

best a very long term goal, implying the impossibility of anything but defeats and betrayals for the foreseeable period.

In fact, the Third International was built by winning the existing workers' movements, or big sections of them, for revolution. In France, the majority of the old Socialist Party was won at the Congress of Tours in 1920. In Germany, the Independent Social Democrats in 1921; in Italy, successive sections of the Socialist Party in the early '20s. It is a sobering truth that where there existed big workers' parties and the Communist International failed to win them, or big sections of them, communism remained a minor force. (It was thus in Britain).

This is how Trotsky, in a polemical speech against the KAPD, explained the relation of what the majority of the Communist International was trying to do to the previous history of the labour movement. *

"As a matter of fact, the Social Democracy — from whom we broke by breaking with the Second International — marked a certain epoch in the development of the working class. This was not the epoch of revolution but the epoch of reform. Future historians, comparing the bourgeoisie's course of evolution with that of the proletariat, may say that the working class, too, had a reformation of its own.

"What was the gist of the bourgeois Reformation? At the dawn of its independent historical action, the bourgeoisie did not immediately set itself the task of conquering power but sought instead to secure for itself, within the framework of feudal society, living conditions most comfortable and best suited to its needs. It proceeded to enlarge the framework of the feudal state, to alter its forms and to transform it into a bureaucratic monarchy. It transfigured religion, personalising the latter, that is, adapting religion to bourgeois conformities. In these tendencies we find expressed the relative historical weakness of the bourgeoisie. After securing these positions for itself, the bourgeoisie went on to the struggle for power.

"Social Democracy proved incapable of translating Marxism into social-revolutionary action. The role of the Social Democracy dwindled to an attempt to utilise bourgeois society and the bourgeois state in the interests of the working masses. The goal of the conquest of power, although formally set forth, exercised virtually no effect upon the actual practice. Activities were not directed toward the revolutionary utilisation of parliamentarianism, but toward adapting the working class to bourgeois democracy. This adaptation of a proletariat not yet fully conscious of its own strength to the social, state and ideological forms of bourgeois society was apparently a historically inevitable process, but it was just that and nothing more, that is, a historical process delimited by the given conditions of a given epoch.

"This epoch of proletarian reformation gave birth to a special apparatus of a

labour bureaucracy with special mental habits of its own, with its own routine, pinch-penny ideas, chameleon-like capacity for adaptation, and predisposition to myopia."

[First Five Years of the Comintern', vol.1, p.180-1].

In fact there was a second epoch of 'working class reformism' after world war 2. It came because of the defeats and betrayals of the revolutionary movement, whose spokesman Trotsky had been, and it was made possible by the expansion of capitalism. It was in the '40s and after that the British labour movement experienced its reformist high point.

But the reformist phase of the British working class movement is clearly over and done with for the foreseeable future. The sick capitalist system can now offer the working class only drastic counter-reforms amidst mass unemployment. All that the workers gained through the period of reformist class collaboration is at risk or is vanishing. *The labour movement is being forced to re-think its whole outlook*, and in these conditions Marxists have every reason to believe that we can win it to the only politics that express its historic interests — Marxist politics.

It is only now that the dialectic of history has led the British labour movement to the crossroads of stark choice to which the Communist International tried to bring the workers' movement in 1920.

That is why the disunity and sectarianism of the forces of Marxism, and especially the sectarianism of the SWP, are of enormous importance. History does not work of itself. The ferment in the labour movement now will not spontaneously throw up scientific Marxist consciousness. If we do not succeed in winning the labour movement, or weighty sections of it, for the politics of socialist class struggle, then the chance may go again for decades. And then they will be certainly grim and probably bloody decades for the British working class.

The odds are against us — especially because of the condition of our own forces — and we may fail. But the working class will not forgive those Marxists who do not try, but confine themselves to tired whinnings, bad jokes, and a self-exclusion that means turning their backs on the working class itself, 'at the given moment'.



The chronic disunity of the Marxist movement has of course many causes, and it would be naive or IMG-style demagoguery to pretend that unity can be created immediately. The Socialist Unity campaign was essentially an attempt to unite the revolutionary Left around a tactic of mini-scale electoralism, foolish in the circumstances and, to anyone with any political sense, or with a sense of the labour movement, obviously irrelevant to serious politics, whether reformist or revolutionary.

It made 'unity' a bit of a joke. That is a shame, because the united strength of the Marxists, or of a sizeable portion of them, could be a major boost for the working class struggle for the political renewal of its movement in the months up to the Brighton 1981 Labour conference, where a major offensive against the decisions of Wembley will have to be faced.

Is there then no way to unite the forces of the Marxist left? There is a way to

begin to create unity — around the work of political intervention in the mass labour movement. After all, the lack of a stable and responsible functioning in the class struggle and in the labour movement, the fact of being marginal to that movement, is a major reason for the fissiparousness and disunity of the left, for the creation of sects around fads, persons, tactics, and fetishes, and for the creation of undemocratic self-perpetuating regimes which spawn a new group with each important difference.

It is necessary — in the first place for the labour movement, but also, perhaps, for the Marxists! — to create a revolutionary movement *in the working class movement, inside it, of it, and not outside it and needlessly counterposed to it*. Whether such an organisation should, or in the circumstances could, call itself a party is a minor detail. The Leninist conception of the revolutionary party is not of an apparatus, a public name or badge, but *fundamentally* of a body of Marxists who have clear ideas and who organise so as to enable strict and honest political accounting, rounded assessments, and decisive organisational and political initiatives. Its members or 'supporters' work in the labour movement, in all its areas and aspects, and attempt to gain the political leadership and to tie the movement together into a coherent class force able to take power.

Such a movement can and will be built in the existing movement. Without it only limited and unstable progress can be made. For example, the work of Labour Party militants can only be barren if it is not integrated with work in the trade unions. The struggle for democracy is an immediate case in point. Neither the struggle in the Labour Party nor in the trade unions can be adequate without ideological combat against all the friends and agents of capitalism in society and in the labour movement. *The revolutionary party is the organisation of Marxists that can effectively do these essential tasks and tie together the fronts of the class struggle — in the political labour movement and in politics generally, in the trade unions, and in ideological struggle — into a coherent whole*.

Back in the mid 1920s Leon Trotsky, pursuing the sort of reasoning expressed in the quotation above, thought it might prove possible for the Communists to become an affiliated organisation of the Labour Party. While the Labour Party maintained its broad character, embracing socialist societies and unions, the CP could gain the effective political leadership, displacing the ILP from that role. (See 'Where is Britain Going?').

And now, fruitful unity of the Marxists can be fought for on the perspective of building such a Marxist organisation in the labour movement to do these tasks — a 'revolutionary party' that is part of the labour movement.

From the point of view of serious Marxists, the most important thing is *what to do now*. We are in the middle of a historic struggle. We must rally the forces to consolidate the Wembley decision. In the last year, the Rank and File Mobilising Committee, initiated by Socialist Organiser/SCLV (a small group of Marxists), played an important part in the outcome at Blackpool and then at Wembley. We must continue that unity, while organising the hard forces of Marxism at the same time.

* It is instructive to read the SWP's official handbook on the party, by John Molyneux (put out with Tony Cliff's imprimatur and edited by him). Molyneux presents a completely ahistorical account of the Second International, in which it is judged and found wanting because it did not have the SWP's (they think it is Lenin's) theory of the party. This is not the view of the Second International insisted upon by the Third International majority led by Lenin and Trotsky. It is a bloodless first cousin to the KAPD view.