

At the meeting of the EC immediately after the December NC, ed Jones rather bitterly expressed resentment and anger at the fact that the NC voted against his opposition to raise the slogan of self-determination for Poland. This was, he said, a case of 'hi-jacking' the line of the organisation. I was 'pushing' issues too quickly, he said.

The term 'hi-jacking' expressed an idea that has come up again and again, also in comments from ed. Smith. Jones declared that from then on he 'was going to fight' (perhaps he said, 'fight back').

Smith expressed general agreement with that.

I was taken aback a little by this, for a number of reasons.

At the NC Jones had had as much time to oppose the slogan as I had had to advocate it. It was a properly convened meeting of the NC. Jones did not even allege that there had been anything underhand. Jones or others had every possibility of proposing a longer discussion in the NC (we were in the first day of a two-day meeting), and I would have supported this. They did nothing of the sort, though they had ample time and opportunity. Therefore, the notion that a NC vote should be seen as 'hi-jacking' the line of the organisation was a rather bizarre one (especially since there was no ex I-CL vs ex WSL line-up on the matter).

The political substance of the issue in dispute in relation to Poland was (and is) somewhat obscure in that Jones and Smith favour the call for opposition to any Russian invasion, and on the 'living' political issues there are, as far as I know, no differences. Poland was not one of the issues we agreed to leave open at the fusion and take slowly thereafter.

In no sense could it be said that I raised this question of Poland's right to self-determination suddenly, or without warning. Quite the contrary. I had raised the matter on leading committees repeatedly in the period before the December NC. At the joint WSL/I-CL public meeting at Conway Hall in autumn 1980, at which both Jones and I spoke, I expressed my opinion with extreme sharpness so that there would be no hint of ambivalence such as afflicts all sorts of pseudo-Trotskyists. I said that Polish nationalism was justified, was progressive vis-a-vis the USSR, and that Great Russian Chauvinism was the reactionary nationalism holding Poland in subjection. I expressed my support for Polish national independence and for those fighting for it.

At an OC on September 25 I raised the question of what our attitude would be if a Russian invasion led to full-scale war, and if the USA etc. were running guns and other help, perhaps through Gdansk, to the Poles fighting the 'Red' Army. There was unanimous agreement at the OC that this would ^{not} inhibit our support for Solidarnosc and the Poles. At the OC of October 22 I raised the Polish question again, asking comrades to consider the call for blacking of Russian goods in the event of an invasion. I raised the matter as clearly and sharply as I could at the October NC.

Obviously I focused on this question because in my understanding of what was happening in Poland, the fact of Poland's lack of national rights played a central role. It was the looming shadow of the Warsaw Pact armies that made the Gdansk soviet diminish and downgrade itself, and attempt to become a trade union, in August 1980.

I kept on about it because I wanted the organisation not to be caught unawares and politically unprepared by likely events, and I thought that the Polish national question, and its possible relation to the defence of the USSR, and the 'restoration of capitalism' in Poland would be controversial and might blow up the organisation. I knew that the leadership of the old WSL came from a tradition (the SLL) which in my opinion - basically for reasons of its relations with factional opponents over the years - taught its recruits to regard 'defence of the USSR' and 'defence of nationalised property' as something of a fetish outside of time and place. The SLL divorced these slogans from concrete assessment of the question which is central in determining what place in our political concerns defence of the USSR must actually hold at a given time: the real balance of ^{the} power blocs. It had very curious political assessments of supposed dangers of 'restoration of capitalism'. In 1968 the SLL's paper appearing immediately after the invasion of Czechoslovakia had a second headline saying 'No restoration of capitalism' - given more or less equal weight with opposition to the invasion.

In fact I had been agreeably surprised that the ex SLL comrades seemed to have emancipated themselves from such Healyite nonsense.

