they will cease to exist). I 'care' about mankind, but so do most of us 'care' about other people - because it is a social condition to care, not a 'biological' invention, in the same way as 'motherhood' is a social conditioning, and is not inherent in the female species.

It seems to me that for comrades to take such stands as "the foetus is sacred", "love of mankind", are such morals, they are endowing

/contd. last p. of NC
minutes

WORKERS' FIGHT WOMEN'S CONFERENCE. 16/17 September 73. Summary minutes.

Present: SA, VN, ND, OD, FB, SL, CB, J?, NW

Apologies: RL, LY

Absent: RsL, MW, SB.

Reports of work in Women's Liberation groups.

Rochdale: work in past - round Philipino girls and setting up pregnancy testing centre. Present - possible - more education; nursery campaign; work with immigrant workers (in textiles).

Bolton: Work in past - nursery campaign; contraception campaign; women's centre. Present - talks to school; pregnancy testing. Possible - industrial.

Manchester: about six groups altogether. Work in past - setting up women's centre, pregnancy testing, house for battered wives, writing on education in schools, discussion of women's literature. Present - meeting on women in unions.

Nottingham: work in past - Boots campaign for equal pay. Present - education talks in schools; abortion and contraception campaign.

Report of general situation in Women's Liberation movement.

To be given in full elsewhere.

Position of women in WF.

Discussion on degree of male chauvinism in WF; difficulty for women in getting recognition of their own problems - e.g. in relation to contact visiting and education.

Women and the trade unions.

Strong current in women's movement (represented by Selma James) reckons women should generally not be in established TUs. SJ's view of unions does not recognise the division in unions between the bureaucracy and the rank and file; identifies the unions with the bureaucracies. No real recognition of the need to fight to change consciousness. Unions like the Women's Industrial Union (breakaway from G&M) really attempt to sidestep this problem of changing consciousness.

Wages for housework.

Agreed that WF should counterpose socialisation of housework to 'wages for housework'.

Perspectives. & Decisions

- A. Each woman in WF should participate in the WLM, or explain to the fraction convenor why not. Convenor to be FB.
- B. Programme of articles for the paper agreed on -
- C. WF women to see that our industrial fractions take up issues relating to women adequately.
- D. FB to co-ordinate a programme of discussions in branches on women and work, women and the family, abortion, etc.
- E. FB to write to all women cdes. not present at this conference.
- F. Next WF women's conference - Manchester 17/18 November.
- G. Socialist women's conference - London 22/23 September. Need to emphasise necessity of greater structure in movement.
- H. Pamphlet. WF to produce a pamphlet which should introduce women to the ideas of the Women's Liberation Movement.*

* The Steering Committee discussed this idea, and suggested that the women comrades concentrate on producing a full coverage for the paper. At a later stage, overall publishing priorities/possibilities being considered, it may be possible to collate articles from the paper into a pamphlet.

On the position of women comrades in WF vis-a-vis work in the working class.

Reasons for writing this article.

1. The group has tiny resources and has not decided to put a high proportion of the available resources into work in the women's movement. Therefore most women in the group are involved in political work mainly with male workers.
2. There is a lack of awareness of problems in the group as a whole.
3. It is important that women comrades should do work in the class, with the backing of the group, for their own political self-development.
4. I was asked to write this article by the women's meeting in the North West because of my experience of working in the Fisher Bendix occupation on my own, and in North Wales mainly on my own. But I should point out that I don't suffer all the problems of other women comrades - e.g. family.

Problems of work in the class by women.

1. Problems of initial credibility. A woman is more obviously an outsider than is a male comrade not from that place of work. Workers may ignore her, or if that is impossible, they may wonder what she is after. Given their previous image/experience of women, it may take a long time simply to convince them that she is there simply for political reasons. In North Wales, for example, men are still slightly puzzled why I spend so much time there discussing politics, even though I've been doing it for five months; they take WF regularly, and we've discussed why I'm there. The walls in the site hut have a totally male chauvinist poem about wives and pictures from page 3 of the Sun. Women are obviously 'not meant to be there'.
2. Problems arise if a woman comrade does gain some credibility. With the contact himself - the woman risks, more than male comrades, being seen as 'good' because of servicing role, and/or because she is seen as 'clever' and 'educated'. With male friends of the contact - there is a problem of jokes, rumours, etc. It may be impossible to meet the contact in a public place (e.g. a pub) especially if he feels at all awkward about it. It may be virtually impossible to see the contact at all. With the contact's wife - she may see the woman comrade as a threat, or a fanatic, or both, especially if the comrade knows more than the wife does about what happens at work, meetings, etc. The wife may experience 'socialism' as meaning endless meetings for her husband, and therefore more baby-sitting etc for her. The contact may oppose attempts by the woman comrade to involve the wife politically.

