

What We Are And What We Must Become

A critique of the politics and perspectives of the Militant Tendency *by Rachel Lever, Phil Semp and Sean Matgamna*

First published July 1966

INTRODUCTION

Early this year, Rachel Lever and Sean Matgamna developed apparently minor criticisms of the leadership's treatment of the issue of trade union legislation [the then Labour government's plans for laws to restrict union rights and restrain strikes]. We made a number of points and practical proposals to Peter Taaffe and later the Secretariat. It would probably have got no further, but for the strange behaviour of the leadership (see Section 1).

The responses, actions and reactions of the centre, the answers, comments and arguments they used in discussion, increasingly made us doubt if the differences were indeed so minor, or that they were isolated and accidental. This had the effect of allowing us an insight on the real nature of the Group's theory and practice. We have found the corrosion of Bolshevism/Trotskyism to be such that a change in quality has taken place. This is why we have dealt with basic questions like the Theory of the Party. Ted Grant may claim to have known this for decades. Maybe... but our case is that in the practice of the RSL [Revolutionary Socialist League, then the name of the group behind Militant] such 'knowledge' of the old hands has no meaning. In order to establish this we have brought in a restatement of some basic Marxist positions as we see them, to act as a fixed measure for the RSL, thus escaping the usual shifting quicksands we get into with talk of 'ultra-left', Healyite, etc. [The "Healyites" were the SLL, the Socialist Labour League, later WRP, then by far the most active Trotskyist group in Britain - already very sectarian in 1966, the SLL-WRP went mad in the mid-70s and disintegrated in 1985]. Peter Taaffe accused us of trying to pick out incidental points to build a system: on the contrary what we have done is to attempt to restate aspects of some basic questions we feel have been forgotten, pigeon-holed, and slowly eroded.

We have spent much time rereading some of the basic writings of the movement, and in the course of this a clearer picture of the RSL emerged. Questions we had raised, and which Peter Taaffe, Ted Grant, et al. had tried to keep segregated in airtight boxes, merged with each other. Concrete, practical details merged with basic theory, and could be clearly seen as originating in false political and ideological conceptions.

Contents and layout

Section 1 grew up unplanned and somewhat haphazard. It tells of organisational experiences, concrete events, conversations, political positions concerning these. Section 2 is on the relation of the Marxist vanguard to the working class and its spontaneously arisen movement; both in the 'abstract' and in connection with the British labour movement. Section 3 deals with 'Perspectives' - the leadership's conception of the thing itself, i.e. what is a perspective. We attempt with quotations to show what were the views of Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci on this question. Finally, we attempt to present a positive alternative. A picture is drawn of the necessary democratic centralist party, and concrete proposals made on this.

We never set out to write anything as long as this. We constantly cut it down and keep only what we felt was essential. Similarly, we tried to avoid repetition, but in some places some may have crept in, as we dealt with the case from as many different angles as possible.

We have in places used the sharpest language, as we feel a need to impress on the comrades that the issues are not marginal, not unimportant, not, as the leadership has tried to contend, secondary issues artificially blown up. The theories and practice of the leadership are, we think, alien to revolutionary communism: to fight these revisions is a thus a life or death question for the group - ultimately for the class. There can be no neutrality on these questions - they must be tackled sharply and clearly. Trotskyism must be today's Bolshevism: it arose as the defence of Leninism. Trotsky held that his most important work was his fight to preserve and develop Leninism against the epigones. Those who deny in words and ignore in deeds the role and significance of the vanguard party in history are Trotskyism's opportunists, attempting to cut away the Lenin side from Trotskyism, and reduce it to a matter of abstract phrases and detached prophecies. The politics of Trotskyism must still be defended. Therefore we declare for Bolshevik-Trotskyism.

SECTION 1

THE GROUP AS WE FOUND IT (AN EMPIRICAL REVIEW)

ANTI-UNION LEGISLATION AND POLITICAL QUIETISM

In the December/January [1965-6] issue of Militant there appeared an article on the front page headed: "No to Legislation." Unfortunately, the substance of that article placed in question the very point of bothering to print such a headline. It was an ultra-optimistic forecast that anti-union legislation probably would not be put on the Statute books, and even if it was it would anyway be irrelevant because of the strength of the workers. "They dare not lift a finger," said Comrade D. Or maybe it wasn't D, as we shall see.

Reading the article Rachel Lever and Sean Matgamna came to the conclusion that the article was wrong in substance and also that its tone raised questions about our general approach. We decided to write a short document for internal circulation on this issue.

In the New Year Peter Taafe visited Manchester and we put the following position to him:

That the paper's task was not to speculate on what the capitalists and the bureaucrats might or might not do, and least of all arbitrarily to dismiss the anti-union agitation as irrelevant. While it was necessary to make a clear objective assessment of what was likely to happen, this should not be blatantly blurted out but should be 'subsumed' within the general agitation material. The task of this agitation material, of the paper, was to seize on passing events to illustrate our basic conceptions; agitation leading to limited struggles which would group forces around our programme, i.e. build the organisation. It was necessary to be 'militant' in order to regroup the militants. The ultra-mechanical 'everything is pre-ordained' approach would have the opposite effect. If the class was strong our task was to help arouse awareness of that strength in anger against the bureaucratic pygmies: it was necessary to see ourselves not as 'Deutscherites' commenting on the passing show, but as Marxist revolutionaries, striving to organise the fight.

Even if there was no danger the very proposals from the Labour leaders allowed us to lead a limited propaganda campaign which could educate certain sections - not least in relation to the Incomes Policy, of which the legislation is the only likely outcome. Considering the illusions in broad 'left' circles (including, it now seems, Walton Constituency Labour Party [in Liverpool, then one of Militant's strongholds]) that it is only necessary to include profits and prices in this for it to be socialist, this became more important. Agitation against Incomes Policy and its implications would be a main content of our work in the next period and it was necessary to conduct it in a campaign spirit, co-ordinated nationally and led by Militant.

It was necessary to step ahead a bit, even if there was no immediate mass opposition, because otherwise we would not be able to group sufficient of the really advanced elements around us to be able to give a revolutionary lead to the broader ferment which would inevitably arise. To sum it up, the article confined itself to computer-type, mechanical 'Marxist' commentary on events, i.e. an undialectical, dead, therefore unMarxist approach. Whereas our task was to establish a dynamic interaction between the full Marxist programme and concrete developing struggles, by leading limited struggles ourselves.

We disagreed with the estimation that there was little or no danger of the legislation going through. It was not necessarily a matter of an all-out attack on the working class, but a limited attack aimed more than anything at strengthening the union bureaucracy and aiding it to discipline the working class. Since sections of the capitalist class saw a 'containment' of wages within a low rate of annual increase as the only alternative to serious deflation, it was premature to say that it would not materialise.

Concretely we made the following suggestions: that the paper should attempt to lead a national campaign on the lines suggested above, and that the best way to attempt to conduct this campaign was through the organising of rank and file committees (the sort of idea outlined for example in "Perspectives of Entryism" [a document by Ted Grant]).

Taafe while disagreeing that there was a serious danger of legislation being passed, agreed with the criticisms of the Militant article. He said that the article was the product of a number of pens and consequently was uneven in quality and was, in fact, wrong in approach. He not only agreed with the idea of Labour Rank and File Committees against Anti-Union Legislation, but chided us with not having informed the centre of this before: how could they be expected to lead if people didn't provide suggestions and ideas?

He suggested that instead of a short discussion document we write a critical letter/article for Militant which would also outline the concrete suggestions, and help undo any damage done by the article. Immediately we should go ahead and attempt to organise a committee to campaign in the local Labour Parties, trade unions, Trades Council etc., and also that we should attempt to involve the Liverpool group in similar work. A close contact that we had fixed up for Taafe to see

was mentioned as one who could play a big role here because of his prominence in his area trade union - and could equally be drawn into the Group as a result of this concrete activity on the issue - Comrade P.

A letter was sent to the Militant deliberately phrased as from two readers: the idea being that there would be no hint of an existing organisation in the proposals we were making. Necessarily, certain points were omitted. The letter read as follows:

Dear Comrade, after reading your front-page article last month ("No to Legislation") we felt bound to wonder what exactly is the role of the Militant as a Marxist paper inside the Labour Party. Is it to lull people to sleep - or should it be (as Lenin said) to agitate, as a first step towards education and organisation of the working class in our fight for emancipation from capitalism? Embodying what is essentially a correct estimation of the objective forces, of the strength of the working class as a result of twenty years of full employment in an expanding economy, it presents a picture of smug complacency.

The article's main case is that the workers are too strong for any legislation against their organisations to succeed - that is, says Comrade D with trusting confidence, if it even gets to the statute books.

Now, even if (a big if) all this were true it would most certainly not be the task of a Marxist paper to present its readers with a 'detached onlooker' type commentary. Without being hysterically alarmist or resorting to gimmicks we must raise consciously before the labour movement the class issues which are posed in a vividly dramatic form by the proposed action by the "Labour Government" to turn the bosses' state machine on the bed-rock organisations of labour; most important, of course, being the question of the class allegiance of the Browns and the Wilsons [George Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer; Harold Wilson, Prime Minister].

In any case is the ultra-optimism of Militant justified? For a start, whatever the present government does, a new Tory government would certainly reap where Gunter [Ray Gunter, a right-wing Labour minister] etc., have sown and proceed with legislation.

Objectively it is not only necessary to comment on the strength of the class and point out that if legislation is on the books it will be a dead letter in the immediate next period; because this in itself is quite misleading. Any anti-labour legislation on the books, even if passed while the working class is "looking the other way," is a defeat: no less a defeat because the practical consequences are delayed. For make no mistake about it, we cannot always bank on a situation so favourable to the workers; or are the Marxists around Militant so confident of the stability of capitalism that they look forward to an indefinite prolongation of the seller's market in labour? In the event of unemployment and sharp struggles in defence of the workers' present living standards, would such legislation still be an irrelevant dead letter? Or would it be a vital weapon in the hands of the bourgeois state machine?

The very events which have strengthened the workers since the war (protracted boom, full employment) have at the same time contributed to confining the consciousness of the mass movement to the level of bargaining within the system. Militant should by all means reflect the strength of the workers and their confidence. But if you also reflect the complacency and in general the average present level of consciousness then you will have added nothing to the struggle for Marxism: since by merely reflecting you can never hope to raise consciousness to any level at which the necessity to go beyond the capitalist system is both realised and fought for.

If it wishes to bridge the division between Marxism and the mass movement, between the present and future consciousness, between the class and its vanguard in the organised movement, between the minimum and the maximum programme, between reformism and socialism, Militant must drop its sedative tone.

The task is to lead an agitation inside the movement against the Tory outlook and policies of the Labour leaders. Of these the proposed teeth for "Brown's" Incomes Policy, so reminiscent of Taff Vale (one of the midwives of the Labour Party [the Taff Vale court judgement, which awarded a railway company heavy damages against the railworkers' union]) raises the vital issues most clearly. Already there are many in the trade unions and local Labour Parties who are moving, often confusedly and instinctively against this.

Militant should assist this growing movement both in practice and by linking up and clarifying all the issues to bring them down to earth: but a literary campaign is just not sufficient.

We must raise the alarm as far as we can reach, alerting the movement to the danger, and attracting the militants without whom we will never generate a mass Marxist consciousness in the future.

Such a campaign is being started in Manchester, with the aim of linking up the struggles around this question that are developing in the trade unions and Labour Parties. It is necessary to avoid both complacency and hysteria. A number of trade unionists active in the Labour Party are organising a campaign committee (Labour Committee Against Anti-Union Legislation) to take the fight into the wards and local trade union branches.

We would like to suggest that Militant sponsors similar committees in other areas - a national link-up would be possible in the event of a sharp development on this question.

RL, SM.

(The warning against only a literary campaign seems very optimistic considering that even a literary campaign wasn't attempted.)

Thus two lines of activity were set in motion. The letter and the practical attempts to organise a rank and file committee, including the attempt to involve Liverpool. The chronology of the two overlaps and it will be necessary to take them separately. We want to discuss two angles: comrade Taaffe's behaviour subsequent to his Manchester visit and the reaction of the Liverpool group to the proposals.

A DISCUSSION IN LIVERPOOL

We went to Liverpool and at a branch meeting made the case more or less as outlined above, with a bit more emphasis on the need to avoid becoming submerged in routine work in the movement as it exists, that we are an independent group etc. Also the elementary point that entry implied that we were once not 'inside'. The reply from nearly all the comrades, with the partial exception of DG, was surprising to say the least. The attitudes taken by the comrades, though in a crude form perhaps, we have found to pervade the organisation - including the centre, though the comrades at the centre are capable of clothing it in a pseudo-Marxist verbiage, laced with bluff. Comrade Ted M epitomised the attitude of the Liverpool group.

M replied that there was no mass movement against the proposed legislation, that in fact the masses were indifferent, and consequently we should not attempt any leadership-type activities, such as the Committees idea. Such things were the mark of the Healyite beast, and anyway even if we did initiate activity, once the masses started to show an interest the Big Boys of centrism on Merseyside would intervene and push us aside as they did the SLL on the unemployment issue three years ago, and the whole thing would lead to nothing. Only the future mass radicalisation of the workers would overwhelm the centrists and raise us to the heights. Meanwhile we must not divorce ourselves in anyway from the masses, but continue making our propaganda for the full programme while waiting for the class. 'Yes' the Liverpool group had sufficient influential contacts, comrades and semi-comrades in the mass movement to make a minority committee of militants to campaign a practical proposition - but the idea indicated a wrong approach. The existing broad movement, if it could be induced to organise such an effort, would be the ideal medium, for example the Liverpool Trades Council which is "almost a Soviet": unfortunately there was as yet no movement of the broad organisations. He wound up listing the people they could involve - if there was any point.

We replied that the comrades appeared to have an all or nothing conception. Either a mass movement now or no activity, merely a passive existence in the Labour Party making abstract propaganda. But the comrades' point on the centrists refuted their own attitude: the centrists would always be able to fake. Moreover, no matter how big the upsurge of the class, or how magnificent its spontaneous activity as witness Spain in the thirties, the centrists, entrenched and suitably adapting their garb to the sharpening situation, could so mislead the class that it was smashed down. The only approach to a guarantee against this was the preparation of a Bolshevik cadre organisation which could compete with the centrists and provide a revolutionary leadership for the class. But this organisation wouldn't arise spontaneously out of the ground in the situation of mass upsurge - it could only be prepared slowly, in advance of the movement of the class. We could only build ourselves into such a force by conscious activity in this period by leading limited struggles, necessarily at a certain point of advance from the masses. Our task was to attempt lead now, recognising the limited situation and also our own limitations: but these shouldn't be exaggerated into a paralysing sense of helplessness. Whatever happened later the SLL's initiating activity on the question of unemployment gained them many cadres and in turn magnified their influence in the Young Socialists. What they did with that support is a separate question: but really we had to consider if our own passive approach hadn't left them with a clear field on this as well as other things and therefore contributed to their power to disrupt the Young Socialists.

On the idea of Liverpool Trades Council being "almost a soviet" we pointed out that the Trades Council was embedded in the existing Labour Movement which was acquiescent, necessarily comprising a section of the class and in fact to a very large extent connected with the labour bureaucracy. To compare this with the soviet, completely democratic, presupposing a determination on the part of the class to control its own life directly, and drawing into activity those masses of the most oppressed workers at present outside the scope of the organised movement, was to debase the concept of soviets, to substitute form and formal comparisons for Marxist concern with the essence of things. To confine ourselves to tailing after the Trades Council as a result of this comparison, was to come very close to the stupid attempt of the Selby Tendency to pretend that the Labour Party is the Bolshevik party. On the basis of such an approach we had no future.

There was no final agreement on practical action, only a vague promise to see if a resolution committing the Liverpool Trades Council to organise such a committee could be pushed through. It must be said that throughout the discussion we both got the impression of a barrier preventing the consideration of the issue on its merits. The comrades responded as if we had proposed a sectarian desertion of the mass movement. They appeared conditioned, perhaps through an un-

thought-out rejection of the Healyite activities, to regard any talk of mobility by an advanced element as in the SLL tradition.

We got the impression from the Liverpool comrades, and later from the centre that any independent organisational activities on our part is tantamount to going outside the mass movement. The rigidity of the Liverpool comrades on this was truly amazing; and this is the main proletarian branch of the organisation...

It is anticipating a little, but we think that it is the practical ideas of the Liverpool group that are representative of the real politics of the organisation, of the real logic of the politics of the Secretariat i.e. those same politics denuded of the verbal camouflage in which Taaffe and Grant excel. For example the idea that the Liverpool Trades Council is "almost a Soviet" is not just a peculiarity of the local group, it is a much-expressed idea of comrade Taaffe's. The Liverpool group is the most dedicated and long-traditioned follower of the leadership. We think it is the most genuinely representative of the essence of their political approach. It is worth recalling what Lenin wrote in the trade union dispute with Trotsky:

"A political leader is not only responsible for the way he leads, but also for what is done by those he leads. Sometimes he doesn't know that, often he doesn't want that, but he is responsible all the same." (SW, p.19, Vol.9.)

PETER TAAFFE'S IDEA OF AGREEMENT...

Immediately on leaving Manchester Peter Taaffe went to Liverpool. In view of the above agreement he expressed with our proposals, as recorded above, one would expect that some discussion would have taken place on the question with at least some of the comrades in Liverpool. Taaffe had specifically agreed on Liverpool as a fruitful field for this sort of work. To the Liverpool comrades, however, he had merely mentioned that we were going over.

Could this omission in Liverpool have been mere oversight? This would be the comradely interpretation except for another incident. He went to discuss with comrade P who had been mentioned as the closest contact who could be involved in the activity. When we went to see the same comrade a few days later we were very surprised to find him a bit put out by the line taken by Peter Taaffe on just this issue of what to do about anti-union legislation! Having agreed with our proposed activity, Taaffe goes and tries to convince our most influential contact in the area that there is no real need to do anything!

To avoid leading him to a bad opinion of the group, we hadn't sent a copy of the paper with D's article in it: Taaffe defended this article's approach completely! "Loyalty" doesn't come in here: if the comrades responsible for the issue of the paper commit blunders that could do the organisation damage and miseducate the comrades, then there is no obligation to defend it.

Particularly in view of his criticisms of the article, and his endorsement of our proposed activities, any talk of democratic centralism (!) or loyalty here is sheer cretinism. (We had, of course, sold the paper in the broad movement, but felt that for comrade P it would have an adverse effect, considering his much higher level and past experience in the Trotskyist movement.) Following a peculiar conception of "leadership" the comrade was soothing the Manchester comrades with words and in practice actively working against ideas which he didn't agree with in the first place.

He says that he had no authority to initiate things in Liverpool and that though he agreed with us he was later overruled by the comrades in London. The behaviour in Wigan leads to a different conclusion, and is quite illogical unless we assume that the comrade was deliberately putting up an unprincipled front in Manchester. Peter Taaffe in our experience usually allows himself a big leeway in "agreeing" to all sorts of contradictory things. In general the non-Bolshevik concept of leadership as bluff is the prevailing one. This may debase relations - but it is so much easier than a continual fight for clarification...

One other thing clinches all this. If Taaffe was "rapped" on the committee question when he returned to London, as he says - then why did he continue in the most unprincipled way to bluff the Manchester comrades? We received a letter from London, dated January 10th, and the following excerpt can leave no doubt on the question:

"... It is most important that you keep us closely in touch with the developments on the trade union legislation question. How do you intend to go about it in Manchester? As I indicated it would be best to try this first through the trade union branches and then through the Trades Council itself, not only Manchester but Salford and the other towns. I cannot overemphasise the importance of you letting us know immediately what you intend to do, especially if we are to link up nationally." This letter is in a very guarded tone compared with the earlier discussions, but for the moment we have clear proof that either someone was being led up the garden path, or Peter Taaffe is a very confused individual indeed. We want to emphasise that this is a political question and as such it is discussed in Section 4. How political is seen in comrade P: He is more than ever convinced that we are unserious: and this from his talk with Taaffe... And Taaffe in his "confusion" told us they reached agreement...

FATE OF THE CRITICAL LETTER TO MILITANT

Three weeks after sending the letter we had still had no reply from the centre. But we heard indirectly, through comrades in Leeds, that it was not going to be published. (We also had the strange experience of hearing from a

Londoner who has no political contact with the centre that the leading comrades were "displeased" with us!) Over the phone Keith Dickinson confirmed this and explained that the letter "gave the game away," that its tone made it a liability for an entryist paper. However... if we insisted... That evening we wrote to him and suggested that it should be given an entryist "trim" and still included. There was no reply to this. The February edition of Militant came out with a column by the Business Manager which openly identified the aim of the paper as being the presentation of a "revolutionary" alternative to Brown and Wilson! So much for the explanation that a letter couched as from casual readers would give the game away.

The final explanation, as it stands now, is that the letter was "against the perspective of the organisation." Unless there are people who possess infallibility on these questions this should surely have been established by discussion of the letter. If the documents such as "Perspectives of Entryism" have any meaning then the committee proposal was far more in line with the established (?) conceptions of the organisation than was the position of the Militant. As it stands the final explanation really means no more than that the leading comrades didn't agree with the points made in the letter!

There was at least one more critical letter on the December/January issue's line on legislation, but there was no critical letter published in the February edition. Instead, there was a long unsigned "reply to critics"!! This article needs to be considered.

REPLYING TO GAGGED CRITICS

This article was written by comrade Ted Grant. It has not been repudiated as was the first one and is therefore an authoritative statement of the Secretariat's position.

In fact this 'reply' was no more than a rehash of the earlier article. The grudging admissions of all the 'points' and 'approaches' that should have been included in the earlier article are cancelled out by a repetition of the original quietist line - only adding to the confusion.

It is a curious procedure to take the practical guts from a letter sharply criticising in toto the first article, and attempting to put forward an alternative picture, and compound them in a 'new' article which essentially repeats what the earlier one had said - at the same time suppressing the criticism.

The comrade had every right to try and repair the gaping holes in the first article utilising points from the attack on their 'we're just spectators' approach; but they have no right to do so at the same time as they suppress the attack on that same outlook. The question of democratic procedure arises here. In a democratic centralist organisation the leadership has no special right and certainly no privileges. On an issue such as this there should be no public replies unless those being replied to are first allowed to state their case in the same forum. The behaviour of the leading comrades is best compared to a chairman who at a meeting utilises his powers of the 'last word' to completely distort what a critic has said - only in this case no one was allowed to hear the original contribution!

Comrade Grant: "However, readers and supporters should have a due sense of proportion... the headlines indicate the main emphasis..." But the headline was only tagged on. The main points in the original article were 1) that it is doubtful if legislation will be passed, and 2) anyway, it would be irrelevant unless the working class were first given a hiding by the bosses - and of course we are so strong that there is no fear of this. (Legislation as an aid, a first step in a phased, step by step campaign consciously conducted by the bourgeoisie and their agents - perhaps aided by a background of deflation and recession - to defeat and hold back the working class is not even considered: the bourgeoisie, their institutions and their class state - all these things are unimportant to the comrades; and they sharply reject the conclusions from remembering these things - harsh class struggle, imposing certain preparatory tasks on ourselves.)

Add the main points of the article to the headline (No! to legislation) and we get a nice formula for doing nothing. Why bother? The recipe even includes a conscience-salve to guard against heartburn: albeit lazily, platonically, as a matter of form, we still say "No" to legislation! But really there is no danger and the purpose of all this is to allow us to preserve our purity by saying our prayers, our abstract formulae. In practice we can go on as a docile Labour Party group. Organise for a fight? Don't be irresponsible, comrade!

Since then the leading comrades have, after the event, had to accept the fact of legislation. The purpose of the exercise from the point of view of the ruling class is to have a weapon against a section of the rank and file leadership, by the bureaucracy, which is thus drawn even closer to the state. This is now joined by deflation. This is certainly an attack on the class, and there will certainly be some serious struggles in the coming period, but it is still a limited attack and not an all-out assault as certain people who deserve to be called ultra-left imagine.

The SLL see an all-out attack and react by expecting a mass revolutionary upsurge - characteristically. Ted Grant says an all-out attack is not on just yet (the legislation is irrelevant) - and calls on the bureaucrats to oppose legislation. It is one of the characteristics of the leading comrades that there is either an all-out attack or no danger! (Either we can win the masses now or we mustn't attempt to win the militants, etc., etc., etc.) If it is not a full-scale attack at this stage then an overwhelming pressure from the masses to compel a total opposition from the bureaucrats on legislation and in general becomes as likely as a mass revolutionary upsurge!

Which is not saying there will be no pressure, and no opposition from sections of the bureaucracy. The comrades reply: 'whatever you may think, and even if we were to agree, the masses of the trade unionists and Labour Party members won't; we must begin from their consciousness and not out own, issues must be posed in the form of demands on the existing tops, so as to expose them'.

Fair enough, there is certainly a need for such material. But read paragraph 4: "We reach primarily the advanced workers at this stage." Quite true. But to make appeals to leaders in a paper which, by his own admission caters necessarily for advanced workers is to spread confusions and sow illusions in that leadership. Since the paper is also the main ideological tie-up between the national organisation, and the whole of the membership and supporters, this line means a failure to educate. (Please, comrade Taaffe no comic talk about Internal Bulletins, 'the Theoretical Magazine' or any of the other myths.) It also comes very near to having contempt for the advanced element Grant speaks of. Do they really stand at the atrocious level of illusions in the leadership with which they come into conflict regularly, as is implied in the Militant approach?

The Militant, aiming at the broad masses, the lowest average level, misses the militants, and stands to miseducate those it does reach. And by his own admission the masses are as yet unavailable. What this means is that, having failed to organise a revolutionary minority today, we will also fail to reach the masses tomorrow - when, objectively, they will be available.

A curious but more or less permanent element in the 'approaches' of the leadership emerges from the attitude taken on legislation: we seem to be forever confused as to the people are addressing. We talk to advanced workers as if they were backward and not a little right wing, confining ourselves to the most general level of Labour Party, to ABC 'Socialism' and making the broadest possible demands on the Labour establishment. Any really advanced worker who took the Militant seriously would be miseducated and thrown backwards!