But what was Jones' (and Smith's) objection to self-determination? That has never been quite clear to me. Jones has never actually explained it clearly other than to express unease and reservations, and to say that it has or may have implications for the dispute on Afghanistan. He has had both time and suitable access to spell out his reasons. For the TILC meeting, which discussed Poland at length, he was specifically authorised to argue his view on self-determination by Kinnell, a supporter of the self-determination position. At the EC on December 23, when Jones expressed discontent with the paper's coverage on Poland, I expressly proposed that he should write - and the result was agreement that Jones should draft the TILC resolution. But Jones did not, while talking about the impermissibility of the NC vote to 'hi-jack' the line of the organisation, find the time or energy to spell out concretely what his objection was to self-determination - it was all hints, half-thoughts, reservations, and the need to take it slowly.

Now, does the raising of self-determination for Poland have implications for Afghanistan? It might have. Certainly I am in favour of self-determination for the peoples of Afghanistan. The point however is that it is possible to find reasons which counterbalance the right of the Afghans to self-determination. Certainly it is a very different country and situation from Poland.

Jones' concern and approach is the opposite of the proper one. We are for basic democratic rights, and thus for self-determination for every people. However, democratic rights, including self-determination, are for us subordinate, where they need to be, i.e. where there is a real conflict, to working class interests. For example, the Bolsheviks, having broken down the walls of the Tsarist prison-house of nations, then had occasion to subordinate the self-determination of the Poles to the class struggle in 1920, when they invaded Poland. It is a matter of concrete assessment and of showing in a given case what outweighs the elementary democratic programme of revolutionary socialism. It might be possible to argue that there are considerations which outweigh self-determination for Afghanistan - defence of the USSR, or the Spartacist/Militant idea that the Afghans are too backward to be free of foreign domination and that the Russian bureaucracy is therefore right to act, so to speak, in loco parentis for them - for those who survive the slaughter and the bombings, and those who don't join the two million who have fled.

Each case is separable. The theoretical 'domino' notion of Jones - that self determination raised for Poland would necessarily lead to it being raised for Afghanistan - is conceivable only as a result of a fundamental confusion about the basic, axiomatic, right, ^{and} about the possible considerations that might outweigh it.

The approach is impermissible for two other reasons.

In the first place it is a miserable and self-diminishing idea that we refrain from raising self-determination for the Polish people in the situation where the most tremendous achievements of the working class in many years are undergoing murderous assault from the Polish bureaucracy, the spawn, stooges, and proxy of the Great-Russian chauvinist bureaucracy within whose 'sphere of influence' Poland lies by agreement with imperialism. If self-determination has no application to Poland now, then there are few conditions when it has or will have meaning. The national oppression of the Irish is trivial compared to what Poland has suffered at the hands of the USSR: and the national oppression of the Irish is in fact a long way from being trivial). To drop self-determination for fear of implications for Afghanistan is to go a long way to dropping it generally - to jettisoning this basic notion of revolutionary Marxism. And if that was far from the comrades' minds, that is only because they have not thought things through.

In the second place, it is utterly sectarian in method to let what we say about

Poland, our championing of the Poles in a labour movement awash with Stalinist conciliationism, to be determined by considerations about something else - about possible implications for Afghanistan, - by fear of 'giving something away' for a different discussion. It expresses an irresponsibility towards Poland's struggle which is truly sectarian because motivated factionally.

(Also, from my point of view, of course, even though the Poland and Afghanistan questions are distinct, the refusal to support self-determination for Poland is a good example of the bad consequences that flow from a grievous political error like Jones' on Afghanistan - an error now persisted in long after the major serious would-be Trotskyist organisation sharing that error, the USFI, has rectified itself and raised the call for troops out, leaving Jones and his co-thinkers virtually alone with the Spartacists and Grantites).