Tackling the problems:

1. The problems must be made explicit, through discussion - at times on branch level. The branch as a whole is responsible - for example, it should decide whether a woman should go on her own to visit a contact. It is often useful if a man goes too, at least on the first visit, so that the contact is forced to recognise that he is relating to the WF group, not to an individual woman. But - if a man goes too, it is his responsibility to see that the discussion involves the woman comrade and does not fall into a male chauvinist man speaking to man situation. There is an exception to this. If the wife of the contact is there, it is useful if the woman comrade talks to her. If the male comrade tries to involve the wife in the men's discussion, it may result in the wife just listening, or going away.
2. The group is responsible for the political development of women comrades, which may be extra difficult because of housework, kids, etc. Baby-sitting must be provided for. If women are to gain credibility in work in the class, they must prove themselves extra able in political and industrial knowledge.
3. Women must take their own political development and development of consciousness seriously. We must meet separately as long as it is necessary for us. We must be aware of the problems involved in initial credibility - e.g. what to wear, whether or not to swear, how immediately to confront male chauvinism.

Cynthia Baldry.

LETTER TO PETE RADCLIFF.

29.10.73.

Dear Pete,

It's some months now since I promised to write to you explaining what I now think is wrong with my 1971 pamphlet 'Building the Party'. I've been waiting until I get time to do it adequately - but evidently that means waiting forever.

And - already in early '72 I realised there was a lot wrong with the pamphlet, but on re-reading it today I find 'Building the Party' little short of scandalous. So it is urgent to explain some points now. I will put a copy of this letter in the I.B., since other comrades have also asked me about the pamphlet.

We can get to the centre of the matter by quoting a passage from 'Building the Party' (p.3) and contrasting a passage from Trotsky ('What Next?', section 3):

"But a cardinal difference between a communist group and a sect is that a communist group always takes as its touchstone the class as a whole... the position of the class as a whole must.. for a communist group, take priority over boosting the organisation as such."

"When the newspapers of the new Socialist Workers Party (the SAP) criticise the 'party egoism' of the Social Democracy and of the Communist Party; when Seydewitz assures us that so far as he is concerned, 'the interests of the class come before the interests of the party', they only fall into political sentimentalism, or, what is worse, behind this sentimental phraseology they screen the interests of their own party... To say that 'the class stands higher than the party', is to assert that the class in the raw stands higher than the class which is on the road to class consciousness. Not only is this incorrect; it is reactionary."

Briefly - I fell into that 'political sentimentalism'.

This was already (partly) pointed out in 1971 by Sean in a letter to me:

"Surely the party influence on the mass of the class (which, as a whole, it does relate to historically, in the long run, and in terms of its overall class interests, and with the goal of mobilising the whole class) is through a vanguard section, which is divided, in turn, into that vanguard section composing the party and the 'vanguard' section on its immediate periphery? The need to understand the question of the stratification of the class is a major part of the dispute on the general strike, if I understand it correctly..."

"There is an interesting discussion in 'The Prophet Armed' on this, where Deutscher contrasts Trotsky's journalistic work with Lenin's, and the orientation of the Vienna 'Pravda' with the orientation of Lenin's writings. Lenin wrote for the vanguard and therefore seriously influenced and prepared a leadership for much broader masses of the class. Trotsky attempted to talk directly to an undifferentiated 'broad mass working class audience', and failed to relate to the vanguard (or to create, educate, fuse a vanguard) and therefore ultimately failed to reach the mass of the class decisively..."

"The point is that relations are not direct. Again, in Ted (Jones) and Tony (Polan)'s politics on this question there is something real when they talk about relating to the advanced layers of the class and helping them to reach the masses of the class.

"Except that they confuse the stages, assume (implicitly) the possibility of always reaching the masses, and (for example on the general strike question) think (i.e. again implicitly assume: a major point being that they don't think, i.e. are not rationally conscious of what they say or imply) that the way to relate the vanguard to the masses is for the 'revolutionary group' to lower itself and attempt to lower the industrial vanguard to the level of the 'broadest masses'.

"Thus they perceive the stratification but totally misinterpret it and confuse the necessary relationship for a revolutionary outcome. The revolutionary party must relate to, organise, and equip the vanguard of the class, to perform all its tasks - but not by tailending the lowest (or even the average) level of the consciousness of the whole class. It must not be

afraid to lead - and to understand that, almost by definition, the vanguard will be attracted by more radical slogans and hopes and the possibilities of the struggle than the mass of the class (usually).

"If the aspirant revolutionary party fears to put forward audacious, advanced, leading slogans, it will not attract - and will not deserve to attract - the vanguard, the revolutionaries, the fighters, the people capable of withstanding the pressures of bourgeois society and ultimately prepared to stake their skins in a fight against that society.