Parallel with this is the habit of the leading comrades and their imitators, in Militant and at meetings, of laying heavy stress on the need to avoid 'hysteria' and 'ultra-leftism' (articles on legislation). But who is hysterical? The average Labour Party reader of Militant? Or the few people who can be got together for a meeting on this question? The comrades talk to the broad readership of Militant as if they were all members of the SLL! In this sense there is as much an air of unreality as there is in the propaganda material of that organisation itself. The patient is suffering from sleeping sickness and blurred eyesight. But Doctor Militant is obsessed with a patient who suffers from hysteria and an extra sensitivity to the light. The prescription? Sleeping pills and dark glasses! In more than one way are we bound by the SLL; by rigid, mechanical and above all negative anti-SLLism.

To take this approach is to be militantly anti-militant, to act against the grouping and regrouping of the advanced workers who are the only force that can mobilise the broad mass of the class, the only force that can be steered and educated as revolutionaries now, to be able to serve and stiffen the masses in the inevitable future upsurge. If we don't win a sizeable proportion of the limited number of militants available today we will be unable to keep abreast of any developments of large-scale struggle, unable to intervene and guide and attempt to lead it. Closer to the militants! More distance from the right wing!

No matter how big the pressures the existing leaders will lead to betray. And this betrayal can inevitably will lead to the class being beaten down, unless we have mobilised sufficient forces, well in advance, to show a different road.

To forget all this in favour of delirious talk of irresistible mass upsurge is to part company with all the experience of the class struggle over the past decades: it is to part company with the crystallisation of that experience - Bolshevik-Trotskyism. Slogans like "Leaders must Oppose" and other demands on the existing tops are only correct as weapons in the hands of a serious force, clearly a claimant to be an alternative leadership. Divorced from a practical striving for leadership they become something else again - a cover for the existing tops and platonic ritual for ourselves. Here we have a pattern that we find again and again in discussing the RSL. Ideas and slogans are turned into their opposite by divorcement from practice.

ULTRA-LEFTISM... FROM COMRADE GRANT!

The section of this article which deals with the New York transport strike has a definite flavour of anticipation and relish about it. It suggests quite plainly that not only have we nothing to fear from legislation, but that the cause of the mobilisation of the masses against capitalism is likely to make positive gains from it! Instead of small strikes - big strikes, promises Comrade Grant! This new element contradicts the earlier approach, but let that pass. (Incoherence, a feeling that a lot of ideas have been patched together by at least four writers, pervades the article.) The anti-union legislation will be a positive aid, helping to embitter the workers; it will add to their determination. Having scratched the Labour ward routinist we appear to be finding relics of Third Period Stalinism!

The New York transport workers won - but at what a cost. And the legislation hasn't always been irrelevant: Steel, for example. If the direct intervention of the state had only a beneficial effect on working-class militancy - why would the capitalists be so stupid? Grant doesn't discuss this question. Obviously a paper law wouldn't be enough to hold down the

whole class; but this is not the intention (and, incidentally, laws are a little more substantial than the paper they are written on: the state exists also.) Our letter raised the point that even if the strength of the class meant that any law on its own (!) without an all-out attack on the working class would only be an irritant, can we bank on it always? Are we so confident in capitalism's future? After all we are not Fabians and only Fabians could imagine a situation of ever-upward progress with a permanent seller's market in labour, and sharp assaults from the capitalists completely ruled out. (Or maybe holding to such an "alarmist" position is yet another mark of the Healyite heresy?)

The effect of this section printed in a paper for the broadest layers of the Labour Party is to argue for the position of Transport House [the Labour Party's headquarters office at the time]. Whatever Grant intended and despite the talk of the increased militancy and embitterment that will result from the legislation, in the context the result was aid and comfort for the bureaucratic renegades. No longer is it a matter of failing to raise the alarm, but one of helping the bureaucracy to have a smooth passage in the enterprise of the moment - all the promises of future struggles make no difference, but are a cover for it.

There is an acute temptation for us to use the strongest language here. The sheer sectarian irresponsibility of coming out like this in an entryist paper is a crime against the labour movement. No language concerning this is too strong.

Another, and vital issue that emerges here is the question of the role of the struggle to attain and defend democratic rights for the labour movement. The conclusion from Comrade Grant's article is that this is irrelevant. Read please the "Death Agony of Capitalism!": "The Fourth International does not discard the programme of the old minimal demands to the degree that they have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers..."

"The Bolshevik-Leninist stands in the front-line trenches of all kinds of struggles, even when they involve even the most modest material interests and democratic rights of the workers. He takes active part in the mass trade unions for the purpose of strengthening them and raising their spirit of militancy. He fights uncompromisingly against any attempt to subordinate the unions to the bourgeois state and bind the unions to 'compulsory arbitration' and every other form of police guardianship - not only fascist but also 'democratic'..." (our emphasis).

If democratic rights were still worth defending, if their defence could play a rallying role for the labour movement in that period when such rights were going down like ninepins all over the world and the class itself was being smashed down - how much more favourable for their defence to play a positive role is the present period, when the class is strong and is in a position to notice any paring away of its hard-won rights!

Also Militant stands as the group of British Marxists which lays most stress on the democratic traditions inside the British labour movement. How often have the Healyites been castigated for ignoring these traditions!

Another curious contradiction: leading to the conclusion that when it comes to it the comrades haven't much real faith in those traditions. They were all right to shelter under in the past - we always need some shelter. While we look to tomorrow when it will be possible to do things, to lead, when the masses will move and show us the way. Always tomorrow. The Spaniards have an expression for it: "manana." (Lenin also had something to say about it - see the section on "Perspectives".) Grant even manages to gain comfort and distil more sleeping potion from the impending legislation to take away formally more democratic rights from the working class. Don't struggle now - because big struggles are coming!

Of course there will be increased bitterness in struggle when the legislation goes through. But even here there will be no big gains for us if our attitude retains its present passive, platonic approach.

Against the argument that capitalism isn't always going to be basking in the sun you reply that any attempt to throw the workers out of the factories as the result of a slump, and create conditions where legislation would have a practical effect, would provoke such a revolt as would topple the system. (Anything less would rebound on the heads of the workers.) Drunken optimism! That the workers will be forced to rise is inevitable - victory is not inevitable. The reaction of the British workers to a slump would almost certainly be like that of the American workers of the 1930s, rather than the British workers of the same period. The class is not beaten down now as it was when the Great Slump pushed it down even further: its condition now is one of self-confidence. Yes. But to imagine that this means that the bourgeoisie are helpless and that such things as legislation couldn't serve as a kick-off to a serious attack on the class is an approach to the light minded optimism of one who believes in Fabian gradualism (or the British Road)! The bourgeoisie too are very strong, despite their decline in comparison with their own past. To interpret our own talk of their decline as absolute decline, and in relation to the working class, is wrong.

Overall decline of imperial ruling classes in the twentieth century hasn't meant kid gloves for the struggle with their own proletariat - but it has meant the most savage barbarism by the bourgeois and petty bourgeois vermin working off their defeat in the struggles with other and more virile capitalisms on their 'own' proletariat - Germany for example. In the 1920s Trotsky (Where is Britain Going?) expected a similar display from the British rulers, a re-importation of the savage violence which has been exported from British politics to the Empire for a hundred years. As with a number of

other things Trotsky's timing may have been a little bit out - but I suggest that only a brave man or one with no respect for the world experience of Marxism, would discount his expectations... as far as the future goes.

Not the least of the bourgeoisie's strengths is the state of the existing organisations; the leaderships open agents of the bourgeoisie, the ideological confusion, the lack of experience in serious struggle, the state of the so-called Marxist groups, including the Communist Party and the SLL etc. The RSL leadership with its cloudy pontifications won't do much to change this situation. Actually it contributes to it. Their confidence is false - it undermines itself: it actively militates against the one thing that is vital for a positive outcome - conscious Marxist activity and leadership, including practical leadership at this stage to accumulate forces, to lead the workers against the capitalists and their labour lieutenants when the big battles come.

Comrade Grant's false optimism contrasts sharply with Lenin's idea, as presented by Trotsky in "Lenin" (c. 1925) on the question of an optimistic or a pessimistic outlook. We must be fully prepared, to the best of human ability, for the worst eventuality. If the best then transpires well and good - ultra-optimism as an excuse or justification of passivity is not the revolutionary Marxist approach: it is the gambler's approach!

Finally, it must be pointed out that Ted Grant obviously thinks our differences were with estimations. He brings in the question of the non-Socialist Quill to 'argue' that the British labour movement would show just as much fight and more. Nobody disagrees. We disagreed with the basic idea of the approach of the Militant which sees our role as mere estimators. We think that all this confusion is not accidental or literary, that it is a deeper one of thought. There is a vital need for clarification. The leading comrades should be made to measure their conceptions against the established ideas of Leninism-Trotskyism.

(There is one more point that needs to be made: Grant talks about the socialist consciousness of the British labour movement. Here perhaps we have a chance to see the roots of the differences. This point is for convenience discussed in Section 2.)

Still having no reply or communication from London we went down on the weekend February 13/14th. Over the weekend there was one discussion with Peter Taaffe and Keith Dickinson (Saturday) and one with four members of the Secretariat on Sunday. These can be dealt with under two heads:

On the question of comradely behaviour

The behaviour of Peter Taaffe on both these occasions needs to be brought out clearly. The matter of a healthy internal life is involved here, and of the correct atmosphere in which discussion of differences should occur. Whereas previously this comrade had behaved with disloyalty, now there was violent abuse, political character-assassination, and at one point sheer personal abuse. On the Saturday, immediately the "discussion" started, Taaffe lost control of himself and started shouting at the top of his voice. The cause of this appeared to be outrage at the sharply expressed disagreements and our anger at his earlier behaviour. The whole "discussion" took place at this loud pitch and was often incoherent.

There was another disagreeable element in the Saturday discussion - the most ludicrous attempt to maintain that the comrades had never done any work for the organisation, and had no rights to argue because of never having made a contribution, etc. Previously Taaffe had been overlavish, even for someone for whom this sort of thing is very cheap currency indeed, in praising the work of the two comrades involved. As witness the November Extended National Committee. In a generally glowing report two people were singled out for special mention - Rachel Lever and Sean Matgamna! Now we had never done any work: disagreement with the Secretariat undid our whole period of activity in the movement! Comrade Taaffe's penchant for easy praise is best regarded as a social-democratic self-indulgence on his part. The remarkable thing here is the vicious reaction to any hint at political disagreement and/or criticism of his earlier behaviour. Rachel Lever had, when Taaffe last told the story in November, laid the groundwork for the developing Newcastle branch, sown the seeds which are now ripening. This besides such things as being elected delegate to the Young Socialists conference after only two weeks in a new town. Now her time in Newcastle had been wasted, she had totally failed to achieve anything, etc. Whether one agrees with the original version or not, this, spat out in the most violent and hostile manner, which might have been modelled on another "General Secretary," shows that for Taaffe everything depends on agreement with the leadership.

With Sean Matgamna the rewriting of "history" (as told publicly by Peter Taaffe) took a form no less exaggerated. Barrel-scraping indeed when it was necessary to dig up an incident of an Independent Labour Party member not being notified that a meeting to which he had earlier been invited had been postponed! This would only have taken place early last summer, and Taaffe had never mentioned it before - i.e. it was not important from the point of view of efficiency, as far as he was concerned, but it was useful as a stone to throw back.

Comrade Taaffe has every right to raise organisational questions provided that this is done seriously and loyally. Indeed, one of the faults of the RSL is that this is not done seriously enough. But he has no right to suddenly do a violent about-

face, in an absolutely exaggerated fashion, on organisational questions just because political differences have developed.

On Sunday Taaffe restraining himself for a short time, again lost control and started shouting, and towards the end this behaviour completely disrupted the Secretariat meeting. At one stage he resorted to sheer personal abuse, based on the physical appearance of Sean Matgamna. The other members of the Secretariat attempted to defend him on the grounds that subjectivity is natural. Fair enough. But there is a generally accepted subjective (non-verbal) reaction to personal abuse, and we doubt very much whether the comrades would have extended their indulgence to Sean Matgamna had he resorted to it.

The point of chronicling this is that this kind of thing injects poison into the atmosphere and makes discussion difficult. If Trotsky was right in comparing internal freedom of discussion with oxygen, seeing it as a vital condition of health, then we must oppose such behaviour as harmful to the movement. It should be possible to raise even sharp disagreements in the organisation without fear of all sorts of petty organisational details being revived, without the need to face violent abuse from the officers of the group. Even if an amount of heat is normal (and unobjectionable) there must be no abuse, political and certainly not personal.

Referring back to the "mysterious" aspects of Peter Taaffe's visit to the North West at the New Year, it is necessary to make the demand for comradely loyalty - comrades must say where they really stand on issues, no two-faced behaviour, and no conning. Organisational co-operation and trust demand this.

THE SECRETARIAT STANDS FIRM

On the Saturday Taaffe repeated that the legislation wasn't a serious threat, at this stage. The letter contradicted the line of the organisation etc.

On the Sunday comrades Ellis Hillman, Arthur Deane, Keith Dickinson and Peter Taaffe were present. The positions that emerged from this meeting have to some extent been put earlier. The comrades accepted fully the second article, denied any tinge of ultra-leftism, contradictions of the Transitional Programme etc. Again the comrades seemed incapable of differentiating any criticism of the leadership's line from the full SLL position. Limited suggestions and criticisms from us were immediately developed to a caricature, and this was obviously genuine on the part of the comrades.

As a whole the comrades endorsed the positions outlined in the article; attempts by Sean Matgamna to raise certain basic questions of Leninism (discussed later on) were dismissed with the unelaborated assertion that Lenin changed his position on organisation etc. in the 1905 period. This seems to be a stock answer of both Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe to any talk of the need to build up a Bolshevik party - that we, the communists, must have a certain necessary distance from the mass of the class as it is at present etc. We will come back to this later, and we think that both the questions and the leading comrades' unelaborated manner of dealing with them are of the utmost importance. In addition, comrade Arthur Deane accused Sean Matgamna of proposing to "teach the working class to suck eggs," but denied that this left the door open to ideas of a spontaneous development of the working class towards Marxist consciousness. In general, all the characteristics outlined above emerged here...

Comrade Peter Taaffe tried to maintain that he had only agreed in Manchester to an attempt to get a resolution in favour of an Action Committee through the Trades Council. He stoutly maintained this position, thus denying any sharp practices. The letter quoted proves the opposite. The questioning on how we are going to set about it, the need for a national link up, the talk of extending into other towns (where there are no contacts - except Wigan) is nonsense unless what he had in mind was the Action Committee to which he had agreed.

From our point of view to agree to the confinement to the Trades Council would have been equally stupid - the equivalent of tying our hands behind our backs: we would never have accepted that. As usual, the "refuge" in itself is a political blunder - the position taken up was one of complete Trades Council fetishism. And the other Secretariat members made no objection. (On the Manchester/Salford Trades Council... they were so militant this year that they called off the May Day march at the Labour Party's request - substituting a meeting of careerists explaining all about the Incomes Policy!)

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing outline of events and opinions is intended as a portrait of the organisation as we have found it to exist. The rest of the document will deal with this politically; it will attempt to analyse the foregoing in the light of the basic ideas of Leninism-Trotskyism.

However, on the above it remains to round off by a frank discussion of the experience of the Manchester comrades in attempting to work on the trade union question. The experience above has raised far deeper issues, and calls for a discussion of the basic practice of the group - but to an extent an account must be given of our activities.

Acting as a small group, separate from the organisation, and at one stage openly opposed by it, we had a limited success in regrouping a number of militants around the need to do something, to attempt a limited fight inside the broad movement to rouse it on this issue. These people are integrated in the broad movement, most of them quite experienced in the revolutionary movement. On the basis of the quietistic approach of the leadership they are not available to the group. We think they can't be blamed on this score. Nonetheless they could form a serious nucleus of an RSL branch in this area, and the position of Wigan between Liverpool and Manchester could have laid the basis for a real expansion. However, people like comrade P of Wigan would need to be convinced we were a serious communist organisation.

As far as influence goes we circulated a leaflet to most of the organisations in the area. The response from the broad organisations was certainly limited, but we managed to make an impression as a tendency on the "centrists" who were regrouping at the time and pulling large meetings of 60/70. They helped circulate our leaflet, which incidentally was produced by the local office of the Plumbers' Trade Union and one of the people involved could possibly be developed politically.

There must be no attempt to bluff on our part. The accomplishments are limited. The point that needs to be remembered is that a great deal more could have been done had this effort originated with a national paper, had we had the aid of that paper, of speakers from the national organisation, had the biggest local group in the area which certainly could have established a broad influential minority committee given the aid it was capable of in practice - though unfortunately not politically. The gains in Manchester would have been substantial and above all big gains could have been made nationally, including Liverpool. In practice we were reduced entirely to our own resources in this effort and admittedly these are limited. By refusing to accept criticism or counter-proposals to their line the leading comrades have allowed the Militant to appear as more complacent than Tribune.

We feel however that the most important immediate task is to get the position inside the RSL clarified. The revolutionary organisation is decisive in any enterprise such as this. Comrade Ted Grant is often heard to say that an organisation of 1,000 people is qualitatively different from one of 100; we think it is even more arguable that an organisation of 100 is qualitatively different from the efforts of two or three individuals. If the organisation was decisive on the question of legislation - it will also be decisive in the future. It is important to begin a discussion on our conception of our own role now that capitalism's offensive against the class has clearly developed: here too the organisation will be vital. There must be no repetition of the above experience.

The beginnings of opposition in the unions now show clearly yet again, the duality, the twin-like symmetry between the RSL and the SLL. The SLL is way out on a limb 50 miles ahead of developments; the RSL is still in its armchair on the Labour Party veranda.

Had the Militant taken a moderate and responsible position on this issue at the beginning of the year, had we begun limited preparations, as proposed in the letter to Militant, then we might now be in a position of authority and even of limited practical leadership on this question. As it is, whatever opposition develops, we will still be tailing after events without even attempting to decisively influence them - completely at the mercy of the unstable bureaucrats who will be driven into a limited opposition. As it is, what will the "advanced workers" think of those who preached quietism on an issue which has now begun to generate opposition (though this should still not be exaggerated.)

The comrades took the line that because there was no all-out attack then there was no role in practical, preparatory leadership for us. We could have begun to prepare; we should have begun to prepare. We were prevented by the confusion, passivity of the leadership. And this in turn was compounded of the characteristic mixture of obstinacy and clique mutual defence with which they react to any disagreements, to anyone who dares to differ. No alternative view was allowed; but the Secretariat was wrong and now the organisation finds itself that it was no less wrong than the SLL - only it was "ultra" in the other direction...

THE SEA STRIKE AND THE MILITANT

"EPHEMERAL?"

"The time is not yet," said the Militant and leading comrades at the beginning of the year, when challenged about their quietistic role on the proposed legislation against the unions. "Wait, be still, the big struggles have yet to come," said Ted Grant in February.

Ted Grant loves to contemplate big struggles. That is - future struggles; but then, perhaps, all important struggles are in the future. In the aftermath of the sea strike, one of the biggest since the war, we are left assuming that still all the big struggles are to come, since it didn't succeed in getting official recognition from this leadership. It was, we were told by Peter Taaffe in Liverpool, merely ephemeral. In general we were given the verdict "only an economic strike"! This is borne out by Militant. Two articles made the "concrete" case for the seamen, usefully, but not better than did the Daily Mail before the strike began, or the National Union of Seamen's official leaflets. Any intimation that this might be more than a bread and butter issue was omitted.

How does this situation arise, and what is the real position, what are our real tasks and responsibilities?

The demands of the seamen were not exorbitant in relation to the standards of the rest of the class. The strike arose because of the Incomes Policy conditions laid down by the leading centres of British capitalism and implemented by the Labour government, and it was this which steeled the shipowners to resist. The state stepped in decisively, backing the employers and declaring the strike to be against itself. The spokesmen of capitalism are quite clear that this is a test case for the Incomes Policy. Whether the workers themselves are conscious of it or not, this objectively was a major struggle against the Incomes Policy and the state.

In this situation the obvious task was to make clear the political implications and nature of the strike. There was also an excellent chance to raise the question of the nature of the state; after all Wilson had done precisely this - from the bourgeois standpoint.

We must recognise the seamen's struggle as of vital importance for the whole of the class; at the time it was the front line of the struggle against the Incomes Policy, which Militant had predicted to come in "bigger struggles later." The seamen were the vanguard and our task was to aid them in the actual concrete struggle, seeing it clearly as the sort of ferment which must form the basis for the future realisation of the ultimate programme, and for the development and tempering of a serious revolutionary force. Militant should have taken up this task of aiding the struggle by drawing the lessons for the broad movement. In the event of eruptions of this sort in the future these lessons will be very relevant.

1. Militant should have shown the connection with and relation to the Incomes Policy and the legislation, linking it up with the immediate practical significance of the fight.
2. Right from the start Militant should have called for solidarity action particularly from the dockers. The link-up is obvious and in one of the most militant seaports we have a group that could have been strengthened had the Militant been a serious weapon. Actually we have groups or individuals in every major seaport: Bristol, Hull, Manchester, London, Tyneside, Southampton, Glasgow etc.

We think useful contact could have been established with most of the major National Union of Seamen branches.

Actually, this was a very concrete case where our talk of the smallness of our forces made us impotent. With a concerted, centralised effort, leaflets and directives coming from the centre, and the paper as a weapon instead of a "visiting card," we could have made an intervention compared with which any work done in the Labour Party during that period would have paled into insignificance. The proportion of seamen we could have reached was vastly greater than the handful of Labour Party membership we can even contact. And we need hardly say that workers in struggle are somewhat more receptive than a ward meeting worrying over sub collections or the next "bring and buy sale." This isn't a syndicalist or light-minded argument against entry; but that we be flexible enough to sally forth into territory outside our usual Labour Party and trade union routine in response to living events.

Here as everywhere else what is glaringly lacking is a sense of their own responsibility by the comrades at the centre; concerted activity by the organisation depends necessarily on the centre - but the comrades always find someone else to blame, they are forever telling us that the initiative is the responsibility of others (even in print: see the shameless reference in the recent Internal Bulletin). The Liverpool branch were too tied to the Labour Party routine even to visit the docks! True, they were rebuked by Peter Taaffe - but on the same occasion he called the struggle "ephemeral," the perfect excuse for doing nothing.

3. At least Militant should have warned about National Union of Seamen's conduct of the strike.

It was clear from the beginning - at least in time for the June issue - that they were aiming to bleed out some of the militancy of the rank and file, settling down to a long war of attrition. Instead of trying to hit the bosses as hard as possible at the beginning and calling for solidarity, they accepted a staggered strike in deference to laws that Wilson himself admitted were unjustifiable, so that at the very end less than half the seamen were out, and some owners were able to divert ships, and avoid the strike altogether in many cases. Also the Communist Party gave us a good chance to expose it (and by implication the lurid witch-hunting of Wilson). For example the earlier speeches by Dash [Communist Party dockers' leader] about "being responsible."

CLASSIC PROCEDURE

This was the classic procedure whose gala performance was the General Strike, and it was here rehearsed publicly in a national strike which promises to be the first of a series of such struggles. Concrete suggestions and demands should have been raised that would show the way forward and would by implication criticise the National Union of Seamen's conduct of the strike. Also if our role really is to attempt to lead then these lessons should have been taken up and generalised for the broad movement.

These are all essentials for our *raison d'être*. If we avoid them and stick to the concrete case under a heading calling for "nationalisation," we might as well be centrists, Stalinists or Tribunites or any of the other varieties which act as brakes and help the established order - but we won't be Bolsheviks.

ECONOMISM?

But what happened when we raised the question? The articles, we were told, had been written by an ex-seaman, who understood "the way they felt," and the paper had sold well to the seamen.

Fine. So we reflect the workers' feelings. What about giving help, making suggestions which would raise understanding and implicitly warn of the need to watch for the leadership's conduct of the strike? "You have your priorities wrong," we were told by Peter Taaffe. The correct recipe apparently is first to attack the capitalists, then bring in concrete suggestions, and possibly after that a word about the leaderships... otherwise you alienate... the workers. Very well - but what happened to the last two ingredients of the recipe? When pressed to disclose their whereabouts, Peter Taaffe said they had been omitted - it was merely a mistake - but really it didn't matter since every seaman knew all about Hogarth and Co. [the union leadership]. If this is so, why the elaborate recipe and the cautions against antagonising the workers? Or is this being too logical? They do know now - after the event; and Militant can't claim to have helped!

If this isn't 'economism' of the worst sort, what is it? Here, in our practice, we have the fruits of the attitude expressed in Arthur Deane's injunction that one can't "teach the workers to suck eggs" - we find ourselves tailing along behind the lowest common level of the spontaneous movement.

ALL-OR-NOTHING AGAIN

Along with over-confidence in the spontaneous movement we get wrong expectation in relation to the trade union leaders. According to the February Militant the struggles would come after the legislation (if this came, which was doubtful) and be sharp enough to force the trade union leaders to 'the left'. The old all-or-nothing conception. The first big struggle came before the legislation, and with the connivance of the trade union bureaucrats and the TUC it is obviously going to be more than an aid to the introduction of Brown's Bill. The union bureaucrats were tipped by Ted Grant to oppose the law if the Bill did get through, and waiting for this to happen justified a further period of passivity and routine, and failure to prepare on our part. The outstanding feature of this is the slavish waiting on the bureaucracy, in the expectation of such a sharp crisis that they would be forced into positions of self-defence.

But the different degrees of crisis are taken into account as little by our comrades as by the SLL. What we are faced with is a limited attack on the class. A vital element in this design is the strengthening of the bureaucracy against the rank and file militants. In this struggle the TUC at first held its hand against the employers and the state and then came actively to their aid: a far cry from making the strike more effective with solidarity action.