In fact, however, all this does not adequately explain the attitude of Jones and his co-thinkers. The hints and half-thoughts and unexpressed reservations are, in my view, more important than the references to Afghanistan, and point to the real problem. Jones has only managed to tell us about Afghanistan and Poland, but the reason he does not want to express his and my politics of Russian troops out in terms of the elementary and axiomatic Marxist principle of self-determination is that his reservations, unexpressed hints and half-thoughts concern just this - that he does not rule out, or part of his mind does not, the possibility that there may be a drive to restore capitalism and that the Russian bureaucracy may be the only force to stop it. I do not know that this is how Jones' thinking runs. But I cannot make any other sense of what I do know - including the failure to think through the possible distinctions between Poland and Afghanistan.

I say plainly that I am for the right of the Polish labour movement to live, even if (improbably) it were to make the grave mistake of restoring capitalism. There are no conditions in which I can conceive of any good Marxist reasons arising to outweigh the right of the Polish people to self-determination. I have made my position as plain as possible, and often. In response there have been mutterings about 'the defence of the USSR'.

In fact:

- The present world situation is characterised by the strength of the USSR and the relative weakness of imperialism. (The comrades seemed to accept this view when it was expressed by Peter S at the TILC meeting and underlined by me. I had made the same point at the August NC).
- Even if it were the opposite, and the defence of the basic property forms of the USSR were posed in real military terms, it would be inconceivable that Trotskyists should accept the bureaucratic perspective in the light of which alone the suppression of a labour movement could be seen as a contribution to 'defending' the USSR. We defend the USSR with the methods of world revolution, and we counterpose to bureaucratic 'defence' the labour movement and the methods of class struggle.

I believe this attitude to the class struggle is common to Jones and his co-thinkers and to me: the problem is that Jones and his co-thinkers carry a certain ideological baggage as well as their proletarian responses.

Why does Jones not spell the issues out? Why does he want time, though he has had months since I first posed the question as sharply as I could - over a year if we count the Conway Hall meeting? Because he is torn in two directions.

His (and Smith's) living response to the events in Poland is, as far as I can make out, indistinguishable from my own. That was one of the things that convinced me that despite the range of formal differences (e.g. the theory of structural assimilation) and the somewhat anachronistic and fetishistic (as it seems to me) way of relating to the question of the defence of the USSR, a fusion of our two organisations was actually possible. Right down to the open letter to Benn and Scargill in the paper, and the call for the blacking of Russian goods in the event of invasion, there are no practical disagreements. The disagreements only emerge - with surprising bitterness - when it is a

matter of summing up the common position in basic Marxist terms, so sharply that it rules out the half-thoughts and (this was my intention) separates us from what Jones and his co-thinkers call 'the Pabloites' of various tendencies. At this point, as far as I can see, Jones' Healyite conditioning rose in revolt. The fetishistic way of relating to defence of the USSR held him back from the logical conclusion and from a sharp Leninist expression of that conclusion, expressed without ambiguity.

'Healyism' here relates to the fact that for the Healyites in the '60s, the way the 'defence of the USSR' was raised and given prominence was not derived from the objective reality - real threats, or real vulnerability of the USSR - but from considerations of fighting the Cliffites in the YS and afterwards outside it.

From the declaration about 'hi-jacking' at the EC flowed the events at TILC. The EC gave Jones the job of drafting a resolution on Poland. I was in favour of this, and no-one opposed it. I passed him a note saying that I had written a detailed analysis of the events of August 1980 (30 to 35,900 words long) and a set of 'theses' on the experience of the mass strike and the political revolution. I asked if he would 'accept my collaboration' on the resolution. He made no response. Naturally I didn't try to press it.

During the TILC meeting I approached Jones twice (at least) to discuss amendments. He was usually 'busy'. Plainly he did not want to discuss them. I did not press that, either. Diffidence and things like that play their part in such affairs, and until things go badly wrong, it does not seem out of place that they should. There was still the scheduled EC.