"If, on the other hand, having understood this need to attract the revolutionaries, the rebels, and the fighters, the aspirant revolutionary party doesn't also understand the need for political honesty and realism, the fact that demagoguery and false perspectives, and what Lenin denounced as 'phrase-mongering' merely abuse, exploit, and ultimately destroy people attracted by qualities of the organisation such as boldness and 'advanced' slogans - then you get a SLL....

"Connected with this question is the idea of Ted (Jones) and Tony (Polan) of a 'growing gap' between the militants and their 'constituents' - which we must help them to overcome. Frankly, quite apart from its obvious relationship to what I have written above, the idea is largely an expression of the sheer amateurishness and quackery of people who don't know what they are talking about. In so far as the stewards in question are leftists politically there is usually a gap. But the fundamental relationship between stewards and convenors and the mass of the workers concerns their services on the job. The relationship is, by and large, self-regulating - given democracy (and few things in capitalist Britain are more democratic and responsive than the steward/worker-'constituent' relationship): a 'bad' steward is usually out. At the same time a steward, whatever his politics or estimation of a situation (like on the Industrial Relations Bill) does not automatically involve or convince the workers, who are usually tolerant/indifferent to the politics. There is a gap certainly - but it won't be bridged simply by asserting the need to do so, and if such an assertion is followed by proposals that the way to do it, and the way the revolutionary party should suggest it can be done, is for the left/revolutionary-minded stewards to be less militant, to avoid talk of general strike, etc, that will only widen another gap - the gap between IS and the militants in industry who are ahead of the mass of the workers and who want to fight".

I took up some connected points in a letter earlier this year to an IS 'Right Oppositionist':

"The question is not whether the workers are prepared, but how and for what they are prepared' (Lenin).

"Because - how do you find out whether the workers are 'prepared'? How do you define which are the militants, which are the masses, which are more advanced? Which are the more militant, the Ford workers or the hospital workers?

"From a Marxist point of view, i.e. regarding the working class as an active participant in the making of history, consciousness can surely only be assessed dynamically, in and through practice. And the activity of the revolutionary vanguard already contributes to the making of that practice.

"But is the general strike possible in the immediate future? To a question of that sort there is no a priori answer possible, that is to say, none ready made. To obtain an answer it is necessary to know how to question. Whom? The masses. How question them? By means of agitation.

"Agitation is not only the means of communicating to the masses this or that slogan, calling the masses to action, etc. For a party, agitation is also a means of lending an ear to the masses, of sounding out its moods and thoughts, and reaching this or another decision in accordance with the results. Only the Stalinists have transformed agitation into a noisy monologue. For the Marxists, the Leninists, agitation is always a dialogue with the masses' (Trotsky)

"The only way to determine the consciousness of the class that corresponds

to the needs of militant Marxism is to address oneself to "how and for what" to prepare the workers. How to assess that? - the way is, as the Transitional Programme puts it, "to base one's programme on the logic of the class struggle".

"And when we appear with our programme before the working class we cannot give any guarantees that they will accept our programme. We cannot take responsibility for this.. we can only take responsibility for ourselves. We must tell the workers the truth, then we will win the best elements. Whether these best elements will be capable of guiding the working class, leading it to power, I don't know. I hope it will be able, but I cannot give the guarantee'. (Trotsky)

"Our 'keynote' is not the consciousness of the most militant sections, but still less is it the consciousness of the less militant sections.

"Naturally, we must make every effort possible to get our slogans and our explanations across to the masses. But here we must first understand that we need the essential weapon for the task. Without grouping and educating a cadre of advanced militants, all attempts to influence the masses are null.

"If we attempt to relate the militants (and, a fortiori, ourselves) directly to the masses, to negate uneven development and the 'gap' between militants and masses by our own effort, then we are forced to construct an 'average' or 'majority' consciousness. But this 'average' consciousness is an abstraction, derived from our own preoccupations rather than from the anatomy of reality. Rather than laying bare the concrete dynamics and potentialities of the situation, it reads the existing relationship of forces (vis-a-vis labour bureaucracy etc) into the consciousness of the masses as a given. The passivity of 'backward' workers is seen as a 'fact of life' rather than as the outcome of a conflict of forces. There is therefore an inbuilt tendency to passivity and/or opportunism. The cold result of the process is abstracted and counterposed to the process itself, in which our intervention enters as an element.

"With this approach, we, by definition, take ourselves outside the masses, and regard party and class as unitary or at best statically differentiated. The task of cadre-building thus becomes an 'organisational' side-line to the business of the party 'addressing' the class. In the case of the IMG (or, at least, 1972-conference IMG), this works itself out as a simple two-term relation:

Party _____ Class

(cf. 'Left & Crisis' and articles in 'Permanent Revolution'). With the 'militant-masses-gap' theory, there is a three-term relation:



with the party presumably as a sort of 'broker' between the militants and the masses: the schema thus obviously tending to a paralysing conservatism.