Also the comrades have ignored the build-up in propaganda, both in conference speeches and in the press. This has been phased so that as the pill becomes more and more bitter, the one that went before becomes quite 'sweet'. Hence those in the movement who began by opposing the whole idea of the Incomes Policy have gradually come to accept more and more state intervention. From opposing it outright at first, they then opted for voluntary as against statutory 'discipline', when this was first raised. Now we have Frank Cousins, the workers' champion, accepting Part 1 of the Bill which places the Prices and Incomes Board on a statutory basis, together with the principle of reference of claims to the Board, and only rejects the penalty section. Such things as the accepted rights in a given society connects up with a climate of opinion in that society.

Here what is important is what the class regards as its rights and therefore will fight to defend. The line at which the unions oppose state intervention has moved further and further to include ever more state control. But Ted Grant ignores this. His refuge as before is that for this to have practical meaning would require a serious defeat of the class. This is true - though it would also be an aid in inflicting that defeat. But it would probably also need a serious crisis before the workers are forced into a serious fight for their standards. Meanwhile the powers and rights of the state increase - and these would not be unimportant in a big struggle. Meanwhile we refuse to fight on limited issues and do what can be done.

Here we must also examine what happens when the bureaucracy do move under pressure. The National Union of Seamen is a case of what rank and file pressure can achieve: the changes since Sir Thomas Yates are a product of this, and when we consider the events of 1960 these are almost startling. Yes. But the National Union of Seamen also shows the limits of such pressure.

A dominant element in this strike was a conscious tactic designed to remove some of this pressure by a dampening, demoralising course of action for the rank and file; remember that other very big response to rank and file pressure, the General Strike. We can always expect this result of pressure - that the judas-goats will respond to mass pressure in such a way as to remove it by aiding in their supporters' defeat.

NATIONALISATION VERSUS THE CLASS STRUGGLE?

Does the call for nationalisation by the bourgeois state replace the concrete class struggle (recently designated "ephemeral" by Peter Taaffe)? Or do we clearly understand and publicly state that socialist nationalisation must come through the class struggle? Do we understand that the future mass centrist current, the waiting for which is the excuse for ignoring non-Labour Party struggles, will be generated by the general class struggles, some of which are now taking place? If this is so, that there are limited and partial struggles leading up to the great mass movement of the future - if this is so it means that we must participate in the formation of the currents (for which the comrades merely wait) by intervening and aiding the living struggles, achieving the vital growth and development of our organisation in the process.

But no. While insisting that the Labour Party is a workers' party (because of the trade unions) we draw a firm demarcation between the ward canvassing machines and the picket line; the former constitute the 'advanced element', the latter are merely the "ephemeral", economic, day to day, bread and butter issues. The seamen's strike shows Militant treating the basic economic struggle as something to observe, digest, and then regurgitate, suitably transformed, as propaganda aimed at the Labour Party wards. Obviously our individual comrades are members of their unions etcetera... but as an organisation this is irrelevant to us.

Here as so often we would do well to re-read the Transitional Programme: "The socialist programme of expropriation, i.e. of political overthrow of the bourgeoisie and liquidation of its economic domination, should in no case during the present transitional period hinder us from advancing, when occasion warrants, the demand for the expropriation of several key branches of industry vital for national existence or of the most parasitic group of the bourgeoisie."

The difference between these demands and the muddle-headed reformist slogan of 'nationalisation' lies in the following: 1) we reject indemnification; 2) we warn the masses against demagogues of the People's Front who, giving lip-service to nationalisation, remain in reality agents of capital; 3) we call upon the masses to rely only upon their own revolutionary strength; 4) we link up the question of expropriation with that of seizure of power by the workers and farmers."

Obviously we can and must raise the question of nationalisation - but not as abstract, diluted, Fabian-SPGB-type propaganda, counterposed to the organic class struggle [The Socialist Party of Great Britain is a group which confines activity to making propaganda for socialism as a complete new order of society and regards trade union struggles as irrelevant to socialism]. As Marxists we recognise that 'politics is dominant' here - but this does not mean the artificial splitting up of the different fronts of the struggle, counterposing a part of the final solution to the struggle in its momentarily most active front. This is what Militant did during the struggle. Nor should we raise demands for nationalisation which completely ignore the question of the state. The case in point gave an absolutely clear chance to raise this and discuss its nature.

"LESSONS" ... FROM TAIL-ENDING TEACHERS

After two issues of the paper during the strike treating it merely on its merits as an 'economic' dispute, came July/August issue with an article "Lessons of the Seamen's Strike."

It is not without interest that meanwhile the line of Militant had been raised very sharply inside the organisation. Some of the comrades have witnessed the arguments in which the National Committee and Editorial Board defended the paper - i.e. each other - with a staggering variety of arguments, needless to say contradictory, since they tried to cover all fronts.

Arthur Deane: "We're too small to affect the outcome of the strike, so what does it matter?" (All or nothing again.)

RS: "Militant is only a visiting-card to the workers, it's what you say to them that matters." (A blanket excuse for every gaping hole in the paper, not to mention the crippling confinement of horizons to a conversation here and there.)

Peter Taaffe: "The seamen know all about Hogarth, he's exposing himself without our help." (One begins to ask such metaphysical questions as - why are we here at all?)

AW: "It was written by an ex-seaman, and it sold well." (No comment, except that all sort of faulty goods sell well.)

Peter Taaffe: "The workers are too strong for a sell-out and we can regard 44 hours as a victory." (No wonder he thinks they know all about Hogarth!)

Considering this last statement it was a relief that Militant did not, as feared, follow Tribune in declaring the strike a victory: so possibly some purpose was served by taking up sharply with the centre the question of its responsibilities.

"Lessons Of The Seamen's Strike" is irrelevant to the discussion of the first articles. The idea implied in the whole performance - that we merely reflect the most shallow and obvious aspects of this sort of struggle while it is going on, using it as raw material for our ward-Labour Party propaganda (linking up with the class!), and then when it's all over conduct an incomplete post-mortem - this idea is itself a complete confirmation of the charge of SPGBism, against which the centre hoped to protect itself by the third article. Politics has its own logic...

These 'lessons' are of the sort which begin: this should have been done - that might also have been done - oh, if only the following had been attempted, etc. In this manner some points are raised, which will be useful in the circles reached by Militant.

To say, in part and after the event, what should have been done in the strike, cannot for us, as Bolsheviks, obscure the real questions, the real lessons - What should Militant have done; or rather, since Militant is only an expression of it, what should the RSL have done?

Further: the chronicle of 'lessons' begs one big question, not of course taken up. What did Militant do to suggest these things, to sponsor them, to agitate for them and prompt and organise our supporters to do likewise? The answer, as we know, is... nothing. From the point of view of our tasks as a Bolshevik organisation every one of those 'lessons' stands as an indictment of the leadership.

This third article is an exercise in literary propaganda; it has nothing to do with the actual struggle. The attempt in the last column to change tenses by saying: "as we go to press the strike has ended", is one more example of the methods of the comrades at the Centre - class responsibility gives place to providing themselves with literary alibis. For if anyone doubts that the article was written under pressure, they need only read it, noting the evidence from the first sentence on.

Even so, there is a lot to be desired. The role of the Communist Party is hinted at in the vaguest manner, using a quotation which only says the workers were 'even more militant' than Norris. It is not our task to measure apparent militancy, but to show their actual role - particularly since the Communist Party is going to reap the fruits of the membership's bitterness in the next year, inside the union. Two jobs in one could have been accomplished here - to spell out the role of the Stalinists would have been the best way to show up the ludicrous nonsense of Wilson, and show how they do a job for each other, consciously or not. [Prime Minister Harold Wilson denounced the strike as being organised by Communist Party members for political motives - which it was not].

Incidentally, the constant repetition of the phrase "modest demands" and all the defensiveness this implies, shows how far we've gone to accommodation to the Labour Party environment. Surely this assumes a level of consciousness far below the average?

The 'literary' conception of our role which we refer to here is taken up concretely in Section 4. Here we want to make it clear that we are not attacking the comrade who wrote the articles on the sea-strike. Comrades with direct experience on such questions are invaluable. The point is that we are a political organisation and it should be the function of the leading centre of the organisation to integrate this sort of experience with the correct political appreciation of the struggle.

The responsibility is theirs: the sort of suggestions and guidance, for their own self-defence, that they obviously gave in the third article, should have gone into the first two - in the interests of the self-defence of our class.

SECTION 2

THE PROLETARIAT, ITS CLASS PARTY, AND THE STATE

"... The year 1919... The entire structure of European imperialism tottered under the blows of the greatest mass struggles of the proletariat in history and when we daily expected the news of the proclamation of the soviet Republic in Germany, France, England, in Italy. The word 'soviets' became terrifically popular. Everywhere these soviets were being organised. The bourgeoisie was at its wits end. The year 1919 was the most critical year in the history of the European bourgeoisie... what were the premises for the proletarian revolution? The productive forces were fully mature, so were the class relations; the objective social role of the proletariat rendered the latter fully possible of conquering power and providing the necessary leadership. What was lacking? Lacking was the political premise; i.e. cognisance of the situation by the proletariat. Lacking was an organisation at the head of the proletariat, capable of utilising the situation for nothing else but the direct organisational and technical preparation of an uprising, of the overturn, the seizure of power and so forth - this is what was lacking."

(Leon Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol II p193)

"Events have proved that without a party capable of directing the proletarian revolution, the revolution itself is rendered impossible. The proletariat cannot seize power by a spontaneous uprising. Even in highly industrialised and highly cultured Germany the spontaneous uprising of the workers in November 1918 only succeeded in transferring power to the hands of the bourgeoisie. One propertied class is able to seize the power that has been wrested from another propertied class because it is able to base itself upon its riches, its cultural level, and its innumerable connections with the old state apparatus. But there is nothing else that can serve the proletariat as a substitute for its own party."

(Leon Trotsky, Lessons of October)

THE CLASS PARTY OF THE PROLETARIAT

In the succession of class societies the change-over from one system to another has taken a number of different forms. European feudalism arose as a synthesis between the Germanic tribes and the decaying Roman Empire, which had always had an element (the Coloni) inside the slave-operated latifundia comparable to feudalism.

The bourgeoisie on the other hand grew up within the womb of feudalism, as part of a developing division of labour inside that society. It was subordinated to the overall rule of society by the feudalists and the Absolute Monarchies, but never as the main exploited class, the source of the surplus produce. In itself an auxiliary participant in that exploitation, a secondary appropriator of the sweat of the peasants. It developed organically, slowly ripening within feudalism's womb, only attacking the feudalists to eliminate all rivalry with and restrictions on itself.

This is true even in the Great French Revolution, where the development of their struggle for power went way beyond the aims of the bourgeoisie proper and fell into the hands of super radicals, leaders of that group, the sans-culottes, standing nearest to the modern proletariat, i.e. the Jacobins. The fact that the bourgeoisie developed their own means of production and their own forms under the old system meant that they had leisure etc. to generate their own class culture, and the possibility of sufficient education, independent of their feudal rival, for the ripening of the objective conditions for their assumption of full power to be adequately reflected in their collective consciousness (though not fully rationally or consciously and often clothed in mystical garb).

Marx wrote that he who possesses surplus produce possesses the key to the Church, the Arts and the Sciences, etc. Before the bourgeoisie's revolution triumphed they didn't have the only key - but they certainly had a key. The bourgeoisie as a whole already within feudalism the possessors of the new means of production, could benefit from a 'political' revolution which was not directly their own doing, not directly in their immediate control, such as the French or even the English.

FOR THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION - POLITICS DOMINATES!

With the proletariat it is altogether different. It remains a slave class right up to the point of taking power. The economic ripening that creates the necessary pre-conditions for its assumption of power, the growing socialisation of anarchic, individualistic capitalistic production are still in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The role of the proletariat during this process is that of wage slaves, the basic exploited class.

(The degenerated and deformed workers' states are a special case, but, without going into details, all revolutionary Marxists agree that the process there will only be completed when the masses of the proletariat take direct power - i.e. make a political revolution, but one with very big 'social' effects. It is this which separated the revolutionary Marxists of all the different shades from the Stalinists and all their Deutscherite fellow-travellers.) [Isaac Deutscher, author of a fine biography of Trotsky, was very influential among "orthodox" neo-Trotskyists in the 1950s and '60s. In 1966 we subscribed to the "orthodox" view that the Stalinist states were "degenerated and deformed workers' states", while seeking to give it a sharp anti-Stalinist interpretation. For more on Deutscher and our own later conclusion that "Deutscherism" was built into the logic of the "orthodoxy", see 'The Fate of the Russian Revolution: lost texts of critical Marxism vol. 1']

The super-exploitation of the colonial workers and peasants notwithstanding, even if that exploitation temporarily means an easing of the pressure on the West European and US proletariat, this remains true. For this reason Lenin said that for the proletarian revolution politics dominates. i.e. politics is the means for economic emancipation, for the proletariat's seizure of the means of the production, which have grown to gigantic size, bloated with its own sweat and blood, and an end made of class society.

CLASS CULTURES

As the last enslaved class and the first ruling class having no exploited class under it, and standing at the beginning of the transition to classless society, the development of the proletariat presents formerly unknown problems. Likewise in the question of consciousness. Because they were semi-conscious, if that, embodiments of a new class society's organic development the bourgeoisie did not need to be clearly, rationally conscious of what they were doing. The English bourgeoisie thought they served the word of God, and the French abstract Reason, Liberty, Democracy, Fraternity - no matter! They still blundered their way empirically towards a society which expressed their needs, of which they were instinctively conscious.

The proletariat has no key to the arts, culture and sciences, and the Churches are bought and paid-for lackeys of the ruling class. This lack is more serious for the last class to establish its own rule (if the question can be posed like that), than it would have been for the bourgeoisie. For us consciousness is vital, a conscious participation of the masses of the proletariat based on a clear understanding of what is. No mystification, no blundering for the class that represents the

first step of humanity out of class society, that corridor that divides its existence as part of the animal kingdom from its future existence as a truly human organism, more and more in control of its environment.

But not only that. The proletariat in capitalist society, without possibility of developing an independent culture, is not a blank page: inevitably it becomes pervaded with the ideas of the ruling class. Ideological chains buttress and make firm the economic chains that hold them down. This is even more true in times of relative social peace.

The growth and concentration of the means of production create the prerequisite for working-class power and also cement and organise the proletariat in gigantic concentrations, in a way impossible for example for peasants. The possibility thus exists for a transition to a higher stage, of the workers taking power. And the tidal movements, the crises inevitable because of the contradictions of capitalism, time after time in different countries propel the workers into the streets in a struggle for power, more or less consciously conducted. This struggle too flows inevitably, organically, from the nature of capitalism.

But it does not result in victory, the transition to a higher stage of society. Victory is not inevitable. As early as the Communist Manifesto the issue is stated clearly. The inevitable class struggle has two possible outcomes - transition to a higher stage as a result of the victory of the progressive class, or regression by way of anarchy and the mutual ruination of the contending classes. Nazi Germany and the present potential of world destruction can leave no doubt about this.

THE PROLETARIAN IDEOLOGY - MARXISM

The battle for a favourable outcome from the current class struggle between bourgeois and proletarians thus becomes a question of a conscious fight. Bourgeois society is at the end of the dark tunnel of class society and represents a very high level of control and understanding of his environment by man. Thus man can begin to understand the laws of that environment - society - created by all his own past history. Certain layers within bourgeois society become aware of the issues, of the true nature of the modern class struggle that has dominated Europe and the world since the days that Marx and Engels wrote of the haunting spectre of communism.

Paradoxically, it is not the proletariat, the subject of future history, that first becomes conscious of the situation - nor even a section of that class. It is sections of the bourgeois intelligentsia who become aware of the real nature of the molecular processes of society in general and modern society in particular.

It could hardly be otherwise. Understanding of the objective laws of nature including society could only be possible for those with full access to science, the highest of modern science, inevitably bourgeois science: the custodian and systematiser (creator if we remember that they merely theorise from the gigantic practice of society) of that science is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia. This is a result of the separation of mental and manual labour in all class society. The "mingling" of Marxist science and the proletariat is the necessary beginning of the first step towards the reintegration of mental and manual labour - the end of alienation.

By its nature capitalist society prevents an objective view by the majority of the intelligentsia of their own doomed society. But the development of bourgeois science, particularly up to the mid-decades of the 19th century, while the bourgeoisie was still progressive and even their social science (so open to ideological distortion) had a portrayal of objective reality as its base, creates the possibility of a new synthesis which embodies the newly-discovered laws of social evolution: the necessary understanding to enable the proletariat to rise above that crude religious, dreamers' socialism concocted out of half-remembered elements from its past and hostility to the existing system, and to imbue the social struggles imposed on the proletariat by the movements of society with purpose and comprehension.

Thus Marxism emerges out of a synthesis of the best in bourgeois thought (economics, philosophy, history) and is immediately denounced by the bourgeoisie, who shy away in terror and immediately castrate that science bred by itself which had produced a revolutionary ideology for the revolutionary class (resulting in modern bourgeois economics, philosophy, history). Therefore by a peculiar dialectic the proletariat and its organic movement arises separately from scientific socialism. The "mingling" of the two takes many forms, not all of them conducive to the most positive outcome. The openness of the proletariat to the influence of the science generalised in part from its experiences and expressing its interests is dependent on the ebbs and flows of society, and Marxism itself comes under immediate attack, open and subtle (attempts to tone it down, adulterate it with a wide variety of bourgeois trash, etc.)

A MINORITY PARTY

The proletariat moreover is not a homogeneous class and even in the most favourable conditions only a limited section can become fully conscious. The Communist Manifesto, while pointing out that the communists had no interests apart from the proletariat, also added: "The communists are, practically, the most progressive and resolute sections of the proletariat of all countries... They have, theoretically, the advantage over the great mass of the proletariat of understanding the line of advance, conditions and general results of the proletarian movement."

History, before the rise of the modern proletariat, had evolved that form of the organisation of an advanced section of a class known as a political party. The struggle to fuse the spontaneous movement of the working class with the ideology that represents its long-term interests must take the form of a struggle for the organisation of the advanced layers of the class in a party that is acutely class-conscious and ideologically clear.

This party will be scientifically conscious and permanently organised for the proletarian class struggle, the regular army of the class, which en masse can only approach revolutionary consciousness in sharp periods of crisis, and even then not permanently, not scientifically. It must be militant on all three fronts of the class struggle: the economic (the spontaneous), political and the ideological - here it must defend revolutionary Marxism and combat the ideology that springs up in the working class movement under bourgeois influence. This party must be so organised and disciplined that it can fulfill its role of skeletal structure of the proletarian class in all its struggles, linking and co-ordinating the various aspects of the struggle. If it is to fulfill its tasks this party must fight continuously, consciously to perfect itself, subordinating its organisation form to the tasks rigorously imposed by the nature and course of the struggle.

Not only must it fight vigorously against the bourgeoisie in the front line of the class struggle, but also against those inside or close to its own ranks who represent the class enemy or bend under its pressure; indeed, its ability to overthrow the bourgeoisie will depend on a successful prosecution of the fight against all vacillation and all accommodation to the established order. This party will conduct the struggle of the proletariat in a campaign spirit - to win.

MARXIST SCIENCE AND THE PROLETARIAT

The revolutionary science existing outside and separate from the broad layers of the working class goes through a long historical experience from the middle of the 19th century to today. This experience has included a very wide variety of stages and relationships of the one to the other, of various degrees of "dominance" (influence) of Marxism over the environment, and more often vice versa. There is usually an appearance of divorcement from reality for that revolutionary Marxism which looks ever ahead. Only in times of sharp crisis do Marxism at its highest pitch of sharpness and "the environment" (and the proletariat, spontaneously going as far as it has appeared capable of going in history) appear to merge. Even with victory for the proletariat the convergence isn't always a permanent thing.

The high point of the unity of theory and practice was the Russian Revolution and internationally the Third, Communist, International, which attempted to function on the basis of the experience of the Marxists who led the Revolution (the conception of the democratic centralist party, etc). Again all the peculiarities of history in a staggeringly brief history of violent downswing and recession of the tide divorced Marxism from the masses. The mechanism of this was the complete adulteration, absolute emptying-out of method and revolutionary content from the forms - i.e. Stalinism. The facts are well known.

The point is that the RSL is a section of the "rump" of Bolshevism, possessing the basic ideas, but in a certain state of undernourishment - even of sclerosis.

We exist in a country where all the interactions of the material environment have produced a peculiar type of workers' organisations: the trade unions and their political equivalent, reformist bargaining within the bourgeois political set-up as an organic part of that system. As Engels pointed out the class struggle takes place on at least three levels: the economic, the political and the ideological. The British labour movement grew up spontaneously in a way that has been compared to plants growing chaotically in an untended garden. Its history is a series of zig-zags, at one time lurching to over-emphasis of the 'political', then fetishising the economic struggle - with a general, almost complete neglect of the struggle on the ideological front.

Bolshevism was born in the virgin territory of Russia; it was consciously built by revolutionaries who drew on the immense experience of the West European proletariat, including the negative aspects of this experience, opportunism and its rationale Revisionism. Bolshevism was the alternative type of labour movement to the apparently imposing but actually chaotic and fragmented organisations of Western Europe. Its essential basis was a conception, a la Engels above, of the class struggle as a unity, with the party as the consciousness and skeletal structure of the class in the various stages of the movement, co-ordinating the various aspects of what was essentially the same struggle.

Lenin's point about the ideological front being decisive can really be understood when we realise that the tremendous energy and decades-long activity of the British working class have resulted in no basic political gains, and the economic victories are built on shifting sand. The British working class, left to spontaneity through a peculiar combination of historical circumstances, has been utterly defeated ideologically. And this has conditioned everything else.

On the ideological front we are the warriors of the proletariat. We wage the fight for the merging of Marxism with the spontaneous struggle of our class. And not only do we 'mingle' an existing Marxism. Our primary possession, lying at the base of all the developed ideas of Marxism and the progenitor of all future developments of the theory in line with reality, is the Marxist method. We must understand the dialectics of development. There is a necessary interaction and

possible enrichment of the developing struggles by Marxism and Marxism by the developing reality. Lenin said it very well: theory divorced from practice is sterile and practice divorced from theory blind.

We are faced not with a fresh proletariat as were the Bolsheviks, but one with a long history and encrusted with a definite set of organisations, in every sense the victim of the conjunction of its own blind activity and the relatively conscious bourgeois system. Without the class we are impotent: the class without Marxism is doomed to continuous defeat, however magnificent its strivings in crisis periods, however glorious its struggles. Spain proved that conclusively. If October was the positive demonstration of the need for a new type of workers' party, then the betrayal and defeat of the heroic Spanish proletariat, equal to the Russian workers in their spontaneous activity, teaches the same lesson negatively.

"CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP"

The experience of the working class in Russia, Germany and Spain led the Trotskyist movement (as earlier the Communist International) to declare that only the construction of democratic centralist parties, fully grounded on the theory and practice of Marxism/Leninism, could lead the class to power. It denounced those who said there could be an absolute maturity of the working class which could lead to an automatic transition to power. The most magnificent risings in Germany, Spain (and to some extent Britain) had been led to frustration and defeat by their own conservative apparatus. The fight therefore was to overcome the 'crisis of leadership' in the working class - to create parties that would embody the historical interests of the working class.

This is our task: this task will be completed or the working class in the future will go down to defeat in Britain as in Europe. There must be no equivocation here, no easy, false optimism here. The issues must be stated clearly. The outcome of the future battles will only be victory, if the advanced layers can organise themselves into a class-conscious Marxist party.

The Labour Party, Clause IV and all [Clause IV, adopted in 1918 and scrapped in 1995, committed the Labour Party - on paper - to common ownership of the means of production], is an abortion from the point of view of the needs of the working class. History will view the Labour Party as an organism through which a détente was established for a number of decades between the partially roused proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the centre of the British Empire, in the period before the world pressures of capitalism upset the balance. It will record one of two outcomes from this. Either a beating down of the working class, or a reorganisation, a shedding of the old ideological and organisational forms of the movement and the emergence of a class-conscious party modelled organisationally and ideologically (the two condition each other in the future as in the present and cannot be separated) on the parties of the early Communist International.

Our political tendency derives from people who held such views in the Communist Party in the 1920s and in the groups and leagues up to the formation of the Revolutionary Communist Party after that. The leadership may occasionally still be heard to say something similar. But side by side with this they do (and fail to do) things, and adopt positions which place this view in question.

They talk about the 'socialist' consciousness of the British labour movement; they talk about the future in terms of a 'stages theory' of development, with the mass revolutionary Bolshevik party emerging, if at all, at the end of the long, long tunnel ahead; they completely exaggerate the weakness of the bourgeoisie and its state in such a way that clearly it would not need the organisation of a proletarian 'counter-state', the combat party, to defeat them. (All well and good... if true.) And finally, as we think the last section shows, they have abandoned all talk of seeing ourselves as an independent grouping, striving to function in the living processes as a conscious, active force; they settle down to wait passively in the Labour Party. From this flows their glorification of the Labour Party and the existing labour movement. We must consider these things in detail.

THE LABOUR PARTY AND SOCIALISM

ILLUSIONS IN THE LABOUR PARTY

The document issued March 1966 begins by stating that 18 months of Wilson's government has confirmed the analysis made by... "The Marxist Tendency of the role which would be played by the Labour government in a period of difficulties for British capitalism..." Later, on page 8, it adds: "One thing has been demonstrated beyond possibility of refutation. The illusions in certain so-called Marxist circles that this was a left Labour government, in the early intoxication of Labour victory, have been dissolved by the realities of events."