At the EC on the Thursday night, and again at a specially convened meeting on the Friday morning, eds Cunliffe, Smith, Jones and Levy took up a completely formalistic and factional posture and attitude. They had a resolution and they were the majority: my proposed alterations were 'individual positions', 'not those of the movement' (Cunliffe). On both occasions, but especially on the Friday, I felt myself in the presence of factional opponents who felt they had the whip hand, not of comrades collaborating in the leading bodies of the WSL.

Ed Cunliffe adopted the tone and manner of a petty bureaucrat: he launched into a mildly abusive characterisation of the 'hi-jacking' at the NC and seemed to be making a case that the decision was not binding. Levy seemed in agreement (though my memory of his contribution is less sharp). Jones and Smith firmly terminated that notion.

But an amendment I proposed spelling out the self-determination slogan in more detail as part of the programme of political revolution was rejected out of hand, the meeting refusing even to consider it. (Kinnell proposed that the meeting vote on the political substance of the amendment, irrespective of whether and how it might be integrated with Jones' resolution, and the majority of the meeting refused). A longer amendment, spelling out why self-determination was an issue, was rejected by three votes to four.

I came away from that meeting unable to avoid the conclusion that the leadership of the new WSL had broken down as a united body.

I want the comrades to be clear about what I mean. It was an accidental majority of 4/3, but it was nevertheless a majority, and there was no formal obligation to accept my amendments. I should have raised them earlier, with better notice, etc. But:

a) The commission to write the resolution was not given on a factional basis. If Jones felt so strongly about the self-determination decision, perhaps he should not have undertaken to write the resolution. As noted above, other ways for him to express his views publicly had been proposed.

b) The most elementary notion of building a united leadership would imply

maximum efforts to get as much agreement as possible for the resolution. (My amendment expanding the self-determination slogan as part of the programme of political revolution, which met such a hostile response, was in fact aimed to do that....)

But one section - the minority at the NC on the matter - in the first place treated the resolution as its sectional property (or supported Jones and Cunliffe treating it as their property), and used an accidental majority of one to 'hi-jack' (to borrow an expression) the resolution.

Smith wanted to make an effort to incorporate some of my second amendment, but when forced to it voted with those who adopted a harshly factional line (which, apart from on the issue of abiding by the NC decision, included Jones).

There was in addition the question of democracy. The draft resolution included the call for self-determination. The notion that this call should be argued (or, in the event, not argued) in a way determined by those who disagreed with it, is contrary to democracy.

It would not have been acceptable that the entire details and balance of the resolution should exclusively be determined by the side that had won the vote on the contentious issue of self-determination (though that would have been less undemocratic than what happened). What was in order was that the resolution should be shaped and arranged in line with the NC's majority view. Instead the comrades treated it as private property.

The resolution was a passable resolution. It summarised the NC discussion and did include the self-determination call. I think it was inadequate in at least the following ways:

- a) It was journalistic and impressionistic - essentially an article.
- b) It was unstructured and unsystematic.
- c) Ideas were thrown together higgledy-piggledy and with no notion of proportion. For example, the lack of self-determination is not a small feature of the Polish situation. If Poland's domination by the USSR is important at all, it is an overweening fact: it is not enough to just throw it in, without concern for proportions and balance.
- d) It exists below the level of the theoretical questions posed by the appearance of events (which it accepts) - of a military coup by the bureaucracy. Either we look to the strength of the Russian and Warsaw Pact bureaucracy to explain the seeming strength of the Polish bureaucracy in face of a mass labour movement, or to some latent strength of the Polish bureaucratic formation. All the known facts and circumstances seem to me to point to the former as a major part of the explanation.

But if we look to the latter, as the resolution mainly does, then the theoretical problems raised for our theory of the bureaucracy as an inherently unstable, fragile and vulnerable social formation, for which a totalitarian regime is an irreplaceable scaffolding and protection from the working class masses, should at least be indicated. They are not, though the comrades have muttered darkly about 'the defence of the USSR' - the aspect of the same complex of problems that has least to do with it.

The amendments would not have made all this good, only some of it (or so I believe).