"More sophisticated schemas are of course imaginable. They all have in common an extremely didactic, 'blackboard socialism' tendency. The task that only the broad upsurge of the class struggle can accomplish - the negating (or, rather, upturning) of uneven development, the movement of the large masses - is allocated to the party, while the task that only the party can accomplish - the regrouping and preparing of the vanguard - is left to one side."

My approach, in 'Building the Party', was on a theoretical level similar to the IMG's "two-term" relation. We remarked in 'The Left and the Crisis' and in 'Permanent Revolution' that the IMG's 1972 conference ideas were merely an inversion of conceptions of the function of the Party being "calling the masses to certain concrete actions". It is the latter, economic-centrist, conception, which is found in 'Building the Party'.

Thus often in 'Building the Party' the argument comes down to: IS says 'party', I say 'masses' (involve broad sections in activity, p.4; non-party organisations, p.4; councils of action, p.5; left unity, p.6 ...). As long as the argument remains on this level, it is IS who is in the right ... or it would be if it were a party they were building, rather than a treacherous centrist morass.

We have had to argue against the false 'anti-sectarianism' of 'Building the Party' many times since our expulsion from IS: methods of mass work, particularly as crystallised in the Manchester branch's intervention in the engineering dispute; the discussion on 'Fusion of Education and Organisation'; the discussions on Councils of Action at various NC meetings; the discussion over joint work with the IMG round 'Real Steel News'; etc...

It is incorrect, I think, to characterise IS's approach to the British working class as sectarian. IS's petty-bourgeois identification of the general progress of the proletariat towards state power with the organisational enlargement of IS is more accurately described as social-democratism. My false definition of IS as 'sectarian' legitimated my equally false 'anti-sectarianism'.

When a particular course or policy, externally derived, is imposed as a schema without concern for the living dynamics of the class struggle, we call that ultra-leftism or ultimatism or dogmatism. When the course or policy is derived from a particular treasured doctrine, we call it sectarianism.

The SAP called the Stalinists sectarian. Thus they regarded the ultra-leftism of the Stalinists as simply the product of false doctrine. Trotsky criticised the description 'sectarian' and insisted on seeing the ultra-leftism as a particular zig-zag of 'bureaucratic centrism'. The SAP fell into 'political sentimentalism'.

The IS Right Opposition (and also I believe the RSL) call IS 'ultra-left' on the Labour Party. Even insofar as the RO's detailed criticisms of IS's line (the tendency to label the LP dead and attempt to bypass it through the rank-and-file) are correct, the characterisation 'ultra-leftism' is not. IS's approach to the LP does not result from indifference to the real development of the working class struggle - but rather from a one-sided attention to that struggle - economism. (IS genuinely is sectarian in relation to the 'Third World' - but not in relation to the domestic class struggle). The RO's false description of 'ultra-leftism' enables them to fall into rightist deviations.

To finish with perhaps the worst example of all: the USFI calls the Maoist bureaucracy 'sectarian' (in its approach to the USSR). It is wrong for the same reasons as the SAP was wrong on the German CP (and more besides). The false description of 'sectarianism' facilitates many opportunist deviations by the USFI (for example the 'softness' on the 'left' turns of the Maoists).

To sum up: whatever correct detailed points 'Building the Party' may contain, its whole approach is wrong. The connection with a negative position on the general strike (through the fact that some of the ideas in 'Building the Party' were borrowed in a half-baked form from the 1972 AH/GC opposition in WF) is not accidental - that 'Building the Party' actually comes out with a (more or less) correct position on the General Strike is fortunate, but little more. I hope that this letter can settle accounts with the pamphlet for good, and enable it to be rapidly and completely forgotten.

Fraternally,

Martin Thomas.

WORKERS' FIGHT

NATIONAL COMMITTEE MINUTES

29th - 30th, September 1973.

PRESENT: RL, EH, TD, PS, DS, SM, CB, MT, JW, SC, JC, AH

ABSEPT: RL(Personal), NS(Personal); JS(TU meeting).

1. Minutes of the last meeting

TD Inquired whether the decision about AH being in charge of printing had been carried out.

AH TB had continued to be in charge of the printing. AH had been doing other work.

TD Having taken the decision at the last NC it should have been carried out.

MT TB has started a full time education course and will not be able to carry the printing for much longer.

AH Thought that the last issue of the paper had been exceptional in that if AH had printed it, it would have been his first time. Was thus worried about making a mess of it. Suggested that the decision be reviewed at the next meeting.