Yes, well, who were those people who fostered illusions in a left Labour government? A document issued early in 1964 by the RSL, and written (we believe) by the then General Secretary (Jimmy Deane) says [The Labour Party in Perspective, p 3]:

"It is clear that there is the possibility of a Labour government being elected in the next election. This government would come to power in conditions of an upswing in the economy which until the early part of 1963 had been more or

less stagnant and which, in relation to the other European countries had fallen behind. This is true even though this upswing is threatened by a balance of payment crisis and inflationary tendencies. In this event it is likely that the upswing would be continued through 1964 and possibly to the end of 1965 by a Labour government even with its limited measures for rationalisation and, above all, with its means for policing and disciplining the working class. The TUC has already promised its hand and even (!) the left wing (?) of the TUC has promised to support an 'Incomes Policy' with all that implies.

"In these conditions - of relative full employment - under pressure of the masses the Labour government would have to give some concessions. It could (reluctantly (!)) allow wage increases for certain sections; it would have to take measures against the monopolies and their price maintenance; it would have to take measures against high profits (! The very idea here is a reformist illusion - SM); it would have to take measures against the uncontrolled increases in prices; it would have to take measures against the enormous increases in rents and the price of houses and land and would have to take measures to prevent the flight of sterling, and so on." I.e. a left Labour government if ever there was one. Clearly these expectations are of substantial redistribution by the Labour government, and not just the occasional empty sop which has been given in one or two of those fields.

So it seems that the "so-called Marxist circles" were wide enough to include the RSL, and those who issued the 1964 document. Or maybe the comrades don't read their own publications? The surprising thing about the 1964 document is that it has a pretty accurate picture of the background; such things as a balance of payments crisis are assumed. "Pressure from the masses" will force a Labour government to act thus. And only a Labour government.

What the writer had in mind is seen clearly when, on the next page, he considers what the prospects are, against the same background, if the government in power is Tory. Not so rosy at all! On page 4, after a Jack London type series of speculations which includes what would happen after a few years of such a Labour government when there would be a decline, and a possibility of big Tory assaults would arise etc. etc. - after all this the eventuality of a Tory victory in the next election is considered.

"In the event of a Tory government scraping to power in the next election it would be short lived. They would have to face precisely the same problems as a Labour government, but with even less ability to overcome them. They would have to take measures against Resale Price Maintenance and perhaps the most formal measures against practices which threaten the interests of the state as a whole (???). However, along with such measures would be the attempt already being proposed to revise the laws relating to the trade unions and their practices (the Tories - not Wilson) and an attempt to obtain the support of the TUC for a so-called wages policy..." Large-scale struggles would develop here. Possibly they would eventually coalesce into a general strike; possibly Labour would return. This being only one variant - of course. If the strike movement failed, the Tories could then continue in power for a period, etc. etc.

Thus we see that the actual perspective of this document, circulated for a time by the RSL was of a left Labour government - the actual perspective as opposed to a large series of possibilities. It would be a government responsive to the workers and reacting with radical difference from the way the Tories would respond in a situation of minor crisis.

Nobody is sneering at the expectations of certain concessions from the Labour Party reformists - or at the banal newspaper headline type 'prophecy'. But a number of things stand out here. Such things as profit control etc. are not seen as shams to deceive the workers, and this is part of a general picture of serious illusions in the Labour Party. In the same document it is certainly stated that in a very sharp crisis, after giving way to the workers, in the final analysis the Labour Party tops would opt (?) for capitalism. But as with so much besides this has no practical significance. Labour is definitely seen as 'better' than the Tories, more responsive to the workers, and only in the final analysis reactionary - from fear of revolution! Also, of course the silly claim to prophetic accuracy in the 1964 publication should be seen as such.

The leading comrades, as we shall see throughout this document have come to believe their own entryist propaganda. Objective reality is forgotten in favour of the need to begin with the consciousness of the masses. They have forgotten that the Labour Party is basically, in its function, a bourgeois party, and that our function is not to speculate on or exaggerate reforms (still less to peddle fantasies) - but to keep firmly in mind the class issues. Truly we have moved a long way from the original idea of communist entryism - when we were going to support the Labour Party as a rope supports a hanged man; when the only advantage we saw in a reformist, Labour government was the possibility of exposing it before the class.

And experience has still not disillusioned the leadership. The 1966 document shows that the leading comrades see the Labour Party not as a machine, however complicated it may be in its structure and despite its origin, essentially manipulating the masses for the same goals as the Tories, run by bourgeois politicians, only with a slightly different technique of manipulation - but as a party genuinely responsive to the workers.

1966 DOCUMENT, P 2:

"... Finance Capital and the industrialists have made a change in their attitude towards the Labour Government and especially to the Prime Minister. The first bitter hostility (?) has changed to cordiality and support. This has been because of the capitulation (???) to the dictates of Big Business and its servants in the Civil Service."

This would be going rather far even for Militant - in an internal document it is incredible nonsense! The writer obviously thinks the capitalists had the same illusions in Wilson and the Labour Party as had the 'Tribunites' and some of 'our' people. Just one fact: the Economist supported Wilson in 1964! And the Times was more than favourable. The capitalist power centres are under no illusions as to the realities of the Labour Party. Are we being ultra-sharp, hostile, seizing upon accidents of phrasing? No one can deny that this attitude pervades not only the publications of the group, but also the internal material.

1966 DOCUMENT, P 4:

"Wilson thus has a computer in his brain instead of a class sense and belongs to the genus of desiccated calculating machines"

But Wilson does have a class-sense. The class sense of the bourgeoisie! That statement owes more to Bevan than the phrase. But maybe it is not Wilson who lacks a class-sense? A characteristic of a blurred class-sense is the partial or complete loss of the ability to recognise class enemies. (This question of whether Wilson is positively in possession of a bourgeois class-sense and consciousness or his is merely absent connects up with the question of the alleged socialist consciousness of the British labour movement - and with the adulteration, in fact the complete abandonment by Ted Grant and co. of the Leninist conception: "The only choice is - either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a 'third' ideology and in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology)").

1966 DOCUMENT, P 6:

"In addition, the ruling class itself, once Wilson had bowed the knee to Big Capital have deliberately built him up as a great statesman..." etc., etc.

But when was Wilson's 'bowed' knee in question? Again the comrades seem to think that the ruling class have been reading our old documents! They have more reliable sources.

In this document published during the election campaign they talk about the demagogue Wilson appealing to the workers to help carry out a socialist policy: "It is this side that will be brought to the fore in the campaign for the renewal of the mandate".

This myopia is not accidental. It is part of the congenital confusion and illusions of the leadership on the question of the Labour Party. Nowhere in all our documents and publications is there a clear characterisation of the Labour Party. The same meagre 'description' suffices: "the workers' party". This lack of sharpness is also no accident. It is the rationalisation imposed on the leading comrades by their abstentionist application of their 'perspective' of the necessary two stages in the future radicalisation of the class. As their practice of 'entry' has become more and more a passive waiting on the centrist current of the future - to the same degree has the need to paint up the 'socialist consciousness' of the broad movement and even of the Labour Party itself grown.

LENIN ON THE LABOUR PARTY

"The fact that bourgeois labour parties have already been formed in all the advanced capitalist countries and that unless a determined and relentless struggle is waged all along the line against these parties, or groups, trends etc. it is all the same. There can be no question of a struggle against imperialism or of Marxism, or of a socialist labour movement... (wherever Marxism is popular amongst the workers, this political trend, 'this bourgeois labour party' will invoke and swear by Marxism)" (Imperialism)

It would be possible to compile a booklet of quotations on the Labour Party from Lenin, and some would appear to contradict each other. What we need then is some indication of how to judge the Labour Party, concretely, as it exists now. At the Second Comintern Congress, 1920, Lenin made a speech on the question of affiliation of the British Communists to the Labour Party: "... indeed the concepts 'political organisation of the trade union Movement' or 'political expression of this movement' are wrong ones. Of course the bulk of the members of the Labour Party are workers; however whether a party is really a political party of the workers or not, depends not only on whether it consists of workers, but also upon who leads it, upon the content of its activities, and of its political tactics. Only the latter determines whether we have before us really a political party of the proletariat. From this point of view, the only correct one, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because although it consists of workers it is led by reactionaries, and the worst spirit reactionaries at that, who act fully in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the Bourgeoisie which exists, in order with the help of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns to systematically deceive the workers."

The Labour Party must be seen dialectically - in its connections, in its actual role and significance in the relationship of the classes - not what fig-leaves it adopts, what it says of itself, or what workers think it is.

Nevertheless, of course, Lenin advised approaches for affiliation by the Communist Party (largely on the ground that certain features of the Labour Party were unique at that time - and which are very largely non-existent now). Lenin, in his advocacy of entry, specifically mentioned the fact that the extreme left party, which contributed the main forces to the new Communist Party, the British Socialist Party, had the right to exist with its own programme, organise in favour of that programme, and to explain openly that the Hendersons etc. were bourgeois agents. There have been very many changes since then. Our dehydrated propaganda is not just a bad substitute - in no real sense can it be said to be a substitute - in no real sense can it be said to be a substitute. But he insisted that this should be without illusion. All this is well known, as is Trotsky's advice in the 1930s.

The point we want to make is that all the RSL approaches on entryism stress the alleged fact that the Labour Party is the Workers' Party, and more seriously, completely fail to point out the alien bourgeois nature of the Labour Party. (Here again the leading comrades think they are dealing with a bunch of Third Period ultra-lefts, and not members of the Labour Party, who will have the shallow picture of the Labour Party as the 'workers' party', constantly bombarded with this view which the bourgeoisie find so useful, by the bourgeois press).

Not only that, but they publicly (and privately) endorse the 'socialist' camouflage of Wilson and Brown. The starting-point for the entryism imposed upon us by circumstances must be a sharp Leninist analysis. This must be the beginning of the education of such forces as we win - particularly those won in the Labour Party. But in practice it is ignored when it is not denied. We are not proposing abandonment of entry - only that it should be seen as a tactic, applied flexibly, an excursion into alien territory - a tactic rather than a way of life. Also reality must be stated clearly; we should sow no illusions in the Labour Party.

On the characterisation of the Labour Party and Lenin's approach quoted above, the leading comrades (Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe) content themselves with pointing out that Lenin later "contradicted" this i.e. their method is one of formal textual comparison which allows them to take their pick of what best fits their own mood of the moment. This, of course is their approach on a whole lot of issues ('Lenin later contradicted What is to be done', etc É), but it is not the Marxist approach. We must see the various positions taken up by Lenin dialectically as they fit together and form a comprehensive (moving) picture. The Labour Party is an organisation of the bourgeoisie - but it is only useful to them because of its connections with the working class. To use the description of it - 'the party of the British workers' etc. - as a means of avoiding a sharp Marxist class analysis of its role, its actual position in the relationship of forces, is not serious. Neither is it serious to say 'well - it is - and then again it isn't.' In its function, whatever the contradictions, it is a bourgeois party. It is true that if we ignore the contradictions we will not be able to gauge future developments - but this approach of the leadership will prevent us preparing to make the best of the future developments in the Labour Party.

The comrades' approach is that Labour Party is the workers' party and essentially the machine is an imposition. It only requires a bit more exertion, pressure, activity on the workers' part for the machine to move, to respond to and reflect their desires, at least to a limited extent. This is both stated and implied: it is our practical approach. The talk of a mass centrist movement is there too of course; as a 'finished formation' it is only one stage removed from the mass Bolshevik Party: our immediate expectation is for a reflection of the ranks' first pressures on the machine.

Because of our whole position we can't avoid presenting these possible reflections as 'good' - whereas our task must be concern for the general class significance of these things, for the fact that movement 'under pressure' by the machine can lead to the defeat of the class. Failure to recognise these people's 'progressive' moves as mousetraps is to make a headlong dive for the cheese! Unless we prepare a force capable of independent activity there isn't much else we can do anyway, except go almost passively, even into the slaughterhouse.

THE LABOUR PARTY IS A BOURGEOIS PARTY

The Leninist position is that the Labour Party, judged in its role and function, and despite its origins and special connection with the trade unions, is a capitalist, a bourgeois workers' party. Judged politically it is not a workers' party with deformations, inadequacies (its 'inadequacies' amount to a qualitative difference), but a bourgeois party with the special function of containing the workers - actually it is a special section of the bourgeois state political organisation. The Labour Party is the main instrument of capitalist control of the workers; the organisation formed out of an upsurge of the workers, but an upsurge in which the workers were defeated ideologically and thus in every other field, is now the means of integrating the drives and aspirations of the workers with the capitalist state machine. It is not a passive reflection but an active canaliser of the class - against itself, against the proletariat's own interest. It is against this background that Clause IV must be seen.

The approach and viewpoint is important here, and what we see will be seriously affected by how we begin. The initial statement 'a workers' party' or 'a bourgeois workers' party' will affect everything else. For example the bureaucracy is seen either as a crust formation, with certain deficiencies in relation to the needs of the class, but basically part of the class, which will respond (genuinely as opposed to treacherously) to pressures - OR as a much more serious opponent, a

part of the political machine of the main enemy class (irrespective of how it originates); and therefore our expectations from it will be quite different. We will not be quite so 'comfortable' in the Labour Party. The most obvious thing is that we will see their shifts to the left as also a danger and not as a triumph for the pressure of the class, as something which increased our responsibilities, as a party, rather than absolves us of them, lessening our role, questioning the validity of the Fourth International. The unqualified definition of the Labour Party as a worker's party is a snare.

Lenin (1920) anticipated a Labour government as a kind of Kerensky-type regime of crisis, and the situation and class forces then justified that. Now, however, a Labour government slots into a more or less stable state machine and immediately works for the capitalists, bringing to the bourgeoisie as its special gift a dowry of the aspirations and illusions of the working class. Its function at the moment is to alleviate capitalist development problems - rationalisation. In its 'nationalisation' enterprises in general the Labour Party seems to have adopted a special role in relation to the structure of the British economy. This is ever more concentrated, centralised, in need of modernisation. The 'reforming' Labour Party harnesses the workers electorally as a driving-force to overcome the resistance of the average Tory supporter who sees private property as a sacred, immutable principle. The beneficiaries - the big bourgeoisie, the dominant capitalist groups - are of course a bit more flexible in their thinking and aware of their situation, their own needs.

What this means is that we must be as free in our propaganda and activities as possible - we must get out of the habit of wishful thinking. 'Nationalisation' must be judged and presented from a class point of view. There must be no exaggeration of the ferment under the Labour Party, its vote, or the electoral swing by way of justifying our own 'tactic'. We must justify ourselves by our activity - not by distorting reality. The first thing, as Trotsky said many times is not to be afraid of stating what is. In 1966 the Labour Party did not appeal to the electorate as a socialist party - if anything the very opposite. Ignoring things like that as the comrades do in gauging the petty bourgeois swing to Labour, can help only the bureaucracy. Quietism and tailism are bad enough anyway - on the basis of the self-delusion they become poisonous.

The lesson is that we must stress the necessity for a role for our own movement; the vital need is for self-confidence. How can we build an organisation when in practice we deny our politics an immediate serious vital role?

SECTARIANISM AND LIQUIDATIONISM

In "Centrism and the Fourth International" Trotsky wrote:

"His shilly-shallying the centrist frequently covers up by reference to the danger of 'sectarianism', by which he understands not abstract propagandist passivity (of the Bordigist type) but an active concern for purity of principles, clarity of position, political consistency, organisational completeness."

Thus Trotsky's definition of sectarianism was: abstract propagandist passivity. The Transitional Programme later:

"They simply dawdle in one place, satisfying themselves with a repetition of the self-same meagre abstractions. Political events are for them an occasion for comment and not for action."

In our application of the entry tactic we unite the worst features of liquidationism, and, paradoxically, also of sectarianism as described above. Our abstract propagandist passivity takes place in the setting of the Labour Party and with ideas watered down to the Labour Party level, retaining only the phrases as dried husks. The disease of sectarianism took us in the throes of liquidation-sickness: it became an over-compensation for our own collapse. The result can be clearly seen. We are so hypnotised our own objectively-imposed weakness that we come very close to fitting the above descriptions.

The concept of waiting for the class to move en masse, while meanwhile we make general propaganda (apart from being very unlikely this side of the revolution's beginning), prevents those partial movements which are necessary to gain strength for our own group. When other groups or tendencies organise or lead such limited struggles more often than not the RSL condemns it. At a time when Hampstead Constituency Labour Party were running a campaign, led by 'left reformists' etc. against the Immigration White Paper, there was a move among them to expel [Frank] Soskice [Labour Party Home Secretary] from that party. Members of the RSL in Hampstead, who had some influence at the time, campaigned against this move. And our General Secretary considers it a matter to boast of - "There are times when one must hold people back." Note that this restraint was conspicuously absent in Wandsworth [where an SLL member was expelled for "hooliganism" and Militant did not oppose it]. When an SLLer is being expelled, that is the cue for our comrades to move into action ... with the right wing. If the exercise of restraint is not consistent, at least the alignment is.

The move in Hampstead was 'premature' - because the masses were as yet indifferent to it. The all-or-nothing approach again: Trotsky defined the attitude of sectarians etc. who refused to differentiate between the two sides in the Spanish Civil War, as a refusal to fight for limited gains.

We do exactly the same - organisationally.

In the last quarter of the 19th century Marx and Engels (particularly Engels) criticised the British Marxist socialists as having reduced Marxism to a rigid orthodoxy, a dogma - "a credo and not a guide to action." We stand in the same danger, only our credo, because of our gesture towards the broad movement of toning down our ideas and refusing even limited organisational struggles - our 'credo' is already so muted that the Labour Party rot threatens us with extinction.

CLAUSE IV

The distant ideal of Clause IV is part of the stock-in-trade of the bureaucracy - without this sort of thing they would not be such useful agents of the bourgeoisie in controlling the working class.

This is clear if we remember 1918 and the fact that the Labour Party and trade union tops adopted Clause IV and reorganised the Party to prevent the workers escaping their control. Keeping their positions they were able to organise the workers' defeat in 1926 and prepared the way for the prostration of the class in face of the Great Depression, and for World War Two etc. The apparent victory of Clause IV in 1918 helped preserve the movement in its present Lib/Lab form and thus prepared future defeats. Primarily it is a tool for use by the bureaucracy in controlling the workers in their own group interests and, through them, the interests of the bourgeoisie.

It embodies the desires of the workers and thus it could rebound on the bureaucracy. But likewise the workers' illusions in the existing organisations (and their willingness to carry out Clause IV) could mean heavy losses, even defeat, once the class began to mobilise seriously.

THE SOCIALIST CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MOVEMENT

Ted Grant talks about the socialist consciousness of the British labour movement - not to build on it for propaganda but to excuse indifference to the concrete struggle (February Militant). Let's look at this. At the very best the 'general socialism' of the movement is embryonic naïve collectivism. This is just Sunday socialism, a dream, a far-off event. Also the movement is split up, sectionalised - e.g. the unions. Practical union politics means at most bargaining within the system - reformism. Reformism is bourgeois politics. Ted Grant argues on the 'socialist' resolutions of the various unions: their socialism (to give the most to Ted Grant's argument) amounts to 'municipalisation'. The practical, each-industry-its-own-plan approach of those unions which adopt 'socialist' demands for their own field is sectionalism, bordering on syndicalism.

The Labour Party is one more example of sectionalism and confusion in the movement, and Clause IV (whatever its significance 'in itself') is just a cover, and sows its own illusions of Fabian gradualism. The official Labour Party recognises the class struggle - but only in the manner of Ramsay MacDonald: as something to be deplored and suppressed and not as a battle to be won for the workers' side. What, after all, prevents these socialisation, nationalisation resolutions which are so plentiful in the movement from being effective? They are left in mid-air hanging, frustrated by the bureaucratic filter and the division and illusions of their promoters. There is no drive, no unity - and the resolutions are the work of that active minority in the trade unions who are themselves split up and suffering from all kinds of illusions, from Fabianism to its slightly more energetic cousin Stalinism - from the tortoise to the writhing snake.

The leading comrades say that there is a socialist consciousness (as opposed to an embryonic collectivism) in the British labour movement - and that our task is to generalise it. But what does this mean? That we do a sum of all the resolutions and propose the final abstraction for general acceptance - 1 times 400? That we call a nation-wide 'compositing conference' ('when we have sufficient contact' of course ...)? This is the logic of the propaganda approach they adopt, the actual counterposing of abstract 'nationalisation' propaganda in the Labour Party to the organic class struggle as in the seamen's strike. We are in danger of becoming a Labour Party first cousin to the SPGB!

We agree that the task is to generalise such embryonic consciousness as exists, but this is not, as in Ted Grant's approach, a matter of doing a sum with a collection of resolutions. The condition of effectiveness in generalising these aspirations and combining them as an aim of the concrete, organic class struggle of the workers, and incidentally of integrating, fusing the various fronts of this struggle in a mutually fruitful strategy - the condition for this is the building of the revolutionary Bolshevik party. Only this can transform the existing confusion, wishful thinking, vacillation of the movement: only this can effect the necessary qualitative change.

In the propaganda field we know the specific objections to Stalinism, Fabianism and vulgar trade unionism - but we are so committed to watered-down sectionalised propaganda criticism of these trends that we fail to knit the whole picture together.

The logic of the gigantism of the means of production in the modern world, is such that collectivism, socialisation, presents itself as the obvious solution in many different forms and accompanied by illusions and complete failure to understand the system as a whole - i.e. how to achieve a harmoniously working socialist reorganisation of the economy. Marxists see this only as a result of the victory in the class struggles of the proletariat and this does not necessarily begin with abstract propaganda about nationalisation. When as in the sea strike Militant ignores the concrete class

struggle, in its momentarily most active front, it merely shows how far we have gone, through adaptation, towards Fabian, petty-bourgeois parliamentary socialism.

Instead of exposing the pretensions of the bourgeois agents in the labour movement the comrades paint them up. The Labour Party is completely integrated in the British bourgeois state system - yet they never explain this. They see only the superficially 'working class' nature of the party, and neglect the dialectical approach which would explore the relationships of the classes, the actual role of the leaderships, the de facto role of the different parties. They say the Labour Party is both a bourgeois and a proletarian party, Clause IV both a bourgeois and a proletarian party, Clause IV both a fig-leaf and an aspiration: yet in practice they talk and write only about one aspect, and the most well-publicised one at that, completely suppressing the overall view, that clearly sees these as essentially bourgeois. They can deny it - but clearly there is mis-education, not only of readers of the paper but of our own membership.

PIPE DREAMS AND REVOLUTIONARY DUTY

The leading comrades gloss up the existing labour movement, exaggerate every hopeful sign and talk about automatic changes and readjustments - in the future, of course, as a rationale of our accommodation now. They forgo a role, and a vital preparation one now in favour of the light-minded dreams and fantasies about tomorrow. We need to keep in mind a point Trotsky made in 1934 about a certain kind of reformist-centrism, capable of "lulling the advanced workers to sleep by inculcating in them the ideas that the revolutionary regeneration of their party is already achieved."

We don't go to quite such a Selbyite length but it is clearly only a matter of degree. In his glorification of the existing 'socialism' Ted Grant denounce those of us who are less enchanted, as having contempt for the workers. Isn't it rather that we have more respect for the potentialities of the class (embodied and represented in its theory) than for the present broad movement, living with the capitalist system, remaining essentially acquiescent, despite momentary upsurges and occasional protest at the crimes of the system and encrusted with an alien bureaucratic apparatus which slots into the bourgeois state system? Of course it would be absurd to pass 'judgement' on the class like this and not to understand the process, the conditions responsible for the present situation - but the comrades' glorification is absurd.

By glorifying it they help perpetuate it, acting against the polarisation and regroupment which is the first step towards changing it. If we too stand open-mouthed, lighted candle in hand before the Clause IV shrine and it concomitant manana Socialism - how can we educate anyone else?

The question that must be taken up seriously is just how automatic is the condition of the existing labour movement? Lenin thought that consciousness was a decisive element and that when considering the labour movement as it had developed in a given country to see it as outside the control of Marxists was to ignore the fact that actual ideas, ideologies had played a part, had entered the process. In Britain these ideas were and are bourgeois ideas; there is no vacuum.

The ideas of an automatic adjustment in response to changing events by the existing movement, apart from being anti-Marxist, stands in the way of our serious striving to influence events in a Leninist spirit. The views of the leading comrades on such things as Clause IV show that they see the movement as slowly maturing and Clause IV as an organically evolved first fruit of this process. The dialectical view is abandoned: the need to see the future sharp breaks, leaps etc. (and the need to prepare for these, rather than wait passively like those other people who had patience and of course 'a sense of proportion' - the Fabians). Also abandoned is the need to see Clause IV as the product of a certain contradictory relationship between bureaucrats and workers.

There will be no automatic upwards spiral here: the abortive nature of the present movement, far from being elevated automatically to a higher stage could plunge the class downwards and backwards in a sharp crisis: more - it must be said that in view of all the past this is inevitable. We think that the task is still the building of the revolutionary party: this conditions everything else. There is a question mark hanging over the future of the class and the handle of that symbol is the Bolshevik-type party.

The existing labour organisations have a stock of 'socialist' sops, half-measures, side-trackings and open betrayals to head off and smash even the most powerful movement of the working class, delivering it into the hands of the bourgeoisie. Even in the most severe crisis the bourgeoisie remains a serious force - and if our leading comrades don't think so the proletariat can't afford to ignore it. With the Labour and trade union Judas-goats to lead the class to the slaughter-house then they are capable of delivering a death-blow against the working class.

We are abashed to have to say this in an organisation which was until very recently the official British Section of the Fourth International [The RSL was affiliated to the 'United Secretariat of the Fourth International', led by Ernest Mandel, from 1957 to 1965] - but the leading comrades are so aerated with senseless 'optimism' that the concept of an actual struggle is ignored and often denied. Younger comrades are miseducated on this day-dreaming. Modern history, Germany, Spain etc. shows absolutely clearly that the outcome in the future will depend on the development of a steeled Bolshevik Combat Party.