The world won't stop for the deficiencies of this resolution. The point is that if the comrades thought they could behave like that, then the message that got through very forcefully to me, at least, was that collective leadership in anything resembling the sense in which we tried to build from last July - and need to build it - had stopped and broken down.

Collective leadership does not exclude political differences and the submission of differences to a vote (indeed, if it did it would be cliquism). It rules out seizing of accidental advantages and the undemocratic exclusion of some comrades in the shaping of the supposedly common work. Kinnell, Hill and myself in the

EC discussions at TILC represented one side in a parity-balanced organisation fused less than 6 months previously: we represented the position decided by the NC, consisting of people from both the previous organisations. The resolution was going to have an international circulation.

The comrades say - or, certainly, think - that I 'hi-jacked' the line at the NC. Tit for tat...? Are the events I have described above at the TILC meeting the equivalent of a vote in the highest body of the organisation outside conference, prepared for in a number of discussions over 3 months or more?

The idea of hi-jacking in this situation is in fact the notion, or the ingrained and perhaps subconscious assumption, that ed Jones and his close associates have special rights: that is exactly what their behaviour in the EC meeting expresses, too. The notion that even against the background of the attempt to murder Solidarnosc, the line of the WSL should evolve in line with Jones' and Smith's thinking and not according to the urgency of events, I find singularly unattractive and self-centred.

There is no reason whatsoever why the WSL NC should wait, despite events in the outside world, for Jones and others to reach firm conclusions before publicly assuming its responsibilities as a revolutionary organisation and raising the Trotskyist banner of independence for Poland.

I had given ample warning that I considered the Polish national question a major issue: I moved to get a decision only when events in Poland demanded that we spoke out as clearly as possible, as people who understand with Trotsky that the national question is a major living issue under Stalinism, or else reveal ourselves as people shot through with ambivalence about Stalinism.

(In passing: are these comrades who treat as private a resolution commissioned by the EC and containing a major qualifying idea carried against their opposition, the same ones who get in a state at the idea that signed articles are not 'accountable'? Yes, it seems they are. Perhaps we might clear a few things up by discussing the difference between a resolution and a signed article!)

On January 9 there took place an EB on the telephone between Kinnell and Jones and Smith. (The road was snowed up). I was in the same room as Kinnell. I had proposed that I write a general article on the situation in Poland, and Kinnell had included this in his plan for the paper. The idea met with fierce opposition from Smith and Jones.

I remained out of the discussion: all I would have had to contribute was the opinion that the comrades had no right to veto this, and probably some not quite peace-generating comments in response to the arguments. They had no special rights, but to have refused to let them veto the article would have precipitated a much sharper crisis than the one we have now. For myself I decided it was better to think the situation out than act 'spontaneously'. The incident confirmed me in the conclusions I had reached a week earlier at the TILC conference.

I will bear repeating here that in so far as there is a political difference over Poland, I represent the position voted for by the NC. In effect, the majority was being denied the rights that I would advocate giving to a minority.

The arguments of Smith and Jones (for which I rely on Kinnell and on what I heard) were essentially: I wrote too much; I had plenty of time to write articles raising controversial questions, and this particular article was likely to be controversial on the question of the defence of the USSR; they didn't have time; they couldn't keep up, because they worked at Cowley and I am a full-timer.

Plainly much of what was said later at ECs had its origin here.

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There is a lot of demagogy here (and in much that I believe was said later at the EC). If it were to be generalised from, it would mean that the Leninist party would be impossible. Specialisation would be ruled out, so to an enormous extent would division of labour. The revolutionaries would opt out of trying to

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'keep up' with the 'struggle on the ideological front' - the struggle which distinguishes our theory of the party from all other notions of a party. The comrades take a self-defensive stand on the limits imposed on themselves by working at Cowley, and seem to want to confine what the party can do within those limits....