Agreed: To review printing arrangements at the next meeting.

TD Raised the question of the 12 page paper. This had been agreed at the last NC with TD opposing, but since the decision had been taken it should have been implemented.

SM There were concrete problems. Things hadn't worked out as planned - i.e. it was realised that the NW24 supplement could stand up by itself and therefore decided to produce this separately and 8 page paper rather than as centre 8 pages of 12 page paper.

DS Thought that an explanation of this should have been given in the paper.

CB Can we assume that next issue will be 12 pages?

RL Yes.

EH Wished to put on record that he thought that the latest issue was very good, particularly the articles relating to Ireland.

2. Steering Committee Minutes

MT Steering Committee had decided to extend MT's leave of absence. MT opposed to this. Work of the secretary could be fitted into his schedule of teaching easily.

SM MT has problems about getting into the swing of teaching. Should have his leave of absence extended for three weeks.

MT Leave of absence is becoming increasingly fictional anyway. Should release JW for work on the paper.

TD Being outside the work of the group can have a more demoralising effect than being overworked. To try and save MT from things that he says he hasn't got is ridiculous.

CB How long is it proposed to extend the leave of absence for? (3 weeks)
Will MT have other clearly defined work?

DS Didn't think that MT should be teaching where he is.

Agreed: That MT's leave of absence should be extended for 3 weeks.
For: RL, EH, DS, PS, JW
Against: MT, JC, TD
Abstentions: AH, CB, SC, SM

3. General Perspectives

PS The boom has been financed by the extension of credit and has thus led to uninhibited inflation. As long as the boom in production goes on the extension of credit will continue - possibility of the economy 'overheating' and the Government stepping in to cool things down. The boom has not been the product of increased investment - there had only been a very slight increase in investment. It had been due to increases in productivity and the wage freeze. Previously booms had tended to lead to an increase in the living standards of the working class - but this is not the case this time. Potentially explosive situation. Instead of the TUC making any real plans to fight against Government policy we have seen the campaign over pensions being used as a diversion. But the TUC is not in any position to come to a deal with the government. There are important claims coming up - miners, engineers, civil servants - which could well be major battles in the class struggle.

NW24 - need to continue the solidarity campaign. IS is not seeing this as a class wide issue. The building of cadres must be a priority for us.

TD Perspective not concrete enough. The increase in productivity was self-defeating for the class. For example where TD worked the shop floor organisation had been weakened considerably by militants leaving to go into the better paid construction industry. Thought we were directing our attention too much to other groups. There was a serious drift towards the right in the unions and the attempt to solve problems sectionally - i.e. the fight over closures in the steel industry.

MT The immediate economic outlook was that the boom would be stronger than had been expected. The government was moving towards a more conciliatory policy. Saw little chance of the TU bureaucrats moving to the left - continuation of Jones and Scanlon policies, for example in the car industry. Had disagreed with the letter in the paper, from JW, on threshold agreements. Now thought MT had been wrong all along on the Sliding Scale of Wages. Wasn't against threshold agreements in principle, rather it was a question of what one was to focus on. Effect would be to take the stress off flat increases - average increase in wages was more than the legal limit.
On the CP. We should give more attention to CP policies, since they determine the policy of a whole number of TU branches.

SC Thought there had been a right wing drift in the unions and a general disintegration of rank and file bodies. For example the NFSSC does not exist anymore and on London docks the organisation had been destroyed. In the car industry the management had attempted to put the militants right out of the gates. In the building industry there had been no advance on the question of the lump, several London sites had gone back to the lump. TASS had been forced to turn towards the computer industry to recruit.
Thought there had been a real growth in the National Front and racialism. For example a letter from an NF member had appeared in the TASS journal and a NF notice had come up at the ASTMS conference. PS was right when he said that the boom won't end as quickly as we thought. Common Market may not be as embarrassing as we have been led to believe.

JW Thought that what TD had said about militants moving to construction industry

ted in generally with a situation of wage restraint and labour shortage - wages pushed up by moving around rather than collective action. On sliding scale of wages MT's proposals which he disavowed weren't what was suggested by JW in the letter to paper. MT was proposing a sliding scale of wages as a general strategy against government pay policy, JW had proposed a specific strategy as far as threshold agreements were concerned,

PS In spite of the boom in production the familiar problems of balance of payments and pressure on the pound still existed. If the ruling class can succeed in restricting wages then the boom will last longer.

AH On the rightward drift observations: Thought that there had been a tendency towards disorganisation. We had talked about the leading sections of the class 'marking time' over Phase 1. The lack of leadership then had led to disorientation now. But the engineers pay claim would not be easy for Scanlon to duck. CP could lead a fight over the engineers' claim.
Question to PS: Is it true that ^{there} is likely to be a downturn in investment because the mass of profit is not sufficient?