"The dynamic optimism of the Communist International stems from far broader and deeper foundations. For us the bourgeoisie is not a stone dropping into an abyss but a living historical force which struggles, manoeuvres, advances now on its right flank, now on its left. And only provided we learn to grasp politically all the means and methods of bourgeois society so as to each time react to them without hesitation or delay, shall we succeed in bringing closer that moment when we can, with a single confident stroke, actually hurl the bourgeoisie into the abyss." (Leon Trotsky, First Five Years of the Communist International, p 303. Our emphasis.)

THE STATE

Our entryist demands on the broad movement necessarily leave out all consideration of the role of the bourgeois state in the class struggle and just how helpless such cardboard organisations as the electoral machine called the Labour Party would be against its might. We have seen how the leadership all along the line have evolved theories of softening contradictions, of an easing of our responsibilities towards the class. While they admit all sorts of possibilities (to which memory of the positions of Marxism 'commit' them) their practical conclusions, orientations, go in the opposite direction: they take the line of least resistance.

As we mentioned, the leading comrades interpret their own picture of the relative decline of British capitalism as absolute decline: the Secretariat state quite categorically that the bourgeoisie is demoralised and more or less helpless; that it is only the restraint of the workers (organised in the Labour Party - whose leaders unfortunately lack a class sense) that prevents a revolution here and now. They don't actually talk, as do the Selby people, of the last 20 years being years of dual power in Britain - but they come close to it.

The delirious optimism is but another example of the undialectical approach of the comrades. There is not much prospect of a struggle the contradictions are becoming softer rather than sharper (and presumably this will be true even in a revolutionary situation ...?) It is another example that the reasoning processes of the comrades go no further than straight addition. So many here - so many there: add them up! My God! What a force - how demoralised the bourgeoisie must be. Two members of the Secretariat hold the position that a peaceful transition would be possible now did the Labour Party want it (Ted Grant and Arthur Deane). They may - or they may not - be entitled to their opinions: but it is generally taken as axiomatic that this conception of easy, non-struggling transition, is the hallmark of the two opportunisms, with their acceptance of bourgeois parliamentarism.

(One of us, Sean Matgamna, first became a Trotskyist, when he realised that Trotskyism was the genuine Leninism of today, as a result of a struggle against this conception inside the Young Communist League.)

Here it is not a matter of a dogmatic repetition of Lenin's phrases from state and Revolution or anything like that. The Marxist insistence that there will be a struggle for power, that no ruling class ever goes peacefully to the graveyard, is dependent on the Marxist conception of the state. Marx in the mid-19th century and later thought a peaceful revolution possible in Britain and America. The opportunists attempted to hide behind that, seeking to reduce the question to a comparison of texts and quotations. In state and Revolution Lenin cut through the verbiage by analysing the concrete reality: the concrete class state. 'Yes' he concluded - 'Marx was right!' - 'No', the opportunists who repeated his phrases without reference to what had happened in the real world since, 'were not right'. Things had changed a little meanwhile. Britain and America had sunk to the 'all European level' of a massive and permanent military and state bureaucracy, organised to serve the interests of the ruling class. And that is the key.

Those who say that an easy 'non-struggling' transition is possible must tell us in Marxist fashion what has changed: has the state receded in importance? In strength? In dominance? Actually the state has grown in importance, extending ever to new fields. Even the bourgeoisie openly admits that parliament has only a criticising function now.

The comrades ignore the state machine. They paint a picture of the bourgeoisie dying of fright. They expect the capitalists to run around madly like a chicken without its head in the event of a struggle. The idea of a conscious bourgeois strategy - now or in the future - of splitting up the workers, judicious use of the Labour leaders, etc. i.e. a fight - these are dismissed. Drunken optimism ... again.

In his 'Lessons of October' Trotsky dealt with the experience of the German Communists in 1923 on this very question of ultra-optimism in relation to the state. Before the sharpening of the situation they dismissed the question of the state and its forces, and its danger. Faced with the crisis, they started adding up the numbers of the opposing forces! And suddenly the state 'grew' in size. The Brandlerites collapsed and ran for cover, without a serious attempt to fight. Such 'optimism' contains the seed of its own inversion. False optimism leads to failure to prepare: in the crisis this failure leads to complete prostration before the enemy's might. Hence Lenin's insistence - 'prepare for the worst.'

The conception one has of the state, its strength and its tendencies, will enter one's calculations in other fields as well. Thus leading comrades' attitudes have contributed to their refusal to engage in any serious opposition to the anti-union legislation. Likewise with their de facto abandonment of the need for, and their failure to begin to prepare, a combat party as the essential thing that will make the potentiality of workers' power actual - this just might make sense if their ideas of the weakness of the bourgeoisie and the unimportance of the state were correct.

But they have never openly declared themselves here! (Though Ted Grant has publicly defended ideas which are at the very least doubtful: and in the privacy of a secretariat meeting Arthur Deane stated that there could be a peaceful takeover if only there was a leadership.) Where do they stand on all this? We think the attitude here is one of 'the Big Issue' clearly delineating - revolutionaries from Stalinists; the self-activity of the workers from Fabian gradualism and reorganisation 'from above'; soviets from hollow bourgeois parliamentarism.

All talk of peaceful transition in West European bourgeois states completely outdoes the Pablo line on Russia in revisionism, not to mention the Fourth International's alleged position on China [The Mandel current then looked to "reform" to create a "healthy" workers' state in China. Michel Pablo, another neo-Trotskyist leader, speculated about bureaucratic self-reform in the USSR]. If the comrades think there's a need to change our line here let them attempt to convince the movement. There must be no piece-meal smuggling of ideas. They must defend their conceptions!

We await the reply. But we will make one point here. Ted Grant publicly defended the idea that if the Labour Party attempted a full assault on the capitalist system there would be such a response from the workers that the state would be swamped. Theoretically this may be possible. But to stake all on vast uniform upsurge of the class like that, is utopian. Unanimity of layers and regions in any upsurge cannot be taken for granted. There would inevitably be a period of skirmishing etc., in which a Bolshevik Party would be vital, to act as skeletal structure and General Staff of the class. But even in the most gigantic upsurge the combat party is decisive.

We have already seen Lenin's idea about the need to prepare for the worst. In revolutionary politics everything is relative, all sort of possibilities exist, but the trend of development, the expectations towards which they orient themselves. The revolutionary trend always orients itself seriously to face and battle to overcome the worst. The opportunists always expect the best and invariably become disorientated by the far from ideal reality: it is they, and not the state, who are 'swamped'.

The comrades run the organisation on the cheap fuel of easy optimism, but this will not be sufficient to tackle the steep hills of reality; as Marx wrote Kugelmann during the brief life of the Paris Commune: "It would be very easy to make world history if the struggle could always be undertaken when the odds are always in our favour."

SECTION 3

VULGAR MATERIALISM AND PLATONIC PERSPECTIVES

"The only true prophets are those who carve out the future they announce."

James Connolly

"While the real teaching of Marx is the theoretical formula of action, of attack, of the development of revolutionary energy, and of the carrying of the class blow to its logical conclusion, ... (the Austro-Marxist school) ... was transformed into an academy of passivity and evasiveness ... and reduced its work to explaining and justifying, not guiding and overthrowing ..."

Leon Trotsky, Terrorism and Communism

MYSTIFICATION

The Catholic Church has a formula which is used to paper over the accumulated absurdities of its doctrine: a dogma like that of the Trinity has only to be declared a "Mystery of Religion" to make sense in the realm of a logical higher than rationality. Likewise the Communist Party in its unprincipled and contradictory zig-zags over the decades has felt the need for something similar. 'Dialectics' in the Stalinist parties has been reduced to his role of giving some pretence at 'logical' (or principled) continuity to the gyrations of the Soviet bureaucracy's hacks. Similarly with the RSL. There is no comparison in what needs to be covered up, but it must be said that we too have our term of mystification. Everything today is explained and all things will be granted to us 'tomorrow' - so long as we know the magic word: "perspectives".

Now there are dialectics and 'dialectics'. Revolutionary materialist dialectics is one thing, but the variety of artificial construction manufactured for special pleading is quite another. Likewise with perspectives. Marxism has certainly been described as the science of perspectives, but it depends on just what we understand by the term to determine whether we are Marxists or not.

FEUERBACHIANIS

Vulgar materialists, addicts of the contemplative philosophy and certain pseudo-Marxists see it as a question of speculation, estimation of what they call 'objective reality'. This is the academic, scholastic 'Marxism' which dominated

the European movement before the First World War. Strictly speaking it has more in common with this Feuerbachian, pre-Marxist materialism than with the ideas of Marx and Engels.

The Third International clearly rejected such Kautskyism - and indeed the struggle against this approach was a major factor in preparing the Bolshevik party, in the decade and a half before October, to lead the working class to power. It was Lenin's insistence on seeing the concrete reality clearly, on denouncing the cowardly Menshevik policy of abstentionism (in what both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks expected to be a bourgeois revolutions) that allowed the Bolshevik Party, trained in that spirit, to survive momentary confusion and in the heat of the struggle in 1917 adopt the perspective of workers' power.

The hall-mark of Bolshevism was the insistence on an active role for the proletariat; just as against the 'Economists' the Iskraites had fought for the conception of conscious activity to assemble a proletarian party, so later the "consistent Iskraites" fought the vacillating Mensheviks to lead the working class as an active, independent force even when in alliance in a bourgeois revolution. Whereas the Mensheviks confined themselves to the abstract estimation that the revolution was bourgeois and it would follow a certain pattern, the Bolsheviks went further. They concretised their conceptions, insisting that the task of Marxist science was to map out a concrete programme of action for the revolutionary working class. Lenin attacked the placid expectation of 'liberal' bourgeois hegemony in the coming revolution, a perspective which the Mensheviks adhered to blindly without examination of the real situation and relationship in Russian society, and which tied them hand and foot to the totally reactionary bourgeoisie when the revolution did become possible in 1917.

Lenin: Collected Works, Vol. 9, p 43. (1905):

"... Instead of indicating just how the proletariat should 'advance revolutionary development' at the present time (advance it further than the constitutionalist bourgeoisie would care to go) instead of advice to make definite preparations for the struggle against the bourgeoisie when the latter turns against the conquests of the revolution we are offered a general description of a process, a description which says nothing about the concrete aims of our activity. The new-Iskra manner of expressing its views reminds one of Marx's opinion (stated in his famous Theses on Feuerbach) of the old materialism, which was alien to the ideas of dialectics. The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, said Marx: the point, however, is to change it. Similarly the new-Iskra group can give a tolerable description and explanation of the process of struggle taking place before their eyes, but they are altogether incapable of giving a correct slogan for this struggle. Good marchers but poor leaders they disparage the materialist conception of history by ignoring the active, leading and guiding part which can and must be played in history by parties that have placed themselves at the head of the progressive classes."

In our opinion the approach of the leading comrades is a variant of the approach attacked by Lenin in this passage.

OUR DOCUMENTS

Lenin's picture of the Mensheviks' ability to give a tolerable description of the process of struggle taking place before their eyes - is it not a true description of the essential approach of our leading comrades? The line on such issues as the anti-union legislation or the seamen's strike makes it seem even a flattering comparison with the RSL - but let that pass.

Read the perennial British Perspectives document: preferably get hold of the succeeding editions to 'see how it evolves'. Here we have football-pool politics with a vengeance! The most intricate and detailed speculations as to the possible future political permutations (allowing the leading comrades to boast later of their 'foresight') goes hand in hand with the scantiest attention to ourselves and our role. Great things in the future and meanwhile we wait on events and vegetate in the Labour Party routine. And neither in their documents nor in their practical leadership - least of all here - do the leading comrades establish a bridge between the one and the other.

The line is that we are the true-born British Trotskyist current. The state we are in today is absolutely, one hundred and five percent the product of the past; only minor details in our present condition could have emerged differently whatever 'mistakes' might have been avoided. The old Revolutionary Communist Party is referred to as the golden age; and the final ignominious collapse, with Healy being appointed Pablo's receiver and the cadres dispersing - this was entirely the result, a mechanical reflection of changes in the world situation. The leading comrades, the younger ones with even more rigidity than the survivors of the shipwreck, bitterly insist on this inevitability. And having reduced to its barest minimum the conscious, subjective element in this process, they can freely do the same for the future as for the past. Regeneration will be just as inevitable and automatic as was the collapse, only pending "world historic events".

RSL "PERSPECTIVE"

Just what is our perspective? We must look for this in the Group documents - and also by considering the real RSL in its day to day practice and in relation to other forces and groups. All our documents from "Perspectives of Entryism" to the "Labour Party in Perspective" are really devoted to this topic.

The expectation is that "Big Events" will change the political climate radically and push the proletariat in the direction of our programme; the mechanism of the is a 'stages theory', with the next big step as the formation of a mass centrist or left reformist current, resulting from a mass turn to the Labour Party - this leading to further left wing developments.

1959

The documents, since, say, "Perspectives of Entryism" (1959) can be summarised briefly: the centrepiece is that the next, inevitable, stage in "the mass left wing". They vary quite considerably in their estimations of the immediate (for the next two or three years) prospects for this.

However, in so far as the documents we have worked over venture a concrete assessment and estimation of the likely immediate events - then they are wrong. For example, "Perspectives of Entryism" clearly expects that the beginning of the mass radicalisation is just round the corner: the beginning of big possibilities in the Labour Party. (The beginning of the Healyite's semi-independent, but still definitely entryist, period is denounced for endangering the possibilities here.) If Labour wins the coming election ('59) - then the prospects are good, and the mechanism of development will be of one sort. If Labour is defeated then (depending on the economic situation!) we can expect a shift to 'economic' emphasis, reflected inside the Labour Party, and - "a socialist struggle against the Government..." Just round the corner: 'Hold on tight, sit still just a little longer!' With Labour in power the remorseless pressure of the class struggle would give the same result. "Exceptionally favourable circumstances such as post 1945 are unlikely to recur."

Fair enough. That was the beginning of '59. 1) As a perspective for the next five or seven years it was as incorrect as Healy's - despite the difficult periods in '61 and '63; 2) It is really (as usual) a reiteration of the general epochal perspective. 3) Since then, at the beginning of 1964, the immediate prospect put forward was of a left Labour government. Wrong again!

Our perspective has differed from Healy's only in that we see the beginnings of radicalisation as just round the corner (1964 it was to come after a few years of 'progressive' Labour government), has opposed to Healy's 'straight ahead'.

The 'superiority' of our 'perspectives' is that the word is really a group synonym for tomorrow, the future. (And did not Ted Grant at a recent National Committee define Marxism as the "science of prediction"; considering his more usual definition, this almost amounts to a declaration that for him 'perspectives' equals prediction). We draw the same conclusion whether the expectation is of a radicalisation just round the corner, or after a few years of left Labour Government - wait, continue in the old routine.

Is there going to be a more or less beginning to the mass radicalisation soon? - keep on in the Labour Party propagandist routine! is it not coming just yet? - then keep on in the same Labour Party propagandist routine! Whatever the estimation the immediate practical conclusion remains the same. If the beginning is a little distant - then we must be patient, have a sense of proportion - and ... wait. If quite near, then we must still wait ... for it to begin.

AND 1966

Take the 1966 document. It clearly expects a big beginning to the mass radicalisation. It does not attempt to establish this in any serious way; it is nevertheless the assumption, ringed of course with all sorts of qualifications. The 'perspective' of the comrades is hardly better established than that of Healy. It consists of a general acceptance that this is the epoch of the end of capitalism - and as all the documents since 1959 show we have been just as capable of expecting as big an upsurge as Healy, only we see it as taking slightly different forms. If we have never fallen to the 'immediacy' nonsense of Healy, it is only because for us nothing is ever immediate. The real has been that we have a more passive, waiting conception of our role, living inside the Labour Party as citizens rather than as 'infiltrated' warriors from the revolutionary class party of the future.

The current document completely ignores the necessary back-ground, the still dominant upswing of world capitalism, and the fact that the undoubted crisis of British capitalism is relative, 'secondary'. The expectations of a mass left wing ('beside which the Bevanite movement would be small') are only grounded on blatant distortion of the level of consciousness of the existing movement. It will all begin through sheer 'socialist' disappointment with Wilson's government! We even have a false picture of Wilson's election campaign in the document which was published during the actual campaign!! - all to bolster our illusions in the situation in the and the Labour Party. (Incidentally, nothing shows the closed-in, unreal world of the leadership better than their inability to describe accurately something going on in front of them!)

The purpose of this section is to discuss the conception which we think the leadership holds of what a perspective is. It may seem odd therefore that we begin by taking them to task for being bad prophets - when our differences hinge on the fact that for Marxists 'perspectives' is not a matter of prophesy. But that's just the point. How ludicrous their conceptions are, is best seen against the record of their past expectations. They try to reduce Marxism to political stargazing, sitting in the Labour Party looking out on the world, seeing their only responsibilities towards the future as being the maintenance of the general Marxist conception of the inevitable convulsions of capitalism. Looking out over the horizon, keeping their general expectation in their minds they sink to the worst form of impressionism. This is seen in

the documents where whole sections (see the very start of the 1966 document) are just reproductions of old newspaper headlines. Wishful thinking, on the state of British capitalism, the level of socialist consciousness of the labour movement, etc., etc., takes the place of serious analysis. And whatever the expectations the practical conclusion for us remains unchanged.

By colouring up the socialist consciousness of the masses and the Labour Party members, by actually distorting the election campaign of Wilson. This is then assumed to be on the verge of disappointment and thus a potential beginning to the radicalisation. (Movement there has been and we can expect it to increase. But to expect the 'mass radicalisation' or its beginning against the current background is nonsense. Our task is to see reality and clearly and attempt to build on its possibilities. Instead of doing this the leadership, as usual, generates illusions in manna from Heaven ...) This is quite false. The anti-socialist, indeed anti-working class nature of the face presented for election by Wilson is ignored because it would call for some actual thinking (as opposed to the ritual playing of some worn old records) by the comrades.

Neither is there a crisis sharp enough to catch the system and its would-be reformist parties in a vice making them clearly visible to the class, which would be compelled by circumstances to seek for solutions - to demand answers. They operate with a conception of the Labour Party as an absolute regime of crisis: but nowhere do they establish this clearly.

QUIETISM

'Don't do anything now - big struggles are coming', is the message (as it has been for God knows how long). But the British situation now is similar to Belgium at the end of the 1950s. The same possibilities seem to exist and also the limitations. We forgo the participation, the gains possible in the limited struggles now - for artificially created illusions in the Labour Party and the situation in general. We opt for dreams of easy gains in the near future, in preference to active struggles now.

We are hardly more rational than Healy, and we differ only in our characteristic slogan - 'wait', counterposed to Healy's - 'act'. As a perfect inversion of the SLL we lack even what justification they have: their militancy. Looking back (to go no further than 1959, the beginning of the current SLL phase and our document "Perspectives of Entryism") this has been the essential difference between ourselves and the Healyites. We have differed essentially on our conception of what our basic expectation obliges us to do. And that is why, despite the antics they have engaged in and which have destroyed so many people - they have emerged as the British Trotskyist group (Ted Grant may not recognise them - but everyone else, particularly the many militants who have moved towards 'Trotskyism' in the last ten years, does.)

Reading the documents those available published since say '57, one gets a definite picture of deterioration, (and not just literary standards). Increasingly do we remain confined to estimation. General outlines of what would happen in the most favourable circumstances alternate in paragraphs with cautions: soon - but not quite yet. Incongruously we find talk of flexible tactics; talk of the future bloody struggles into which the movement will be plunged - alongside the immediate practical conclusion - wait! We are forced to take it that such phrases are abstract, ritualistic, the property of certain people in the group, which they bring out on Jubilee occasions, or which constitute the subject of a reverie.

Seen as things in themselves (this is surely what they are for the leading comrades) the documents sometimes contain abstractly "correct" gleanings and memories from the books, but nowhere are these matched with their immediate practical conclusions; one would expect to find here plans, preparations for participation, leadership, insistence on organisational and ideological clarity. Instead we have the ill-matching, perennial advice - wait.

And this 'wait' is the reality of the group, and not the phrases about flexible tactics or what the leading comrades say when pressed. This 'wait' is the conception and practice of the members and the group as a whole. This permanent 'wait' - not the practical immediate conclusions one would expect alongside talk of flexible tactics. The Bolshevik approach of searching for the necessary practical activity that will aid, assist and condition the looked-for events is completely absent. Just to mention the prospects for a reflection of pressure by the bureaucracy, as the 1966 document does - without a characterisation of these people, what they are capable of, what we must do when they move - is the most glaring political lack of the RSL. We are not opposing the need for estimation of trends and possibilities; neither do we deny that in certain conditions some of the lower echelons of the bureaucracy would go over to the proletariat. But the union bureaucracy is like the petty bourgeoisie in relation to the workers. They will be attracted, if at all, by conscious strength.

But in a spontaneous upsurge they could go along and form a centrist drag on the class - unless there were a Bolshevik force to deprive them of the dominance of the movement. Only in such conditions could detached sections of the bureaucracy play a positive role: i.e. only on condition that they were auxiliaries, under the discipline of the class organised around the Bolshevik columns. Again it must be pointed out that the leading comrades' idle speculation on a future progressive role for these people prevents us from creating the force necessary for a positive outcome in the event of their moving.

In practice there is no serious attempt to relate 'our perspective' to concrete events, to evolve tactics that are appropriate to it. The leading comrades have an approach which sees ourselves as not so much active participants in the process that they in the footsteps of the great Marxists, expect, as passive 'fellow travellers with events', albeit the designated 'beneficiaries'. The Labour Party is a train and we are travelling on it. It will take us part of the way, when 'objective events' will enable us to change to the more conventional 'centrist train' and so on ... All the time we expect to get bigger until the final train will be our own. Meanwhile we must hug the Labour Party tight and engage in no struggles that can be avoided, and confine ourselves to propaganda which is necessarily abstract. Struggle? Adventurism! Unless it is against other groups who try to struggle.

A STAGES THEORY

The central core of the leading comrades' expectations is the theory of the future mass left wing. Their documents always follow a recipe. Begin with a general consideration, perhaps a bit of history, then go on to an immediate impressionistic picture of the current situation: political 'small change'. Then we reach the catalyst, which is the stages theory and the prospects for the mass left wing. They deny us any practical role on the basis of this; always the conclusion is 'wait' and each time we become less capable of doing anything else.

As a Bolshevik group, the tiny remnant of a once mighty revolutionary force, they are ultra conscious of our own weakness, and for them this next stage has the same importance as the expectation in Russian Social Democracy that the next 'inevitable' 'stage' after Tsarism, was a bourgeois republic. In their estimations the comrades, as did all the Russian Marxists, base themselves on the past experience.

The differences that divided the movement were on just what this 'inevitable' 'unavoidable' road of development meant in practice for the Marxists. The anti-Bolshevik factions contented themselves with a general estimation of events, a mechanical expectance of a repetition of West European experience, more or less exactly.

The Bolsheviks always insisted on a concretisation, a concrete analysis, an active role for the proletariat even in the bourgeois revolution. And this a role that would transform and deepen the nature of the revolution, as a result of the alliance of the proletariat and peasantry in a radical, Jacobin type revolution that would sweep away all the old feudal garbage, and clear the way for the next stage in the independent march of the proletariat - this as opposed to acceptance in advance of 'big' bourgeois hegemony, which would have meant a bourgeois revolution that retained a large proportion of the old forms, and would thus hinder the proletariat in the future, and consequently be the most favourable for the bourgeoisie.

MENSHEVIK PEDANTS

There isn't space to deal with the facts of the disputes - these are easily available. What we must understand about the tragedy of the Mensheviks is that its essence was their method: their conception of Marxism as scholasticism and passive contemplation, and their accommodating approach to reality to flowing from this. They didn't fight to prepare the future, to attempt to march ahead of the class - but accepted, 'worshipped' and then began to rationalise: they tailed after classes and events. Many of the Mensheviks were excellent theorists, if by theory we mean just scholasticism: pedantic, computerised commentating on living events rigidly squeezed, however uncomfortably, into abstractions and patterns of the past, took the place of creative Marxist struggle to build a force that would be able to act as a conscious proletarian vanguard in times of fluidity.

Despite the subjective intentions of men like Martov and the theoretical giant Plekhanov, their perspective bound them to the bourgeoisie. Basing themselves on a rigid, formal scholastic perspective of Russian developments, 'correct' according to the written word of the Marxist fathers, the Mensheviks failed to keep reality under review and gradually lost touch with it. They preached a mixture of abstention and subordination (abstention as far as revolutionary proletarian class politics went) to the bourgeoisie for the workers, and bound themselves in practice by their false analysis to such an extent that they became tied to the 'liberal' bourgeoisie who are seen as the pre-ordained leaders of the inevitably bourgeois revolution. They had no hope of a really independent role, or even existence, in the sharpened conditions of the revolution. They could not change their perspectives as the Bolsheviks did in April 1917. They were tied to the bourgeoisie by too many threads and connections built up over a long period. These threads were all unravelled from the same skein: their abstentionist, platonic, waiting-on-events conception of the perspective they drew from past history.

The Bolsheviks, despite proceeding from the same estimation of the basic character of the revolution as the Mensheviks, counterposed revolutionary action to abstentionism, creative concretisation of their orientation to the placid Menshevik reliance on the bare abstraction (bourgeois not socialist revolution), proletarian independence to subordination; sharp ideological and organisational demarcation to hazy blurring of differences; distinct revolutionary working class politics to reformist adaptation: - and finally, on the basis of the clear situation, the Bolsheviks organised power for the proletariat and the Mensheviks began their attempt to substitute for the bourgeoisie.

Ted Grant's conception of waiting on events, of a rigid two stages (and more) process of development, has the same effect on us as had the analogous 'theory' of the Russian Mensheviks. And for the same reason: because they interpret it as passive waiting for us, all initiative in the hands of others - careerists, bureaucrats, fakers. It blurs and distorts their view of events, and everything else. Everything takes on strange shapes for them; they are like a sick man condemned to lie permanently flat on his back.