All of this has, of course, no bearing on whether I would write anything useful on Poland, or whether I should be dismissed as a party work for incompetence or some other reason. If these are the issues, though, then the comrades should focus on them directly, and not argue in generalities which challenge the basic theory of the party we are trying to build.

More damning in its implications is the demagogic 'workerism' which they try to use here. Working in Cowley is not the best situation from which to prepare for and write serious articles. That's for sure. That the organisation should do everything it can to offset the pressure on time and energy so as to make it possible for the comrades to write and study, is essential to the organisation being a healthy one attuned to the working class, one in which workers can live, breath and develop. I would argue for Smith and Jones having their burden of routine party work lightened much more than it is at present. I also know from experience what the comrades face in trying to combine writing with doing heavy industrial work.

But Jones has written on Poland. How can the gaps and limitations, and the fact that over months he didn't seem to manage to focus his ideas on the issues raised, be explained in terms of his general situation, within which he has written a lot of articles over the years?

In fact this seems to be an attempt to appeal for support and sympathy on a spurious and dangerous basis - a demagogic appeal to a section of the organisation against the Bolshevik idea that the party is a cadre organisation which knits together petty bourgeois and proletarian members (and, to bring myself into it, proletarian members who function as professional revolutionaries).

The attempt to appeal demagogically - and with complete spuriousness - to something essentially irrelevant to the issues under debate, against their political opponents on Poland, is quite a long way from the letter and spirit of the political tradition we declared ourselves as having in common six months ago - that of the theorists of our views of the party, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, Cannon.

Smith's assertion that I had insulted the Assembly plant branch at the last EC was in the same vein. I hope that if a discussion develops, we will not descend to this level again. I serve notice, however, that if it does, then we will discuss these questions politically - in terms of what conception the comrades have of the revolutionary party we are trying to build.

The question of the revolutionary party is indeed the heart of the problem. The revolutionary party is in the first place a programme - which is not just a set of numbered points, but a concretisation of goals and basic concepts in relation to the world around us, i.e. it is also an analysis, if it is alive. The drive of some of the comrades to reduce down the ideological work, or even the work of keeping the real world under review (the issue in dispute over Ireland last year) amounts to a drive to sterilise the organisation politically and intellectually. Instead we need to have a Bolshevik approach of not being frightened to express differences and to fight for clarity on the basis of an effort to learn and to convince.

Many of the problems we face arise from an averaging-out approach - organisationally and politically - which as far as I can see afflicted the old WSL, which threatens the new WSL, and which thus threatens to undercut and destroy one of the essential strengths of the I-CL.

Time and space force me to draw to a conclusion. It is as follows:

1. The paper should be so edited as to promote and defend the agreed positions of the League. It will maintain a sharp and clear line on the immediate issues of the class struggle.

2. Agreed policy covers positions adopted by conferences, leading committees, etc. It does not and cannot cover shades of analysis, assessment, etc; moreover, such officially adopted positions can be solidly and scientifically grounded only to the extent that they are based on substantial work done by competent and interested comrades to develop those 'shades' as clearly as possible in line with objective reality.

The Leninist method strives for a homogenous understanding - but not on the basis of averaging-out. Leninism therefore demands a range of shades of analysis in the press - the alternative being to edit the press on the basis of a lowest-common-denominator or a consensus, i.e. to sterilise the paper and the organisation politically and intellectually.

3. Given the different cultures and traditions in the League, and given that lowest-common-denominator politics is alien to Trotskyism and unprincipled, we do not have any alternative in the organisation but the approach above.

4. Where there is a majority position, minority views should generally be allowed space in the press for a discussion. The exceptions should be where such public discussion compromises the integrity of the organisation, would bring us into discredit, or uses the weight of bourgeois public opinion against the League, etc. On major defined differences the right of decision would, of course, lie with the leading bodies of the League.

In addition we will probably need a period of paying more attention to the formal commitment to parity than we have been doing.

CAROLAN . 14.2.82