PS Profits were at record levels, due to inflation. Was not convinced that employers would go ahead with plans on investment without guarantees over wages. Employers had to be able to control costs and would push threshold agreements. Any crisis of overproduction would be a generalised one throughout the EEC because of the tying of exchange rates.

AH Not satisfied. Is it true that the mass of profit will be insufficient to reinvest?

TD Must bear in mind that if Labour gets in then will try to prop up the economy by nationalisations. More needed in the paper about the difference between what we mean by nationalisation and what the LP intends.

EH Thought that there were similarities with the situation in 1956 and 1961/62. Attack on militants and attempt to split them off. E.g. all IS members at Chryslers were now moved onto two gangs. Fragmentation same as in 1956.

DS Militancy was being isolated.

MT Sceptical about theories of move to right - had been overplayed and oversimplified. On TD's remarks about losing militants to construction - this was surely a gain for construction. NPSSC is something separate because the ports is a dying industry. Ford + Chrysler, why are the management bothering to isolate the militants unless they see them as dangerous. SC's list only covered specific industries with specific problems.

SC Had taken major industries. Whole number of weaknesses.

PS Contradictions of the situation. I.e. NAC was basically defensive with limited tactics which had led to defeat. Same with the docks. The boom has actually helped to accelerate the demise of these movements. At the same time large sections of the working class are feeling the pinch. Cannot see the situation where there will not be pressure on the TU leaders. Can't say that there has been a drift towards rank and file movements, therefore no struggle.

CB Thinks that there is a likelihood of the NW24 losing in court and this might result in demoralisation. We must stress again the need for mass pickets and flying pickets. Defence of pickets was still a key issue. On Rank and File organisations the situation was worse than SC indicated - Charter impotent.

AH Necessary to see the relationship between the sections of the class. Examples of ruling class tactics of wearing the working class down - i.e. steel, had announced closures at dates which they didn't intend to meet and then extended employment as a concession. This was used to wear down the anti-closure committees.

who had built up prestige and reputation. In motor industry there wouldn't be any outward flow due to already high wages. There has been a rise in militancy and now there was demoralisation and demobilisation. Political consciousness was posed in a sharp way.

NW24 - CP hadn't taken it over completely. Will go to Liason committee - liason committee will then take on alot of flesh.

MT Wanted to vote on a motion repudiating MT's original line on sliding scale of wages and letter from JW in the paper, and supporting article in the paper on threshold agreements.

JW Opposed taking a vote. MT's line had already been defeated and now he was muddling it up with attitude to threshold agreements which was a separate issue, and around which there had been no discussion.

It was decided not to put MT's resolution to the vote.

4. Article in WF No. 33, on Soviet oppositions.

MT Introduced a resolution (see later for text) criticising the article. The use of the word 'democracy' was imprecise in the article. Article didn't distinguish between oppositionists - some are extremely right wing. Position on bureaucracy should that we defend it against attacks by bourgeois elements and support its overthrow by working class.

AL On abstract theoretical point - i.e. use of the term 'democratic communism' MT is correct, 'Communism' was used here in the colloquial sense - should have read 'workers' democracy', but didn't want to lump together all oppositionists by using this term. As for right-wing agents against which the bureaucracy must be defended - who are these anyway?

SM MT correct on the misuse of the term "democratic Communism" but his argument doesn't relate to the situation in Russia today. Today we would be in favour of freedom even for fascists in Russia - i.e. they would be treated rather than jailed.

AH There could well be antagonism between democracy and workers' power - i.e. the Constituent Assembly and the Soviets. Genuine revolutionaries differed on the answer to the problem. The article distinguished specifically between Marxists and ^{RIGHT} oppositionists. Didn't agree with SM about freedom for fascists but who were the the fascists anyway. There was no reason to believe the Soviet government claims about oppositionists being fascists.

TD Agreed with MT but though the NC was wasting its time discussing the matter.

JW Didn't think that such terms as 'fascist' etc. made much sense in terms of Russia. The degree of suppression in Russia meant that if three people got together one of them would be a police spy - in this situation there were no clear currents of thought.

SM The question was one of the rule of law as against bureaucratic arbitrariness. After a workers' revolution, then what is a fascist anyway? - someone who is ill. MT's arguments would lead to support the suppression of Hungary and Czechoslovakia on the grounds that some right wing elements were involved. MT's quotations were from a totally different period.

MT Program for a political revolution - would mean the denial of political rights for the bureaucracy, Rule of law does not mean civil rights in abstract. We would independently fight alongside bureaucracy against restoration of capitalism. In reply to JW Sakharov's views are very well developed. Anybody fighting for abstract democracy in the Soviet Union is fighting/fascism.

SM On suppressing the bureaucracy, MT is ahistorical.