ANALOGIES ... AND METHOD

Comparisons can be illuminating, but of course any analogy taken too far collapses. This analogy is startling because of the almost complete set of parallels between the anti-Bolshevik groupings in the period leading up to the Russian Revolution, and the RSL. And they are not mere parallels, stretching on without ever meeting. In both cases the policies, estimations and practical orientation result from the same method of thinking. The same scholastic, platonic and undialectical materialism is what unites the leadership of the RSL and their Menshevik forebears. The writings of Lenin, particularly the earlier material, are studded with analyses of this centrepiece, this central thread which linked the Economists with the Mensheviks, the Mensheviks with the Liquidators and so on.

If the comrades want to argue: 'That's not so at all, the differences were certain prognoses, proposals, reactions to certain events', then they must remember that these things were constantly changing. But, as Lenin wrote (?1912) the basic dividing line established with the Economists emerged time and again in various forms, under the pressure of different events, until the two streams found themselves on opposite sides of the barricades in 1917 and after. We must look for a deeper explanation, one of method, for the practical evolution over the years of the trends which had at first been separated only by nuances of approach. Throughout the various struggles Lenin clearly delineated the basic question, the question of method, initially against the Economists and then against the various categories of the post-Economist opportunist groups. (The leading personnel of these groups were often the same people!) Bearing this in mind, similarities in method between Ted Grant and the non-Bolshevik factions are far more startling because more basic, than those empirically sighted analogies on stages theories, and serve to reinforce these analogies.

And this answers a question that arises naturally here: is there any point in going over all this in such a sketchy fashion? In the space it is not possible to take up the concrete cases - but anyone who doubts that the comparison is justified (and adequate) or who wants to take refuge in this 'defence', should go through the earlier volumes of Lenin's Collected Works.

If the basic thing in Marxism is its method, the 'constant' applied to nature and society fermenting and changing continuously, in accordance with laws uncovered and given the name Marxism, then we are really saying that the most vital thing about the Marxist classics of the past is that they exist for us first and foremost as concrete examples of the application of the Marxist method by its greatest masters.

And this is a second reason for bringing in the Russian experience. The relatively short few years of the Russian labour movement prior to 1917 is best documented, despite Stalinist distortions of aspects of it, in the history of the class. We have the writings, dozens of volumes, of the greatest thinkers since Marx and Engels, devoted to analysis and discussion of this experience. And finally came a day when the revolution passed judgement on the preceding period; showing just what it had all been about, clearly separating the accidental from the essential.

Contrary to what the leading comrades seem to think, the forms, the verbal formulae forged by Marxists at one stage to portray reality, are not Marxism: Marxism needs a clear precise terminology as do all sciences; but since language for Marxists exists to portray changing reality then there is always a great danger of sclerosis, of a parting of the ways, of the reduction of Marxism to a computerised selection of past expressions of the Marxist method as applied to a concrete situation - in lieu of, as a substitute for a new concrete analysis. That is the lesson of the Menshevik-Bolshevik controversy, and we think it can be shown that it is likewise with our Group.

Our long term perspective and our estimations are necessary arbitrary, necessarily based on expectations of a more or less exact repetition of past events, of which there is no guarantee, least of all as to the exact nature of their re-occurrence. Here it is worth recalling Lenin's comment on certain Left Mensheviks:

"What strikes one is their slavish imitation of the past. They all call themselves Marxists, but their conception of Marxism is impossibly pedantic. They have completely failed to understand what is decisive in Marxism, namely its revolutionary dialectics". ("Marx-Engels-Marxism", p 547) The extent of the comparison with the Menshevik is truly amazing. Our 'bourgeoisie' is the 'left' bureaucrats. We extend recognition to them as a legitimate formation, and the leadership says that it is only 'formalists' who balk at such things as our collaboration in expulsions by the bureaucracy. Our 'Marxism' is just as scholastic, just as platonic, just as Feuerbachian: we make our epochal prognosis and then wait - on the left reformist movement, or rather on the change in the political temperature that will produce this. Not that the RSL is inactive; but our activity is routinist, dominated by Labour Party reformists and the machine. As far as our own revolutionary politics go, we wait, keep them separately packed and compartmented and only let out as dried out formulae.

In practice, whether necessarily so or not, we wait passively. The corrosion of Trotskyism is such that we fall to the level of repeating the Menshevik experience. On a small scale, in changed circumstances - but then history's 'second (?) edition' is usually farcical, as Marx observed. Farcical, but it also promises to be more tragic. In Russia the work of consigning the Mensheviks of all the various drafts to the rubbish heap of history was performed by Bolshevism and didn't cost the class its head. There is no Bolshevik party in Britain: the building of such a party is OUR responsibility.

NATURAL SELECTION IN POLITICS

A programme is not a thing in itself. Neither are formally adhered to ideas. They do not exist in their own right. Ideas, and phrases originally associated with them, can be filled, sponge-like, with a wide variety of contents. What a stated political idea, conception, really means, really represents depends on its relationship with its environment, on its context, its role in the ferment currently going on. Ideas, even the most revolutionary and formally correct at one time can play a reactionary role at another; and dehydrated platonic ideas, whose 'flesh and blood' 'is' in the future, lend themselves particularly to this role of cover for alien content.

Behind the ideas of Martov, Axelrod and company there took place a natural selection, which proceeded outside the control of the easy-going Mensheviks (only the Bolsheviks attempted sharp, conscious control), and this natural selection necessarily reflected the real pressures and impulses within Russian society, instinctively felt.

Political orientation is not just formally stated ideas, but a complex of class pressures, temperament, experience and then ideas. The others will condition the practical importance, interpretation of the ideas, even the most 'revolutionary' ideas.

(For example, Marxist ideas won't have at all the same meaning or urgency for the average skilled and comfortable worker as for individuals and groups in the class who have "the taste of slavery in their mouth" (Connolly's phrase). Whole layers of the highly skilled and comfortable workers in Russia stood with the Mensheviks in their emptying of Marxism of its revolutionary content - even after October.)

Quite contrary to the intentions of the 'theoreticians' their movement became a vehicle for all sorts of bourgeois influences: behind the generalised and more and more demonstrably false perspective which gave the leading role to an ever more unwilling bourgeoisie there accumulated people for whom the theories were a mere cover. The people like Dan were the 'hard' Mensheviks, who sheltered under the pontifications of the Martovs. Responding to social pressures of an alien sort they held with rigid doctrinairism to their exploded conceptions - even when these led them to try and substitute for the lagging bourgeoisie and turn squarely against the workers.

In 1918 when he was approached to become titular head of an anti-Bolshevik government, Plekhanov declined with the comment that after serving the workers for 40 years he couldn't now shoot them down even when "they are following the wrong path". Very commendable. But here we have a chance to see how a false perspective rigidly adhered to links up with reality and the subjective intentions of its holder. Plekhanov's followers, i.e. those who had assembled after a form of natural selection behind and under cover of the rigidly scholastic 'perspective' adhered to by the Mensheviks were not so scrupulous. The Dans were less passive than Plekhanov: they did shoot the workers down.

Our perspective, our expectations of the trend of events, will only be Bolshevik if we see it as conditional on certain achievements on our part. If it becomes an excuse for the line of least resistance, for taking the 'soft option' then we are doomed. Already there are quite serious signs that we are so falsely bound to the Labour Party perspective that we consciously impose rigid limitations on our own activity, crippling limitations on our own development as a force sensitive and mobile enough to be relatively independent of the Labour Party.

Disturbing events have already shown that the abstract (platonic) and rigid application of our expectations ('perspective') of the stages theory have allowed a natural selection with the Labour Party environment where we appear as a respectable non-right-wing alternative to the SLL (and even the Labour Worker group! [forerunner of the SWP - and then the ostentatiously "moderate" wing of the Marxist left]), which augurs badly for the future. Some of our comrades are quite willing to 'shoot down the workers' i.e. others militants. There are a number of examples of members, people on the periphery, and (still close) former members seeing themselves as being at liberty to do a housecleaning job for the bourgeois Labour Party machine, on other militants who had a different 'perspective' (or a different idea of what 'a perspective' is) - without repudiation from the leadership - in fact with their open support.

The affair could be relegated to the field of psychiatry if it involved only Mani [the RSL member on the spot]. Unfortunately the whole movement came out to defend him. Violently insisting that no act of principle was involved, they went a fair way to making defence of this unstable person a principle in itself. Their principle. Without going into details the most shocking thing in this defence is the credit the leading comrades take because Mani (is said to have) persuaded the Labour Party to do the expulsion for "hooliganism", and not as they were intending, for political affiliations! So our role is to be Public Relations men for the bureaucracy!

We are aware that we risk provoking many comrades to a sense of outrage by raising Wandsworth again: but that's just the point. Not only by natural selection, but by the education of practice and events as they occur, does the leadership's

conception of 'perspective' as placid waiting deep in the Labour Party (saving our souls by mumbling abstractions), with the necessary practical actions that flow from it - have a harmful effect. The strings - of habit, conception, accommodation - that tie us to the present level of the movement are very numerous and will prevent us reorganising it ...

Comrades educated by such incidents as Mani (there are many more incidents that can be cited) will never build a revolutionary Bolshevik Party of militant fighters against the bourgeoisie and all its agents.

(This is not the place to examine it in detail but one of the most prominent features of the revolutionary socialist movement today is its fragmentation: there is a profusion of groups each with its prophet, each one with 'ownership' rights on some aspect of revolutionary communism; a sort of political equivalent to the territorial divisions that rent the empires of the ancient world at the time of their decline. Thus the State Caps [the forerunners of the SWP] make a fetish of 'workers control' as the RSL does of 'nationalisation'; (there is an absolute parallelism here as both ignore the central question - the state) the Healyites overstress the activist voluntarist combative elements of Bolshevism, and we overstress the so-called objectivist approach of quietistic commentating spectators. There are many more examples. This one-sided overemphasis is yet another barrier to the future reintegration of the fragmented forces of communism in a comprehensive mutually complementary party. And the terrible thing is that it is self-fostering, self-perpetuating, this one-sidedness. Comrades will no doubt have come across SLL people, for example, who tell you about their experiences of the terrific militancy of certain workers etc., etc.; and their own incomprehension of this, because their experiences are in a quite different, less enclosed environment where the air is less rarefied. And that is the key to the one-sidedness, the growing away from each other of groups which began with a shared programme and merely differed on the aspect to emphasise. Your initial orientation will largely determine your experiences - and in turn your experiences will reinforce the initial direction of activity. This seems to be the root of the extreme degree of polarisation of the Trotskyist movement. The decision that the Labour Party is everything (or will be everything) means we start walking along a certain road ... The initial decision will lead to the Labour Party dominating our consciousness which will then reinforce the first step. We will recruit people in the Labour Party environment, and over a period these will become the dominant element. The Labour Party environment will be their only experience - and gradually, in certain conditions of the absence of a serious conscious striving by the supposedly highest pinnacle in the group, the centre - gradually the necessary detachment is lost ... what began or was originally said to be (see appendix) a tactic ... becomes something of principle. That is why a continuous conscious clarification from the centre is paramount - why we must keep everything continuously under review, fight routinism) (See Section 2)

OPTIMISM - REVOLUTIONARY AND OPPORTUNIST

The expectations of the leading comrades are adopted in toto from the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky; only in the demoralising experience of the past period they have become somewhat eroded and vulgarised. The Bolsheviks too regarded themselves bound inseparably to their environment and all their perspectives were based on an estimation of certain changes in the objective situation they found themselves in. There is very little that we can do to change the objective situation that we find ourselves in, but there is a great deal that we can do to affect its future development. For us it becomes a conscious effort to prepare a revolutionary force that enters as an active element into the given environment. For a Marxist a 'perspective' is a conditional estimation which is a guide to action and conditional on the successful outcome of that action.

How sharply we have veered from a correct Marxist understanding of what is a revolutionary perspective is seen clearly when we compare our own documents with Trotsky's essay in producing a 'British Perspectives' document - the final chapter of "Where is Britain Going". Written in the 1920s when there was still good reason for Bolsheviks to retain some of the revolutionary optimism of October, Trotsky never descended to the light-minded 'optimism' of our leading comrades. He would have regarded such 'optimism' - minus the practical activity to make it a reality - as a cover for opportunism.

"Most unstable and unworthy is revolutionary radicalism which finds it necessary to keep up its morale by ignoring the dialectic of living forces in economics and politics alike ..." (First Five Years, volume 2, p 303)

Trotsky too has an optimistic expectation from the future - but he clearly sees this as dependent on the emergence of the then tiny Communist Party as the leader of the British labour movement. And even this is not seen as 'inexorable', 'inevitable', or anything of the sort but it clearly depends on the subjective qualities of that party. There is no talk of inevitability, of a positive outcome for the working class from the fact that the existing tops will respond to pressure from the masses - as they did in 1926.

Yet our leaders who call themselves Trotskyists have retreated from disappointed "hopes" and misunderstood perspectives behind the unMarxist expectations of great things falling into their laps from the sky, with little or no effort on our part. They get drunk on the long-term historical optimism of Marxism in this state fail to take the necessary steps to ensure that favourable outcome.

"Perspectives" for the leadership amounts to the sort of great expectations which "exist" for imaginative gamblers. Creative activity doesn't enter into it and there is no bridge between the present and the future. We repeat: this conception of perspectives has nothing in common with Marxism. For Ted Grant perspectives is passive estimation; we see it as a guide to conscious activity. A number of quotations will establish this more clearly and demonstrate what was Lenin's conception.

GRAMSCI

The leader of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci, directly discussing the question of perspectives in his fascist prison cell wrote:

"It is certain that to foresee means only to see well the present and the past as movement, i.e. to identify with exactness the fundamental and permanent elements of the process. But it is absurd to think of a purely objective foresight. The person who has foresight in reality has a "programme" that he wants to see triumph, and foresight is precisely an element of the triumph. This only means foresight must always be arbitrary and gratuitous or purely tendentious. Moreover one can say that only to the extent that the objective aspect of foresight is connected with a programme does this aspect acquire objectivity. 1) Because only passion sharpens the intellect and co-operates in making the intuition clearer. 2) Because reality is the result of the application of wills to the society of things ... to put aside every voluntary effort and calculate only the intervention of other wills as an objective element in the general game is to mutilate reality itself. Only those who strongly want to realise it identify the necessary elements for the realisation of their will." (The Modern Prince, our emphasis)

At the turn of the century an "economist" critic of Lenin's approach wrote a letter which was published in Iskra, then still dominated by Lenin.

"The drawback ... (of Iskra) is the extreme importance it attaches to the influence that the ideologists of the movement exercise upon its various tendencies. At the same time it gives too little attention to the material elements and the material environment of the movement whose interaction create a certain type of labour movement and defines its path, from which the ideologists in spite of all their efforts, are incapable of diverting it, even if they are inspired by the best theories and programmes ..."

Lenin: "... an ideologist is worthy of that name only when he marches ahead of the spontaneous movement, points out the road, and when he is able ahead of all others to solve all the theoretical, political, tactical and organisational questions which the 'material element' of the movement spontaneously encounter ... To say however that ideologists (conscious leaders) cannot divert from its path the movement created by the interaction of the environment and the (material) elements is to ignore the elementary truth that consciousness participates in this interaction and creation. Catholic labour unions are also the inevitable result of the interaction of the environment and the material elements. The difference, however, is that it was the consciousness of priests ... and not that of socialists that participated in this interaction."

I.e. by our tailism, by keeping rigidly in line behind the spontaneously-risen labour movement, by not continuously finding an active role for the 'conscious element' - ourselves - organisationally and in practice as well as in propaganda for the final programme, we "mutilate reality" by depriving the evolving process of conscious Marxist activity; we abandon the class to the bourgeoisie and their agents. We declare ourselves impotent in advance and the act of doing that makes it so.

A perspective is either an arbitrary estimation, limited to the subjective ability and more important the historical viewpoint of the foreseer, an idea of an inevitable mechanical interaction of defined other elements, or it includes an active attempt to participate in the developing reality, on the basis of estimations (which thus acquire real objectivity for the participant) of the objective world. Conscious perspectives are always for a minority, an advanced section of a class, and for us, as a tiny splinter from a mass party (temporarily) eclipsed by historic events to see it only as a question of a gigantic outside world moving according to laws which we try to define and in directions which we try to guess at in accordance with past experience is suicidal, a mutilation of reality. It is true that we are small and on no account should we exaggerate what can be done immediately; but the leadership reduces our activities to abstract propaganda inside the Labour Party, rigidly refusing to struggle organisationally. To trust completely to a spontaneous ripening to do our work for us, as do the leadership in practice, is not a Marxist conception of perspectives.

TROTSKY'S PREDICTION...

Ted Grant has said that "Marxism is the science of prediction." It might have been an accidental formulation, or even have been 'taken out of context' - but it is clearly Grant's real conception as we have seen. The most brilliant piece of Marxist "prediction" was, of course, Trotsky's prognosis made before the 1905 Revolution that the future course of the revolution in backward Russia would place the workers in power. In the event it was brilliantly confirmed.

But if we analyse it we have to reach the awkward conclusion that had it been left to just Trotsky's prediction, estimation of possible developments, then his prediction (which post facto we can see to have been very accurate) would not have been correct at all.

Trotsky's estimation stopped at the broad general concept - the working class will be forced to take power. He did not concretise it sufficiently to be able to see the significance of the internal contradictions in the working class and its political groups - to see that the clarifying, tempering work of the Bolsheviks in building up a combat party was the to-be-or-not-to-be question for his estimation. Trotsky made an estimation and a forecast - but it was Lenin who prepared the forces to make it more than mere possibility. And of course he did this step by concrete step without having Trotsky's long term bird's-eye view. The Bolsheviks, because of their serious, active determination to do the revolutionary tasks that could be seen as necessary on the basis of the real situation as it evolved, did not find the lack of a long-term prophetic blueprint fatal; the revolutionaries won the internal party struggle in 1917. The Leninist "algebraic formula" of the "democratic dictatorship of proletariat and peasantry" sufficed to enable a party to be built that could survive a change in basic perspective - because the concrete 'tasks of today' had been properly attended to all along. Trotsky, minus the Bolshevik party and despite having predicted the possibilities accurately, would (on his own estimation) have been helpless in 1917. Had it remained just an estimate - it would in retrospect now appear a false estimation. Had it remained just a general outline, and had Lenin not built the Bolshevik party, we would know of Trotsky as a man who advocated workers' power in an upsurge of the class in Russia during World War One. The class would have been defeated and the Trotskys would have gone down as 'utopians'.

To the end of his days Trotsky maintained that the major credit for 1917 was Lenin's: he recognised that it was Lenin's preparatory work before 1917 that made his own foresight a reality: "... the significance of the subjective factor - the aims, the conscious method, the party - Lenin well understood and taught to all of us ..." (Permanent Revolution)

In his last period this conviction made Trotsky defend the Bolshevik conception of the combat party, against which he himself had struggled for so long, from attack and adulteration by 'friends' and enemies alike. A "perspective" without a serious fight for this kind of Party he saw as being as viable as a production of "Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark!

... AND GRANT'S ...

We see the big turn in the future as inevitably taking the form of a mass left wing in the mass workers' parties, as post World War One, and to some extent post World War Two. The European radicalisation, post World War One came under the influence of the Russian Revolution and it was this that permitted the mass centrist currents to be transformed to mass revolutionary parties (some of them anyway). But we must assume that any future left current will be faced with a similar situation as were the Italians, post World War Two, with Stalinism as a block, poisoning the developments, playing their accustomed role of abortionists of History. (It is impermissible to take for granted the disappearance of Stalinism from the scene in the near future - particularly if this is used to excuse us from preparing for the worst.)

Thus the only hope of transforming a future centrist movement even the most promising, would rest on the pre-existence of a serious cadre party - which can only be built up over the years in limited struggles, being tempered and educated and growing with developments. If this is true then our current accommodation to the existing movement will prevent us playing a positive role in the future centrist mass movement; our current peaceful coexistence with the bureaucracy will get obstacles to realising our perspective, preventing us from making the necessary preparations. Our interpretation of the 'perspective' as passive waiting on events will frustrate our expectations ...even if objectively things develop exactly as predicted.

"Perspectives of Entryism" argues that had there been a Marxist tendency in the Independent Labour Party in the 1930s then the basis for a revolutionary party could have been laid. What if that 'Marxist tendency' (in the past or in the future) were like the RSL?

In "Centrism and the Fourth International" Trotsky recorded that centrists [half-revolutionaries, half-reformist] are willing to accept the most extreme conclusions in words provided they have room for manoeuvre and backsliding - and can avoid commitment in practice. The big job of a Marxist tendency in a centrist current would be to insist on practical conclusions, on revolutionary consistency. 'Revolutionary' phrases would be as cheap as water in such groups in the sort of conditions we envisage. But the RSL itself today is satisfied with the most platonic declarations, the most vulgar abstractions, the most routine, accommodations forms of activity. Anyone who assumes an automatic adjustment by ourselves doesn't deserve to be taken seriously - and only wits (or Peter Taaffe) will bring in the analogy of ... 1917. Such adjustment, when it comes will be the result of a conscious struggle.

If we glorify the movement today - what would the leadership not say about the 'mass centrist current'! As it is today the RSL would not raise the level of the centrist current; it would be swallowed up and contribute to the morass. Those who wanted to argue for concretisation in relation to practice would be likely to face a united front of the ex-reformist centrists ... and comrade Grant! (This is not a slander in view of the current showing of the group.)

Our perspective is an estimation of events: we must consistently work out our role in these events. We have the agreed task of building a league of revolutionary Marxists. We are separated, more or less necessarily, from other groups with the same aim and similar precepts by our expectation of the trend of developments, towards which we then turn our faces and ... wait. "Renounce stereotyped formulas when discussing specific problems!" We live in one stereotyped formula and there is a consequent effect on our practical work.

Unless we devise appropriate tactics all talk of our grandiose perspective is just self-mockery. If we take it for granted that there is some necessary connection between our success or otherwise in assembling cadres and the objective conditions, we must also admit that the line of demarcation will only be established in practice. That the struggling and attempts to test the real environment by activity is a beneficial thing in that it tempers the movement. It must be understood that it is not possible to rely on abstract, platonic estimations for specific local situations, and also that all experience is not a thing of the past to which we must slavishly submit - and least of all that all past experience has been adequately assimilated beyond the need of further consideration or discussion.

FINDING THE LINK

Two more quotations are necessary to establish what a Bolshevik conception of perspectives really is.

"It is not enough to be a revolutionary and an advocate of socialism in general. It is necessary to know at every moment how to find the particular link in the chain which must be grasped with all one's strength in order to keep the whole chain in place and prepare to move on resolutely to the next link"

(Lenin, Works, vol. XXII, p 466)

I.e. practice is the decisive thing. Not the ability to speculate (and all talk of perspective without the most rigorously serious approach to practice is speculation) but the ability to find the necessary practical steps, successive links in the chain of the necessary development of our concrete revolutionary practice. It is not enough to know that we must wait for the broad masses to move towards us, but to know what to do in the necessarily limited conditions of today to prepare step by step, link by link to be able to serve and lead that mass movement when it begins. Too close a connection, too practical a commitment to the mass movement today will make us just as helpless as before the great mass upsurges of the class that are inevitably coming, as were the Mensheviks. It is inevitably coming - but its victory is not inevitable. Speaking sharply, the victory of the class tomorrow depends on the preparatory activity of the vanguard today. And we are only the vanguard in so far as we do prepare.

If we hold with Lenin in 1905 that in times of sharp crisis under the pressure of the environment the vast masses of the proletariat approach revolutionary socialist consciousness, then we are admitting that the condition of the working class today is anything but that, that for example the level reached in the Labour Party (!) will have to be superseded, shed like so much dead skin if the class is to go forward. We are therefore saying that the "Marxist groups" of today have more in common with the future of the class than with its present. Our task is to prepare the future. Our future is to be the highest embodiment of the interests of the proletariat, its most advanced consciousness and the skeletal structure of the class as an active revolutionary force.

It is necessary to be with the class at all stages of its development from now to the revolutionary future: but a too organic a connection with the political and ideological conditions of the class as it is today and even as it progresses to a higher stage can divorce us from the class at the future highest pitch of development. However that may be it will certainly prevent us preparing that development. The vast masses of the proletariat only periodically reach the highest, sharpest awareness of class society, instinctively, and can be defeated and thrown back for decades - therefore our debilitating accommodation to the broadest movement today can be disastrous for the proletariat in the future. Our tactics, our connections with the broad labour movement, must be very subtle, very flexible. It is just not sufficient to make a broad generalisation; we must search for the successive links in the chain.

MARXISM ON CREDIT

Writing a preface to Bukharin's "Imperialism and World Economy" in 1916 Lenin made some points which allow us to get some idea of the essence of the Bolshevik approach, of the connection between our expectations and our practical day to day activity. Lenin polemicised against Kautsky's theory of 'Ultra-Imperialism'. Kautsky argued that a period of supra-national peaceful ultra-imperialism was being ushered in by World War One, and that this coming period was the one where the working class would come into its own. Meanwhile the task was to survive as well as possible, avoiding sharp breaks and sharp struggles ...

Lenin: "We have any number of promises to be a Marxist sometime in another epoch, not under present conditions, not at this moment. For tomorrow we have Marxism on credit, Marxism as a promise, Marxism deferred. For today we have a petty bourgeois opportunist theory - and not only a theory - of softening contradictions ... In practice he who denies the sharp tasks of today in the name of dreams about soft tasks in the future becomes an opportunist. Theoretically it means to fail to base oneself on the developments now going on in real life, to detach oneself from them in the name of dreams ..."

We too look to the future when we will have soft tasks, while today we denounce groups that attempt to struggle as "crazy", "petty bourgeois", "ultra-left", etc., etc. The sharp task of today is to assemble in the limited struggles possible, a cadre organisation, tempered and educated in action, and capable of developing as the struggles grow. If we continue to defer this to a remote and largely mythical future when it will be supposedly easy, we are adopting a Kautskyite, centrist position. Such a position has its own logic, leads to a process which changes the character of the organisation, emptying our phrases of meaning - this irrespective of anyone's intentions.