Voting: On MT's resolution For - MT, TD

MT's resolution was therefore defeated and it was decided unanimously that the letter should be published as from an individual; rather than from MT as national secretary.

5. Security.

There was a short discussion in view of the raid on the centre and various bizarre suggestions were defeated. It was decided to re-emphasise precautions which had already been sent out in branch circulars and also get in contact with the NCCL so that cdes. could have fuller protection when arrested on demonstrations etc.

6. Finance.

RL Long term situation was better because of the opportunities for commercial work which the new press opened up. It was necessary to get someone in the union and inquiries had already been made to see if we could get printing contracts for various papers. However the short term situation was bad. Nothing had been done about the previous decision of getting in the fund extra by the end of September.

AH We needed money now to get commercial work. Suggested a levy.

RL Preferred voluntary contributions.

CB Should learn how to get money off contacts - JB had shown that this could be done in Liverpool.

Agreed Voluntary contributions rather than levy

A list of bad branch debts to be published in IB subject to warning.

Financial balance sheet to be circulated to all members.

7. Labour Party.

JW Gave summary of reports which had been sent in. (see LP IB for more details).

SM Added to reports: M/C JS had affiliated NUPE branch to local LP.
Coventry + Northampton work going on.

Should continue with explorations and hope to build up a base. Should consider the possibilities of a broadsheet.

SC In Oxford cde. was using his base in union to get a foothold in LP branch. Should this tactic be adopted generally?

CB Thought that there should be more explanation about why we were entering the LP.

MT Emphasis should be on building bases in the LFYS in London and Bolton.

DS Entry would raise certain specific problems - i.e. should we recruit to the LP? Question of Liberals and 'Community Politics'. Many LP militants thought that Liberal successes due to this as opposed to LP inward looking attitude. Should use this?

SC Thought that this could be used.

SM On entry tactics, noted that the bans imposed during the cold war period had been lifted. Tribune argues that can only be kicked out of the LP by being proscribed.

DS Can use LP as a stepping stone to Workers' Fight?

SM Doubtful - this sort of perspective depends on a mass turn which is not likely. Therefore main orientation towards the LFYS which can be used in this way.

Agreed - to appoint a committee to centralise LP work - JW to convene, members

8. Engineers' pay claim.

AH Not possible to give a comprehensive picture because of failure in sending in reports. Foresees fragmentation as with last year. Was not sure about the state of order books - this could be a very important factor. However known that in ship-building the orders were slacker than elsewhere. Possible that as last time there is a series of nationally backed strikes but not national strike. Union leadership could stand in the way of a national strike by hiding behind the rule book on such questions as ballots etc. Our position should be to emphasise the hours question. On equal pay the IMG position was to make propaganda about abolishing "womens' jobs" rather than equal pay. Didn't think this position faced up to the immediate situation.

TD Resolution had been sent from TD's district committee about planning tactics. Wasn't surprised about ignorance about the claim since district committees hadn't been informed as to what the claim was.

JC In Manchester CP AUEW leaders Fanter and Tocher had lost credibility over the GEC strike. Women workers had ignored a call for solidarity with SEI. Demoralisation as a result.

MT Asked about the timetable for negotiations.

TD Negotiations would go on throughout next month (i.e. October) Should remember that in many branches engineers were outnumbered in the AUEW by other members. Thus there was a splintering in these branches with the non-engineers not wanting to discuss the pay claim. This acted against any struggle. Call for restructuring of the branch system?

AH Thought this would be diversionary. Branch system much the same in all unions.

TD Explained situation further. Many places coming under the Confed agreement were small shops on low wages. These were often in a minority at AUEW branch meetings and they tended to get ignored.

SC Should select areas from which to get information.

MT Thought that the reasons for lack of information from the branches was probably that the branches didn't have the information.

SC Should get information about feelings in factories.

AH Also what was needed was information about the state of the order books.

Agreed - That the main emphasis should be on the question of hours and explaining the defeats of last year.

9. Tenants

SC Two conferences had been called - one by CP and one by IS. No national upsurge. Thought it probably that the 50p rent increase would go through without major resistance.

AH Should connect the question of rent increases with attitude towards the LP - i.e. no LP endorsement for councils without a promise of no implementation.

SM Thought this could only be raised gently.

MT Re-iterate decision at last NC about Nottingham being responsible for centralising tenants' work.

10 Day schools.

These were arranged for North West and Midlands.

11. NC Attendance.

TD Raised the question of the poor attendance on the second day of the NC. Two day NC were supposed to strengthen the NC - ridiculous if people don't turn up.

Agreed - to send a circular round to all NC members about attendance.