When the big events do occur, in which the 'Kautskyites' had promised to be revolutionaries, they are always to be found looking off into the horizon to the manana-time when it will be made that much easier by a further ripening of conditions. We must abjure dreams and base ourselves on the struggles now going on in real life.

These are limited and are not all to be found inside the Labour Party, and are not all confinable to the mass movement. The essence of the present situation is that the struggles are limited and involve minorities. It is crazy not to recognise this fact as the SLL experience shows, but again we have the familiar antipodes since in practice the result is the same if we interpret this to mean that there must be absolute subordination of the militants to the at present backwards mass. It is impossible to limit within the bounds of the organisational forms now existing, the tasks and activities of that Party, however small it may be, which epitomises the highest consciousness of the proletariat. To do this with the justification that a broad sweeping estimation has already been made about future developments is sheer irresponsibility. A broad general expectation on which everything is staked, all trust is placed and no preparations made (in Trotsky's phrase 'no tracks laid') for alternative developments or unforeseen variations, is not the Marxist approach. We only justify ourselves in making broad prognoses if we "do the tasks of today." That task is the building of the RSL as an embryonic Bolshevik party fighting on all fronts.

We have a general idea of how things will develop: how will we, as an organised cadre-force, fit into it? In "Where is Britain Going?", written in the mid-twenties, Trotsky put forward an idea of a possible rearrangement of the labour movement in Britain in which a compact, highly organised Communist Party would slot into the framework then occupied by the Independent Labour Party [At that time the ILP current - MacDonald, Snowden and others - despite being small, was hegemonic in the Labour Party]. Maybe the future development will emerge as something like that? Maybe the future radicalisation would produce a situation where that would be the most favourable rearrangement? Perhaps this will be our relationship to the developing centrist current? The point is that a variety of developments is possible and we will only avoid idle speculation if we attend to our own tasks, i.e. our own self-development.

"Without a perspective it is generally impossible to arrive at a far-reaching revolutionary policy. But our prognosis cannot be mechanistic. It must be dialectic. It must take into account the interaction of objective and subjective historical focus. And this opens up the possibility of several variants - depending on how the relation of forces shapes up in the course of living historical action ..." (Trotsky, First Five Years, vol. 2, p 301)

We will only be able to respond to the situations as they emerge if we are a compact, ideologically clear, uncompromised force. We will never succeed in building a strong cadre organisation if we interpret 'our perspective' in a way that amounts to tying our own hands.

Trotsky: (in the event of Fascist victory in France) ...

"Under the least favourable hypothesis, the building of a revolutionary party would mean to speed the hour of revenge. The wiseacres who duck away from this urgent task by claiming that 'conditions are not ripe' only show that they themselves are not ripe for these conditions." (Terrorism and Communism, introduction)

We have had to make this section a point by point discussion rather than a straight forward exposition. A summing up is called for, then.

TO SUM UP

The mere idea of a long term perspective (a conception of the main direction and tempo of developments, absolutely necessary for any intervention by the conscious force) does not, as the leading comrades in practice assume, absolve us of the responsibility to understand the concrete detailed developments the mechanics of the day to day work out of which we have to evolve our short-term, necessarily much more flexible, empirical, subtle perspective - i.e. our practical activity. It is vitally necessary to consider the relation between our long-term perspective and our practical work - the long-term estimation must be seen as conditional on certain preparations being made, on our ability to concretely 'ferret-out' in practice the necessary links in the chain in day-to-day practical struggle. We are not abstract philosophers in watch-towers a la Deutcher, nor vulgar philosophical materialists who see it as merely a matter of contemplation - but Marxists for whom the task is the changing of history, the philosophers having interpreted it quite sufficiently to enable this to be done.

The conscious activity of the proletariat must be seen as the point, the great 'unknown' that transforms all the so-called objective factors that we can map out. We are the advance guard of that class consciously trying to prepare the point of intervention. A conception of perspectives as just 'objectivity' defeats, acts against our task. It is a vulgarisation of

Marxism on perspectives. The fundamental weakness is that the presently conscious element is reduced to commentating. The source of the mistake is that the leading comrades content themselves with mouthing the long, epochal perspective as a substitute for the hard job of working out concretely our practical detailed tasks to assemble a force to fight step by step for our perspective.

In so far as it is a matter of method, the source of the mistake is a failure to understand the elementary law pointed out by Trotsky and the other founders and leaders of revolutionary socialism many times: that the different spheres, though finally reducible to the basic laws of the motion of matter, have their own laws, peculiar to themselves, making them what they are.

The need to make the 'descent' from the sweeping generalities to the concrete particulars such as how to assemble and temper the cadres on whom our perspective depends has completely defeated the old leadership. They have rationalised this situation to the point where 'perspectives' is now seen as a matter of an automatic process and the appropriate tactic amounts to waiting for the ripening process to be completed. On the concrete questions such as these we find Ted Grant messing around with the largest possible paintbrush where the sharp point of the etching-needle is the only tool!

For our leaders as for the original 'Marxist' centrists, taking refuge in generalities means accommodation to the practical reality (Lenin on failure to do the tasks of today, etc.) This failure to express our basic ideas in practice, this failure to fight to find the appropriate unity of theory and practice in the concrete situation is rationalised and in turn reacts back and changes the unconcretised generalisations into sheer vulgarities: there is of course at all times a possible unity of theory and practice - appropriate practice.

This idea has been caricatured into idealist nonsense by the SLL. They take it as being an immediate thing that there is a 'one-to-one' relationship, that 'practice' in this formula means the ideal, most appropriate, most advanced for the theory - as if it were purely a matter of will. For us this must mean that the unity of theory and practice proceeds step by step, in line with the objective ripening. But this means that as we 'do the tasks of today' at each stage, then we enter positively the 'objective' process, evolving organic connections with it until we can finally 'dominate' it. It means that 'objectivity' is not a thing apart which we view contemplatively, searching for the trends.

Objectivity for us is a process into which we enter with the purpose of changing it; (recognising that we are in it anyway and have the choice of a conscious positive role - or a negative accommodationist one of abandoning the field to bourgeois reformist influence) increasing our scope as we interact and evolve with it. It means recognising no inevitable progress towards a given preordained point - but that what happens in the future depends to a large extent on our conscious efforts. It means recognition that 'objective' ripeness is a contradiction in terms, quite impossible unless it also includes 'subjective' ripeness - of a class-conscious proletarian force. If the SLL tend towards idealism here, we, as usual, provide the opposite pole of vulgar 'objectivism', seeing it as a matter of spontaneous ripening. It is necessary to reject the idealism of the SLL, but let the comrades not hide their own absurdities behind that. Far too much of our politics is based on anti-SLLism; the leadership think it enough to trot out the stock stuff against the Healyites when faced with any criticism 'from the left' (a very relative term). There will undoubtedly be an attempt to saddle us with the sins of the SLL on this question - the comrades will have to think again, however.)

Faced with the task of concretising in appropriate practice the broad generalisations of the Marxist teachers, the leaders of the RSL take the line of least resistance and content themselves with parroting mechanically the prophetic optimism of a Marx or a Trotsky. Dressed up in the ill-fitting robes of the prophet they still tell us what 'history' is preparing, what the 'irresistible forces' will compel into existence. The tragedy is that the prophets have, in general, played their role on the stage of current history: the vacant part now is for action; the onus is on us to bring to life the expectations of the teachers, to help into life the potentialities of our time. History will compel ... but history can only work through people ... and she is badly served if those available get the roles mixed up and insist on playing at 'prophets' on what 'history' will do in the ripeness of time - as an excuse for shirking their part now that the time for a serious beginning is more than ripe.

VULGAR MECHANICAL MATERIALISM IN THE PAST

APPENDIX A. HOW THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PARTY COLLAPSED

"Perspectives of Entryism" contains an admission of certain mistakes by the leadership at the time of the collapse of the Revolutionary Communist Party [1949]; but these remain unexplained for our instruction. The explanation as it stands in one word: 'inevitability'.

This line is both a typical example of the vulgar approach of our leaders - and the starting point for our 'confidence' in some future mechanical inevitable growth for our tendency: we have a big future just as inevitably as we have come to a pretty small present; we who understand the trends of development, who have a correct grasp of reality. Decline was inevitable, so too will be the new resurgence: rationalisation from the past commits the old-timers to this line and the younger generation are miseducated on this *reductio ad absurdum*, this vulgar caricature of Marxism. The mechanicalism applied to the future is dangerous and debilitating: it weighs heavily on the movement.

That there is some automatic, reflex relationship between the basic events of the period, the beginning of the capitalist boom, the growth and expansion of Stalinism, and the fate of a British proletarian party of 300 members is a ludicrous idea: a conception of Marxism held and propagated only by the ignorant and the hostile. The Trotskyists in the world didn't collapse to the same extent as its main section in Britain did; Healy didn't collapse (we may point to his wrong immediate expectations, but that begs the question couldn't we, free from such limitations, have been expected to stand up even better?)

The big parties embrace a large section of a class which is rooted throughout society and thus have a quite direct contact with the ebbs and flows of the basic social tides, such as the economic ... even here it is not an automatic reflex. But for a group of 300 (500?) people, and these the self-proclaimed most conscious group of the class, surveying the situation from the high pinnacle of Marxist theory erected out of all the experience of the past - nothing of the sort holds good. If Ted Grant thinks so he is on the same ground as those who say Marxism teaches that everything, from a work of art to all the activities of a given capitalist, has a direct connection with economic self interest! Likewise the idea that the unexpected vigour of Stalinism should so dishearten 300 Bolsheviks that they died or changed their coats out of sheer funk - this also is a caricature. Admitting that the pressures existed and realistically could have been expected to claim certain people - the remainder should have been tempered and strengthened.

The choice for British Trotskyism at the end of the 1940's was either retrenchment or collapse; either digging in of heels or liquidation; either determination to hold on to what had been gained or prostration. The Revolutionary Communist Party collapsed into the Labour Party and its members scattered in all directions. WHY? The question of political consciousness is obviously the key, and the handle of that key the consciousness, the conceptions of the centre of the organisation, its political brain and heart, on the responses of which depended the fate of the mass of the party in the unexpected situation.

A similar situation was faced by Bolshevism in the period after the defeat of the 1905 Revolution. There too a response of a large section of Social Democracy [i.e. in the terminology of the time, the Marxist movement] was liquidationism; essentially an emptying out of the revolutionary content of Marxism, an accommodation, the line of least resistance in relation to the given situation. The Revolutionary Communist Party went the way of the Liquidators, and anyone who doubts this has only to consider how hollow in practice have now become the remaining shells of Trotskyist ideas, preserved as dead shrines by our own Mensheviks. Again - why?

The Revolutionary Communist Party died of heart failure alright, but it was first and foremost the heart failure of the centre. In the crisis period this was the most demoralised element in the party. The centre collapsed, failed to lead, to organise the cadres to do what could be done in the given situation - as a preparation for tomorrow.

Those people who still peddle their Menshevik platonic optimism refused to fight seriously to maintain themselves as a serious force active in the process leading to the upsurge in the future; they let the Revolutionary Communist Party dissolve, and they surrendered to Healy and Pablo because they felt that it just didn't matter. If there is any argument about this it will be possible to re-publish a document which was circulated by the present RSL leadership in 1949, which expresses complete indifference to the future of the movement.

Echoes of this can still be found in "Perspectives of Entryism". The leadership exaggerated the existing pressures like a magnifying glass the sun, and ensured the demoralisation of the movement. Read the many letters etc. circulated by individuals and small groups in the last period demanding that the leaders lead, that some serious orientation of the party be attempted! But the leadership was the most demoralised element in the organisation; the Revolutionary Communist Party was dying of the fright and heart-failure of the central leadership.

It's important to raise this now, as it would be very fruitful to go into detail and establish just how much of our passivity and expectation of mechanical developments start from rationalisations of this period. At the same time we would need to examine just how much of the leadership's conceptions of our role as passive abstract propagandists are spun from their sheer "infatuation with their own inadequacy". The comrades today operate with an idea of History as Santa Claus, gathering gifts for their future. If there was a similar conception in the 1940s, those days when documents were entitled "Preparing for Power!", is it any wonder that the effect of the unexpected reality at the end of the '40s was so shattering - above all for the leadership?

However that may be, now standing as a barrier to the future are the rationalisations, the emptying of revolutionary content from the dried-out phrases of 'the books', the accommodations of the last 15 years, the effect on the Marxist 'eyesight' of the old leadership after the long period in the Labour Party darkness - and the fact that this blurred vision appears congenital to many of the new generation: all this stands in the way of a serious preparation for the future.

An automatic response to events is assumed for the future, as it is used to explain the past. The future is conditional on our activity - but the self-satisfied rationalisations of the leadership compel an approach which explains everything in terms of 'objective' inevitability. If we admit that we owe something to the people have kept the organisation going we must also see that the dominance of mechanistic conceptions, a result of the past experiences and failures, definitely

now stands in the way of future progress. Here too there will be no automatic readjustment. It becomes a matter of conscious struggle.

(NB. Actually, the limited progress made by the group over the past period, partly by default, shows how much more could have been achieved, and exposes the sham nature of the explanation trotted out for the 1950's, at least.)

APPENDIX B. THE ORIGINS OF OUR ENTRYISM

The disagreement we have with the leadership partly concerns how to apply the entry tactic. We have made certain criticisms and implied what we think are the correct alternatives. Closely connected with the question of the Revolutionary Communist Party, is the following: how did the RSL adopt the entry tactic in the first place? After all, there was a five year fight with Healy on this very question [In the late 1940s Healy advocated that the RCP should enter the Labour Party, while the majority leaders - Jock Haston, Ted Grant and Tony Cliff - looked to the direct growth of the RCP]. Ted Grant may be correct in saying that 'in theory' they accepted 'the possibility of entry at some point', but since this was anyway the epochal perspective it is insufficient explanation for its application as a tactic then, and this to has been admitted by Ted Grant in "Perspectives of Entryism".

Actually they didn't accept entry as a tactic at the time, but as a refuge, lacking in any immediate perspective. Having fought against it for five years, a section of the Revolutionary Communist Party leadership (Haston) finally accepted it as a means of surrendering all responsibility to Healy. At that time the Fourth International correctly denounced any confused scuttling into the Labour Party as Liquidationism. Faced with this situation the people who later founded the RSL refused to decide either way: they avoided fighting the open Liquidationists like Haston with the formula which "Perspectives of Entryism" partly reproduces - outside = no hope; inside = not much hope (see the document).

"Perspectives of Entryism" says: the majority of the Revolutionary Communist Party were right. The conditions for fruitful entry just weren't there in the Labour Party, and the Healyites had a completely wrong perspective.

Then there is an amazing jump (p 4): "However, once the Revolutionary Communist Party had dissolved and all the forces of Trotskyism were inside the Labour Party..." They were right against Healy - then suddenly they have adopted the same stance and are inside the Labour Party! An amazing jump which "Perspectives of Entryism" records ... without comment. Once inside ... "The problem of how to work in the Party and with what perspectives was very vital one. It is necessary to understand that our own forces are too weak to create a Left Wing of mass proportions." i.e. having collapsed into the Labour Party we declare ourselves impotent - and this in practice meant willingness to work against those like the Healyites who didn't quite agree with our quietism, and had for entryism (on a false expectation of developments, certainly) as a positive policy of entry to do a certain job; entry as a tactic, seeing the Labour Party as a battlefield for the forces of Trotskyism rather than an old folk's shelter. We 'adopted' entryism not as an active policy but as a place of retirement, where we could await the "big historic events". It is not irrelevant or mere mudraking to raise this: our present conception of entry, our actual practice of entryism still bears all the mark of its origin.

"It is true that the conditions, as Trotsky outlined them, are still not present. But it would be the height of stupidity to abandon the work in the Labour Party now and launch into 'independent' adventures after a decade or more of work there. The conditions for independent work are not favourable either. Whatever may have been gained by remaining independent in the past, tremendous (why necessarily tremendous? SM) gains cannot be expected in the immediate future. For any such gains would be disproportionate to the future possibilities in the Labour Party" ("Perspectives of Entryism", 1959)

In other words; we shouldn't be here really, and it's too painful to talk about how we got here, and we don't know where to go: we can't go back and we can't go forward - so we'd better stay here where we have fallen for who knows anyway, for all we know, it is quite likely, sometime in the future, to be the most favourable position. Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the fact that we collapsed into the Labour Party and the sheer helplessness before events, almost consciously stated here, of the founders of the RSL. Bolshevik retrenchment? Preserve what can be preserved? Fight outside (1949) - or go inside and fight? NO! The only fight has been against people who drew sharp conclusions, the Old Folks peevishly pushing out the 'rowdies' so that they may safely wait in peace and quiet ... for their future life. This is one of the origins of the leadership negative anti-SLLism.

At first sight when we compare the two positions of the SLL and the RSL they appear to have somersaulted 100 percent during the last twenty years. Actually in so far as basic approach goes they are self-consistent. Healy entered the Labour Party in an attempt to find a positive role. Our comrades entered without perspective, looking for a home, and their rationalisation has been the epochal perspective - i.e. a mass radicalisation in the Labour Party on the day before 'doomsday', or perhaps at a stretch the day before that. Having used the long-term perspective as a rationalisation for sitting quiet in the Labour Party, they then thought it sufficient to bring it out each year, dust it, and pass it off as a short term tactic. (See the succession of documents). We don't disagree with the long-term estimation; but, as we have already stated, this must be seen as a guide to action, using the short term tactic as a bridge to the future - and not as an excuse for passivity.

'Entry' to the Labour Party to await the coming of the epochal millennium and the mass radicalisation, thus amounted to 'retirement' from active revolutionary politics: an abandonment of the task of building a party to prepare for this future. They certainly did not join the Labour Party to achieve anything, and even today they still don't think the conditions for entry apply - we are merely there to await the future.

SECTION 4

FORGING THE WEAPON

" ... The most important observation to be made about every concrete analysis of forces is this: that such analyses cannot and must not be ends in themselves (unless one is writing a chapter of past history), and they only acquire significance if they serve to justify practical activity, an initiative of will. They show what are the points of least resistance, where the force of will can be applied most fruitfully; they suggest immediate tactical operations; they indicate how a campaign of political action can best be presented, what language will be best understood by the multitudes, etc. The decisive element in every situation is the force, permanently organised and pre-ordered over a long period, which can be advanced when one judges that the situation is favourable (and it is favourable only to the extent which such a force exists and is full of fighting ardour); therefore the essential task is that of paying systematic and patient attention to forming and developing this force, rendering it ever more homogeneous, compact, conscious of itself ..."

(A. Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, p173)

" ... the presence of a revolutionary party, which renders to itself a clear account of the motive forces of the present epoch, and understands the exceptional role amongst them of a revolutionary class; which believes in that class and believes in itself; which knows the power of revolutionary method in an epoch of instability of all social relations; which is ready to employ that method and carry it through to the end - the presence of such a party represents a factor of incalculable historical importance."

(Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, p18)

" ... The great historical significance of Lenin's policy ... his policy of irreconcilable ideological demarcation, and, when necessary, split for the purpose of welding and tempering the core of the truly revolutionary party ... "

(L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, p 49.)

The fight is therefore to build the revolutionary party

The task is to organise a serious cadre organisation, embryonic Bolshevik Party, as the immediate concrete step in the fight to reorganise the British labour movement. On the building of the revolutionary party in Britain we have a rich, if not always fruitful experience which must be summed up, and which unfortunately hasn't been discussed seriously enough. This involves a discussion of the old Revolutionary Communist Party experience, of the tendency which has emerged as the SLL and of that tendency, originating as the dominant group within the Revolutionary Communist Party, which is now the RSL.

In the abstract three positions on the question can be formulated.

1. The present SLL, "ultra conscious", direct building approach that tries to shoulder the existing movement aside, ignoring the fact that there are good reasons for its survival in its present form. Mechanical analogies with 'Bolshevism' functioning as a sort of myth - ignoring the differences, the virgin territory of the one, the weed-grown garden of the other (the greater complexity of building a revolutionary party on territory with an old-established reformist labour movement, etc.). The experience of the SLL dramatises the situation; the undoubted need to build consciously, and the unfavourable environment which can't be controlled at will, which prevents this, resulting in a caricature quite out of touch with reality. Denying that this is a period in which a limited amount can be accomplished, they go off on mass campaigns and wind up providing empirical proof of the truth they rebel against. Nothing shows this more than their reduction to very young people, and their open proclamation (1965 Conference) that after the age of twenty the masses of the working class become anti-revolutionary! Their 'party-building' now is confined to the Sisyphean labour of trying to divorce a generation of proletarian youth from the rest of the class.
2. The centrist position that sees everything happening spontaneously, a direct machine-like, mechanical relation between working class experience and a looked-for future revolutionary socialist consciousness. The most that can be done now is make a limited, toned-down, abstract propaganda, and any attempt to organise, and seriously attempt to educate a vanguard now, in limited struggles, is doomed, and anyway pointless when it will all happen automatically. The extreme example are the Selbyites. But, in essence, the RSL has a similar position. The flourishes of theoretical absurdity in which the Selbyites indulge are not really essential to their

position. This sort of thing amounts to no more than baroque decoration on a central theory and practice no different from that of our Secretariat ...

3. The view that recognises the fact that we are embedded in a particular environment that can't be changed at will, and that (generally) a spontaneous shift in the class is necessary before anything decisive can be done. At the same time, however, recognising that the steeled revolutionary party is the key to any favourable outcome for the class in the future, and that such a party can only be prepared slowly step by step in the limited conditions that exist to be able to grow in the future - and thus attempting to build an embryo of the necessary party, of the type seen as vital in any upsurge of the masses to ensure victory, and modelled on the Bolshevik Party and early Communist International. Seeing its own future as entering as the decisive factor into the mass regroupment (assuming a correct policy, which allows it to put on flesh as the situation develops), the supremely conscious element, bringing the programme and the organisational conceptions and the crystallised experience of the world struggles of the proletariat, in their most developed form; participating on the three main fronts of the class struggle, attempting to link these up. Its conception of perspective is of building on history rather than Menshevik attempts to impose patterns on it. Entry is seen as a tactic, not a principle or a way of life.

THE DEMOCRATIC CENTRALIST PARTY

But what is this Party? Is it just an accidental sum of individuals who agree to propagate a common view of what should happen in the future? Or is it qualitatively different from what usually passes for a group or a party? We think it is. Let us examine it.

THE WEAKNESS OF THE CENTRE IS A POLITICAL QUESTION

As individuals our comrades are involved in the different sectors of the labour movement. What is lacking is clearly the central leadership: the national organisation that raises a sum of individuals and raises them qualitatively into an organisation of Bolsheviks. The character of the centre is decisive for the nature and quality of the whole organisation. The centre must be the pinnacle of consciousness and the embodiment of the tradition of the movement. If we are to be conscious of ourselves as an independent political force, of entryism as a tactic rather than a routinist adaptation, if we are to conduct the Bolshevik fight against all accommodation to bourgeois ideology - the centre is the key. The drive, elan, combativity of the organisation, its will to fight, its political responsiveness is necessarily conditioned by the centre, the theoretical and organisational power-house. A stream cannot rise higher than its source. The question of the centre is not just a matter of one and a half full-timers or merely a technical problem - it is a political question. The signatories have at various times raised the demand for more technical improvements at the centre, and there is certainly room for this. But it is obviously no longer enough. On its present level politically any amount of technical improvements would not produce the necessary change. To explain, as is usual with the leadership, the political inadequacies as a result of lack of resources, is to reverse cause and effect; it shows a completely wrong conception of the relationship between politics and organisation. We must begin by being politically adequate and from this beginning consciously generate, call forth an organisation and resources to enable us to fulfil the political demands that the objective situation makes on us. To take the approach of the leadership is to wallow in the worst subjectivism. If we wait until we have a dozen full-timers etc., before we accept the political responsibility to attempt to lead, to become involved (as a group, not just as individuals) in the day to day struggles of the class and the various socialist groups, then we are doomed to wait indefinitely. What is needed then, the only possible new beginning, is a political beginning.

SUBJECTIVISM

In the last Internal Bulletin Peter Taaffe (?) aims a 'blow' at those of us who have recently attacked the political and organisational inadequacies of the centre:

"A bulletin must reflect the movement. Leadership comes from the rank and file as well as from the 'leading' comrades on the Secretariat and National Committee. We have never subscribed to that concept of leadership beloved of the ultra-lefts" (July Internal Bulletin).

The writer must be congratulated for having the grace to put "leading" in quotation marks; we think such a qualification should be employed when ever we speak of "leading" comrades! (but why ultra-lefts? Do we not call the State Caps [forerunners of the SWP: at the time they were vocally 'anti-Leninist'] ultra-left? And what conception of leadership do they subscribe to?) It has been alleged in this document that a great deal of our current practice derives from rationalisations of the leadership, who have allowed this corrosion of Trotskyism in deference to their own inadequacies. Here we can actually see the process at work: a new 'branch' begins to bud on the cancerous growth that has sapped the strength of the group for so long. We can actually see the crystallisation of a 'new' (?) attitude, born as with so many of the approaches of our leading comrades, out of sheer self defence. (Another recent example of presenting weakness as virtues - the glorification of a 'soft' centre at the June National Committee).

The trick is simple. If the writer is advocating rank and file initiative he is of course correct - but he obscures the issue by a blanket use of the word 'leadership'. Thus he attempts to shed the responsibilities of the centre, in support of an

attitude of self-indulgence. Where everyone is leader, how can anyone dare take Ted Grant or Peter Taaffe et al. to task for such lapses as on the seamen's strike?

The sheer irresponsibility of spreading this sort of confusion is also typical. This is the sort of thing that has reduced the group to the point of invisibility as a political force and which has allowed the worst features of Healyism to become identified as Trotskyism by the labour movement.