12. Extended "Workers' Fight" EB Meeting.

RL SC to be industrial editor and JC, who had just moved to London to be on the EB. One of the problems and reasons for the lateness of No.33 was the new press and the problems of learning new techniques involved. Eight pages because EB was faced with choice of having the NW24 supplement as centre 8 pages of 12 pager or of separating the two. Later course was taken because the supplement stood up by itself and four pages was insufficient to cover the news.

JW Proposed small editorial working team rather than large EB to be in daily control of the paper.

TD Need to regularise EB meetings - should be on a fixed pre-determined day.

AH Agrees about regularity. SC meeting usually on Sunday or Monday when there was an NC meeting - could have EB meeting at same time.

MT Suggested JW to be responsible for calling EB meetings. To avoid postponements. Should be articles on the bourgeois press, basic educational articles and more exposure type stories.

SM Everyone agrees with routine, but loads of other problems pressing from all sides leads to rushing from one to other. Low level of writers in the group - need to train more writers.

RL Suggested functioning EB of JC,RL,JW.

Agreed: editorial team to consist of RL,JC,JW (RL to be editor).

JW to be responsible for monitoring the papers, and convening EB.

Definite structure of control - NC(six weekly); SC(weekly); Editorial team (daily).

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On abortion/ contd.

Marxism with religious qualities and human beings with mysticism. Man constantly strives to overcome nature, that he will do this is beyond doubt, hence test tube human beings. Before comrades get 'up-set', at this, it is already being done in Oldham General Hospital - that to me puts such bourgeois concepts as that human life is 'sacred' where they belong, on the altar of the nearest Catholic church, in the narrow minds of priests.

"All that lives deserves to perish", because it can do no other, coming into being and passing away is the only absolute.

FRAN BRODIE.

DISCUSSION ON OPPOSITIONS IN RUSSIA

As Comrades will learn from the NC minutes there was a discussion on our position on the various oppositions in Russia, which centred around MT's criticisms of the articles in 'Workers Fight' No.33. MT moved a resolution stating that a letter, which he presented to the NC, should be published in the paper as an official repudiation. This motion was defeated and it was agreed that the letter should appear as a criticism from one member rather than as the line of the group. There was then a change of mind by MT and those who disagreed with him, to the effect that the IB would be a better forum for the discussion. There follows the text of the letter from MT. A reply has been written but was too long to be included in this issue of the IB - it will appear shortly.

LETTER TO THE PAPER FROM MT.

The page 2 articles in Workers Fight 33, by lumping together communists (like Medvedev or Grigorenko) and bourgeois liberals (like Sakharov) under the titles of "those ... who are fight for democracy in Russia" miss some important points.

No-one in the USSR is safe from stalinist police apparatus - not even the most 'orthodox'. Still it remains a fact that repression is not spread evenly. Right wing figures like Sakharov have far more breathing space than left oppositionists.

"Concern with civil rights" (WF 33) in the abstract is not the attitude we should take. The Soviet state would be quite justified in repressive action against genuinely dangerous right wing agents (though not even Sakharov falls into this category). What is wrong is that the fire is directed against the left.

The most misleading phrase in the articles is - "democratic communism". As if we held the bourgeois view that Russia is communist, but, unfortunately, undemocratic communism! The point though, is that Russia is neither communist, nor socialist, nor even a healthy workers' state.

Moreover, "democratic communism" is a contradiction in terms. Lenin wrote: "in communist society democracy will wither away", for "Democracy is a form of state, whereas we Marxists are opposed to every kind of state".

The use of this nonsensical term "democratic communism" feeds fuel to the vulgar notion that the Trotskyist criticism of Stalinism is that it is not democratic. Such a criticism would be straight away rejected by any thinking person as unrealistic meralising. The Trotskyist criticism is based on 1) the sabotage of world revolution through the Stalinist bureaucracies' orientation to alliance with whatever bureaucratic or bourgeois forces it can find; 2) the stifling and repression of the conscious activity of the working class - the necessary basis for building socialism - through a massive bureaucracy separated from the masses. At no time have Trotskyists followed reformists and ultra-lefts in assessing the reality of the USSR by an abstract classless norm of democracy divorced from material conditions.

It is of the greatest importance that we show that "democracy" is not a name for "good political system", it is a political form which arises on certain material bases at certain periods of history, and can cover various class contents. In time of revolutionary crisis, it is very likely that we will find the worst reactionaries gathered against the working class precisely under the banner of "democracy"; support for the elected government, wait for the verdict of elections, no mob rule, etc.... And at their head will be those like the Labour Party leaders, who describe themselves as "socialists", but democrats.

As Trotsky summed it up, the "history of bourgeois and 'social' democracy turns the banner of 'democratic communism(?)' into the banner of outright class betrayal". We should never speak of democracy without making clear the class content and historic role in question.

Martin Thomas.