In Section 2 it was argued that our task is the establishment of a democratic centralist party. In such statements as that quoted from the Internal Bulletin the leadership of the group deny this task - but first and foremost do they deny it in practice. We must therefore ask what a democratic centralist party is, and measure the group as it is against this model.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership arises within parties and classes because of unevenness of development; all people haven't got the same training, the same experience, the same inclination, the same drive. We, when we develop a revolutionary party, aspire to have that party as a whole, as an organism, function as the leadership of the class. Likewise within the party, albeit on a higher level, there is a repetition of the unevenness. Here too unevenness of development means sharp differences in consciousness, political understanding and above all in serious commitment to the preparation for the proletarian revolution: certain people emerge who embody the best - consciousness, the drive, the organisational propensities necessary to the party. And of course there is a 'hierarchy' down to branch level. Even in groups (e.g. anarchist) where leadership is regarded as original sin it can be seen how de facto certain people always dominate, either generally, or in particular fields. Unlike the anarchists, Bolsheviks recognise this. For us consciousness is the vital spark, the beginning, and this means not only recognition that leadership will evolve but that leadership, the most conscious political centre, is the most important element. We recognise that specialisation and concentration develop people, that only by such serious revolutionary leadership can the revolutionary party keep abreast.

For us leadership is not an evil - we frankly recognise that in this period of unevenness of development generally, there must be a division of function, a delegation of authority, and this must be on the basis of ability.

REVOLUTIONARY PARTY THE KEY

Let the anarchists bemoan this; let the State Caps deny it; let Ted Grant take refuge behind the SLL caricature - history shows the need for a special type of revolutionary proletarian party, organised in a special way. Let those who want guarantees from history shudder in fear lest a highly centralised party aid 'degeneration' in an unfavourable future: the organisation of single cells into multi-cellular bodies gave rise to the phenomenon of death - it also made life as we know it possible. Melancholics may bemoan that the organisation of the human body implies death: we content ourselves with observing that no body equals no life.

For us in politics the Bolshevik party is like the body. It also has the advantage that degeneration is only possible in certain unfavourable conditions. But modern history shows that no Bolshevik type party in times of crisis means no revolutionary life for the proletariat.

'But', the comrades will ask: 'is all this really necessary, in an RSL Internal Bulletin?' We think that, unfortunately, it is. Such things as the paragraph in the July Internal Bulletin are neither accidental nor meaningless. Neither is it accidental that a member of the Secretariat can respond to talk of leadership by accusing us of wanting to teach the workers to suck eggs. The conception of the Bolshevik party which is a basic idea of the Fourth International has receded so far into the distance for our leadership, it has become so meaningless in practice, that all talk of the revolutionary party has now become a mere platonic ritual. The attitude expressed in the Internal Bulletin represents the real practice of the leadership - it therefore represents their real position. The organisation must no longer be content with platonic declarations from them - we must demand practical demonstrations.

Side by side with vulgar mechanical ideas of the centre - ideas which amount to crude determinism, we have its necessary concomitant: the implied idea of a full spontaneous ripening of the working class. This leads to our practice of passive waiting on this ripeness; which in turn leads to a disparagement of the role of conscious activity, of the Bolshevik combat party. (For these people it exists, if at all, in the future; here and now it is non-existent even in embryo - how then can it exist in the future?).

There are people, such as the Cliffites [proto-SWP], who explore this attitude theoretically and appear to believe in some absolute ripeness (see Tony Cliff: International Socialism magazine, autumn 1960). Despite their garbled repetitions of the position of Bolshevik Trotskyism, our leadership have in practice exactly the same position. In fact, practically, they go much further in this direction than the Cliff group, (which also seems to be reconsidering its former position) [In 1968 the proto-SWP would switch back to calling itself 'Leninist', 'Trotskyist' and 'democratic centralist'].

There are those who look back over the past 50 years and say: 'The workers were defeated - "immaturity"; capitalism has developed tremendously since then, despite sharp and very costly downswings including World War Two; it has given birth to a virtual second Industrial Revolution, despite all the continuing contradictions - which proves that, in

keeping with Marx's axiom that no social system ever disappears until all the productive forces contained within it are exhausted, it could not possibly have been overthrown.'

Those who take this line belong neither by temperament nor outlook to the work of preparing the proletarian revolution; at best they can be well-wishers and describers of the process: in no case can they join or build an organisation that proposes to march boldly onto the highway of history and play an active part.

Also they distort history, they confuse and reverse cause and effect. The West European workers have not failed to take power because capitalism mystically contained within itself hidden seeds of future development, these seed being protected by some Guardian God even in times when capitalism was prostrate: no, rather, capitalism continues, because the working class, impelled by the monstrous convulsions of capitalism (particularly and initially after World War One) revolted and were betrayed and delivered up to the reactionary butchers by their own renegade apparatus. Neither was the degeneration in the USSR inevitable because the revolution itself was a world-historic accident hopelessly premature and inescapably doomed; this degeneration being aided, speeded, by the structure of the Bolshevik Party. Rather was it the absence of such democratic centralist parties in the West, to fight the apparatus that was the product within the European labour movement of the past era of conservative accommodation to the status quo. This absence it was that ruined the European Revolution and left the successful revolution in isolation to degenerate and sink into the backward Russian mud.

That capitalism could pick itself up again, in time, out of the troughs that have included the betrayed and defeated proletarian revolts, is easily explainable by the nature of capitalism itself - in the nature of its development mechanism it experiences periodic booms and slumps, expressions of its inner contradictions: beginning in 1914 the same forces led to such catastrophic events that the continued existence of the system was in question. We have briefly considered the results; the point is that the very depth of the crisis, its social wastage, played the same role for the system as the earlier, smaller blood-lettings, the slumps which cleared the way for a new boom each time.

That this has also meant a continual, indeed very rapid, development of technology is also in the nature of capitalism. At the cost of proletarian blood and degradation in ever increasing quantities, capitalism has survived and sometimes 'prospered' in the last 40 years. It is difficult to think of a likely situation of inexorable crisis, out of which West European capitalism, the most dynamic system couldn't survive.

But side by side with this the recurrence of crises where the overthrow of the system becomes again possible is inevitable. Only an atomic war could remove the inevitability of such recurrences. The revolutionary party is thus the key. Those who deny the primacy of the combat party - in theory or in practice - work against the force which will be decisive for victory even in the most favourable circumstances.

THE PARTY IS A LIVING, FIGHTING ORGANISM

The democratic centralist party is conceived as an active, functioning organism. It is not an accidental conglomeration of individuals or of so much democracy, so much centralism etc added up, but an organic fusion of these things into a higher unity. Each member is a cell, and there can be no dead, inactive cells. This aspect is absolutely vital both for centralised activity and for full democracy. A combat party, strongly centralised, can have no dead-wood; its function is to prepare, organise and fight the class struggle; it is an army on the march (Lenin: "the column of steel"); its measure must be its will and ability to respond to events decisively and sharply. This means that the central leadership, democratically elected and controlled, must be in full position, having been appointed as the highest active consciousness, to give directives which are binding. To do this effectively it must know exactly what resources are available - and where. Unless it knows as near as possible what forces it can muster, then even an approximate calculation (to be submitted to the test of practice) is not possible i.e. Bolshevik-type activity is not possible. Centralism demands an active membership.

DEMOCRACY

Likewise, democracy also demands an active membership. Inactive members, dead cells, poison a living organism - and they certainly poison a living Bolshevik organisation's democratic life. Only an organisation with a fully active membership can be fully and consistently democratic. Look at all the organisations of the labour movement. Some members are active, the majority are not. The leadership is only there by default and, through cliquism, self-perpetuating. Differences in experience etc in organisations where only some members are active allow some groups to dominate, allow the passive members to be manipulated. How can passive members be directly involved enough, be sufficiently in tune to appreciate all the issues?

The function of a democratic centralist party is to usher in the future. In the matter of an active membership it must antedate that future. The bane of working class organisations is that the pressures of daily life under capitalism for the workers prevent full interest, full activity on their own behalf by the masses - even where formal democracy exists. Lenin proposed an immediate shortening of the working day, irrespective of the economics involved, because he saw this block on the self-activity of the masses as a terrible barrier. We can observe its effects in the unions and Labour

Party now. The revolutionary Bolshevik party, existing here and now with all the pressures of capitalism, must, if it is to perform its function, overcome the pressures sufficiently to enable it to have an active membership and a conscious democratic life. We must be able, by our consciousness of our responsibilities to create such conditions for ourselves, ahead of the masses of the class, or we will never lead that class out of slavery. Only those who seriously devote their lives to socialism, who organise their lives around the single purpose of fighting for and with the class can be revolutionary socialists of the vanguard. It is a hard logic - but one imposed by an equally hard reality. And it is this reality, with its tremendous pressures, dragging us down to accommodation, that we must rise above and overcome.

Only a fully active membership can be an approach to a guarantee of full democracy. Members who are fighting actively know that every turn, every twist of the leadership, every lapse of the centre has a direct immediate bearing on themselves, that their local work may be ruined by the national leadership. Consequently they will be vitally concerned with what goes on. They will be compelled, as they value their party and its work to keep everything under review, to decide, take a position on every issue to the best of their ability.

FLEXIBILITY

As we have seen democratic centralism is not a measured quantity of both - but a dialectical fusion. A flexibility of both aspects is part of its structure: the flexibility of steel. Depending on the environment and the tasks which it consciously works out and sets itself, it is capable of the most rigid discipline (imposed by the political authority, established by the practical leadership of the centre) needed to fight the bourgeois state, and of the flexibility needed for the fullest possible democracy in the given situation.

It is capable of working underground without democracy, or in conditions of full democracy: full democracy prepares the way educates and disciplined the organisation to enable it to transform its structure underground when forced to. The original Bolshevik party is of course the classic example of this. It was able, from 1903 onwards to respond organically to conditions where no democracy was possible and, when conditions permitted as in 1905, to expand like a great plant, broadening its base, generating the fullest democratic life: then once again in 1907/8 it faced rigid retrenchment.

CENTRALISM

Without centralism there can be no practical revolutionary activity. The function of a democratic centralist party is political action (or preparation for action). This must be as effective as possible, bringing the fullest weight of the whole party to bear on one given point which may be decisive. This is only possible with strong central leadership, closely connected with all the local branches by strong organisational sinews; it is only possible where dissenters accept a duty to carry out in practice majority decisions. And this in turn is only possible where such internal relations exist that decisions are arrived at democratically: that the minority's 'submission' is seen, by both sides, as really a submission to the test of events.

This is the second co-efficient of democratic centralism. No democracy equals no unanimity of action, no confidence in the directives of the leadership. Trotsky compared democracy here to oxygen, i.e. not a liberal fetish but a functional need for an organic party such as we have in mind (and which could be done without for a period, in exceptional conditions, but at a cost). Democracy, in decision, in equality of rights for majorities and minorities; in the complete 'neutrality' of the party machine in face of internal differences, played the vital function of allowing the party to live and grow and adapt and change aspects of its line where necessary.

Minority rights played the vital function of preventing monolithicism of line; the 'leadership' wasn't God-appointed, functioning with papal pretensions to infallibility, but its positions were submitted to experience; its abilities to practical demonstration. Minorities were loyally active dissenting (obviously within certain limits) groups which were potential alternatives: they were reserves, accepted and preserved as such by the party as a whole. The mutilation of this by the Communist Parties was possible only by the installation of hacks who had no position except of dog-like regard for the slightest flicker of an eyelid by the Soviet bureaucracy - the Dutts, the Thorez, the Togliattis.

REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY

Lenin said: "No revolutionary ideology means no revolutionary practice." Without revolutionary Marxism there can be no consistent fight to build the democratic centralist party. Without a conscious fight for Marxism, necessarily the job of the highest pinnacle of the movement, the revolutionary centre, the would-be revolutionary party will find itself inevitably accommodating to the broad labour movement (and in the final analysis capitalism) in practice, and it will find its supposedly 'revolutionary' ideas ever more compartmentalised, ever more 'prayer' like: ever more "a credo and not a guide to action."

The ideological front is the crucial battle-front in the laying of the foundations and the building up of the democratic centralist political organism which the class absolutely needs. A vital part in maintaining the status quo of capitalism is played by traditional ideology: only a crude 'materialist' would minimise the importance of ideology in cementing the ties between masters and slaves in capitalist society. Engels pointed out that it was only in the field of ideology that men

became aware of the conflicts that take place in the material world. It has been said many times that ideas assume the power of material forces when they grip the masses. And this does not only apply to correct ideas - it applies even more to the illusions.

The prerequisite of a revolutionary party is to break decisively, clearly with all bourgeois ideology. We must fight against all fully developed bourgeois ideology and in the working class movement in particular we must fight that ideology which springs up spontaneously and which must be classified, after Lenin, as bourgeois, even when it includes elements of a naive 'socialism'. There are no half measures here, no 'neutrality', no abstentionism - we either fight bourgeois ideology or we succumb to it. This fight is first conducted within the party. The party is the instrument for waging the struggle to break the ideological chains that help bind the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. The importance of this fight cannot be overstressed. It is the to-be-or-not-to-be for revolutionary politics.

This is why the question of whether we start with the level of consciousness of the masses is vital for us. We cannot start there - we must start with a Marxist analysis of objective reality. On this clearly established basis, on which our comrades must be educated, we evolve approaches to the different political and non-political layers of the class, necessarily taking into account their various levels of consciousness, remembering that there's not just one - the lowest common denominator - which is the conception of the leading comrades.

A beginning with the average consciousness, which is allowed to seep into our own organisation, is the equivalent of deliberately catching the disease we exist to combat, bowing to bourgeois ideology, which dominates the masses of the working class in one form or another. The use of the word 'seep' is not casual: we exist in an environment, including the labour movement, pervaded by bourgeois ideology. Marxist consciousness is something that must be fought for consciously. To keep our politics to the level of propaganda, bowing to popular illusions, is to capitulate in the vital fight against bourgeois ideological influences on the class. It is to accept a wasting disease of diffusion and adulteration which threaten our own organisation with extinction. It precludes the possibility of a revolutionary party.

The daily grind, pettifogging concern for petty details in the spontaneously arisen labour movement, forever bear down on individuals, forever pressurise individuals and small groups; it is only through collective life, intellectual and practical, of a democratic centralist party, that individuals can rise to the heights of being serious consistent revolutionary fighters. Only thus can individuals avoid being trapped by the routine of the existing labour movement; only thus can individual revolutionaries avoid having their ideas in one compartment and their 'practice' (Labour Party and trade union routine) in another.

Of course the creation of such parties is not a matter of wishes and dreams. The central problem of Trotskyism is that it represents the highest, sharpest formulations of Marxism on theory and practice - and is cut off from decisively influencing the broad masses in the spirit of its full programme. Yes. But the party will be built consciously or not at all - and we must build it: who else is there? Only a fool would think that a mighty battleship of steel could emerge from the foundations laid for a modest house-boat - and therefore we must examine the relationship between what we must do and what we are doing: the dichotomy between the fighting machine which the tasks of the class call for and the modest 'propagandist' activities of the RSL. The centre is the key, as it has been for one and a half decades. The state of the centre prevents the coalescence of our collection of ward and trade union members into a Bolshevik force. Its role is not just not positive: since it is the only centre, it works either for or against a Bolshevik organisation. Frankly it must be said that it works against. The ties that link our comrades together are minimal. The activities of the organisation as such are equally small, our members exist in the broad movement like so many logs from a shipwreck bobbing about in the sea. The major part of our activity is routine activity in the broad movement, with a sort of private sideline in propaganda ... All along the line we must accommodate, go along with the current. Bolshevik activity demands a conscious design, a plan of activity - Bolshevik, not routinist work in the broad movement. Rather than logs bobbing helplessly we must bind together as a raft and attempt to steer our activities consciously: that binding must be, can only be Marxist ideology and a serious democratic centralist organisation ... as it exists the RSL needs to be changed decisively if it is to emerge as a Bolshevik party.

POLITICAL SUBJECTIVISM

We have accused the leadership of vulgar objectivism - of holding a conception of Marxism little different from determinism, and accompanying this a slavish tailending after spontaneity; a removal of all conscious effort, all voluntarism from politics.

We must add the charge of organisational and political subjectivism. The contradiction is only apparent. If it is all going to happen anyway then there's room for self-indulgence on our part. If it's only a matter of 'prophecy', of holding to pre-ordained conceptions, and not a question of organising, tempering and leading a force to enter into the living processes consciously (which don't necessarily have a preordained inevitable outcome at the end) - then the meandering self-preservation at which the leadership is so expert is quite permissible.

Add to this basis the rationalisations of decades and we get a situation where clique self-defence by the leadership takes the place of serious concern for political responsibilities. Democratic centralism becomes a mere 'prohibitive' shield for

the leadership: everything else is forgotten. This is the first thing that prevents a proper, active democratic centralist organisation developing out of the RSL.

For a long time the comrades who have dominated the organisation have not begun their considerations politically. And there is no other basis of Bolshevik considerations. Earlier we used a term of Lenin's: "infatuated with their own inadequacies" - this was not mere abuse. At every turn we see this approach from the older comrades, and the newer and younger ones are both miseducated by this and taken onto a National Committee or Secretariat which functions on this principle.

We see this in the various issues of criticism: the leadership responds not as a political organism conscious of responsibility, but as a clique conscious of the need for self-defence. Mutual forgiveness amongst the leadership is proclaimed as the correct approach. They think a mutual protection society is the ideal formula for a Bolshevik centre.

Instead of a seriously organised Bolshevik force fighting and attempting to function seriously, demanding a minimum level of seriousness from everyone, and a great deal more from the leadership, we get a slack, run-down, sluggish organisation, reduced in practice to abstractions; whose members go every which way with the tides of the broad labour movement, the bourgeois domination of which we exist to fight. The organisation begins always with the mood of the centre, not objective considerations of duties or a revolutionary struggle to overcome inadequacies and live up to our politics.

The national political and organisational ties will become weaker, and the members more firmly attached to the routine of the broad movement - their 'Trotskyism' will become more and more a thing for Sundays and the distant future. Self defence will (as we have seen over the seamen's strike) be capable of calling forth more energy than struggles of the class. The whole tempo of the movement will be geared to the 'leaders' who are lagging behind: there will be no shortage of rationalisations. This subjectivism and cliquism is the opposite of a serious approach - it is the dog-end of Trotskyism.

The limited gains made by the organisation in the last year or so, though partly by default, show decisively the fact that the centre has been sitting in the road for years: and their ideas and methods still dominate.

Bolshevik politics can only be grounded on sharply delineated tasks, on a serious revolutionary will to intervene and fight step by step for leadership of the class. Where this will has collapsed and been replaced by meandering and self-justification, where mutual protection takes the place of revolutionary drive - then no serious Bolshevik organisation will be built.

THE RSL IS NOT DEMOCRATIC CENTRALIST

The task is to reorganise the group. We are not a democratic centralist organisation at all: if it has any meaning for the group, other than something to pay lip-service to, then only its 'prohibitive' clauses - on such things as the right of comrades to disagree with the line of the paper publicly... It is two years at least since the last conference: the so-called Extended National Committees are no substitute - the discussion at these cannot take the place of a detailed written, considered discussion that should necessarily precede a Bolshevik congress.

For healthy internal political life and the forging of the revolutionary party, congresses must be held on a regular basis. We deplore the lack of a congress for two or three years - merely on the excuse of the difficulties of finding a meeting place!

In general there is, despite all sorts of discussion meetings, a lack of serious discussion in the organisation.

Two examples: the ex-Selbyite - RSL unification; the Secretariat presented a *fait accompli* - making it a matter of loyalty for the National Committee members to rubber-stamp the issue. The leadership deliberately stood in the way of a serious discussion of the issues. People who had previously held positions of 100% liquidation of Trotskyism joined en masse and there was no discussion of the issues. A 'fusion' was announced: when it was objected that discussion of the old issues hadn't taken place the 'fusion' was changed to a 'joining', the Secretariat declared itself satisfied that all was well ... and that was that.

A serious centre, eager to clarify and raise the consciousness of the whole organisation, would have insisted on a general comradesly discussion. We can see the effects of this sort of comradesly behaviour in the fact that they can get away with it: a seriously conscious membership would demand clarification. Democracy is not just a formality - it also presupposes a certain level of consciousness. It is the duty of the centre to provoke discussion (not artificially, of course) to develop this consciousness.

Splits and fusions must be undertaken in a fully democratic way - i.e. full discussion of the contending sections or factions must be organised for the clarity of all comrades. Without such clarity the factors leading to division will continue and play a negative role in the building of the revolutionary party. To avoid comradesly discussion with the ex-Selbyites and then to insist on unanimity, on which only the National Committee could vote (though it was an

aggregate) is blatantly undemocratic. That is how not to build a party in spite of the numerical addition to the ranks at the time.

There is an appearance of democracy in the general looseness of the organisation. But this is not the democracy of democratic centralism: i.e. deliberative discussion as a prelude to decisive action. This anything but looseness.

The International: There is also the question of our split with the International [i.e. the current led by Ernest Mandel, called 'United Secretariat of the Fourth International']. We find ourselves excluded from the International without a serious political discussion of the issues. There was a couple of Extended National Committees devoted to very one-sided discussion of some of the issues. No written discussion took place at all. It appeared that attitudes on such things as entryism in Germany were taken up at the Congress - but where did discussion on entryism as a world historic principle take place??? The membership was hustled along by the Secretariat. Comrades may have had the right to disagree but that is not enough. A Bolshevik organisation needs detailed discussion, sharpness and clarity - deliberative discussion, deliberative democracy. It is a scandalous thing that there is no written explanation of the present situation in relation to the International. The document entitled "The Expulsion of the RSL" is at best semi-political. The RSL side is hollow rhetoric, completely unsatisfying. To list the iniquities of Alan Harris and to pose affirmatives in place of negative charges by the Fourth International ('yes, we do have a healthy section', 'no we don't have the same perspective as Healy') is totally inadequate. As revolutionary communists we have a duty to the proletariat, not just nationally but internationally. For a Bolshevik organisation this sort of thing cannot take the place of serious democracy. For us democracy is not just an absence of constraint, leading to general looseness. It is a functional thing, conducted consciously and seriously - leading to practical conclusions. The looseness that passes for democracy in the RSL is not Bolshevik democracy.

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE

De facto we have no National Committee. There exists a Secretariat which hovers without visible support above an National Committee which is always a general aggregate meeting, meets every three months and at best votes as a rubber stamp: where has there been serious preparation for discussion at the National Committee? The quarterly national aggregates are nothing else, despite such titles as 'Political Extended National Committee' 'Organisational Extended National Committee' etc.

If the function of the party is to be the consciousness and skeletal structure of the class, the function of the National Committee is to play the same role for the party as a whole - on a much higher level. The National Committee members must have the highest consciousness, and must be the driving-force, the practical leaders responsible as individuals to the whole National Committee for particular tasks collectively determined and distributed on the basis of a division of labour - and above all responsible to regularly convened and properly prepared Congresses. At present the National Committee has no function at all and is best defined as a form of differential franchise.

RESOURCES

A root cause why so much talent and resources lie fallow in and around our organisation is the absence of a serious programme to harness to the objectively determined and derived tasks - a serious organisational drive. There has certainly been an improvement lately - but let us leave the habit of being grateful for small mercies. Why this lack of a serious drive? This, in our opinion, is because of a capitulation before the objective pressures by the leadership, a feeling of impotence which has been accepted over the years, Menshevik capitulation to the environment, compounded and made poisonous by being rationalised and 'theorised' upon - rather than a Bolshevik determination to fight for what is necessary.

The leadership attribute all defects to 'lack of resources'. But why do we who have had for two decades "a correct orientation" find ourselves so short of resources? Isn't it perhaps the habit that has grown up over the years of rationalising from our own weakness, lowering the objective tasks to our own abilities, to our most easily available resources. In general, as far as resources go we have sufficient to accomplish far more than we do. What is lacking is a centre, conscious of its political and organisational responsibilities, determined to reorganise our resources - human and financial - around a serious attempt to build a Bolshevik cadre organisation, to fight within the existing movement.

We must, if we are Bolsheviks, begin with an objective appraisal of the tasks of a given period, then strive to live up to them: not a lowering of sights - but a raising of ourselves! Criticism and self-criticism, rather than a complacent self-satisfaction that takes refuge in false objectivism, that blames all deficiencies on 'objective' forces, outside the possibility of control, reducing our own conscious effort to the minimum. Finance etc shows this very clearly. Working class organisations have always had a hard time and bitter struggles to survive - and yet have not allowed this to be crippling; from the Herald in 1911, through the Worker to, dare we say it, the technical, organisational, practical successes of the Newsletter!

PUBLICATIONS

In the main publication of the RSL one finds a mish-mash of formally correct slogans and ideas, and these mixed-up with entryist approaches: "Marxism" on the level of "Labour Party legality" - without any clear distinction between entryist approaches and clear-cut Marxist analysis, without clearly establishing the difference between what is objectively true (on such issues as the state, class character of Labour Party etc ... which can hardly be tackled clearly in an entryist paper) and concessions on our part to popular illusions. The mixture of Labour Party illusion and 'Marxist' jargon which fills Militant at the moment is neither entryism nor revolutionary politics. It is incapable of attracting the militants and it will scare away the so-called 'lefts' and Labour Party types because of its dried-out jargon.

Here we have a new synthesis: a centrist segment formed of dried husks of Marxist phraseology filled with left Labour content. The centrists were originally Marxist after all, Tribune is merely left Labour, liberal tinged with Sunday socialism. Dehydrated Marxism threatens always to sink to the level of centrism.

An entryist paper is possible which begins at the level of the average Labour Party consciousness and strives to raise it on certain issues, avoiding open clashes with general conceptions, on certain questions, leaving them unilluminated and unanswered, going along pedagogically with certain mass illusions, utilising the transitional demand conception ...

A certain amount of 'capitulation' seems unavoidable, working in the Labour Party environment appealing to such aspirations of the workers as Clause IV without explaining these things dialectically. This is 'capitulation' in a limited way to certain bourgeois ideological influences in the labour movement with the purpose of taking the workers beyond such ideas. This must be done consciously and deliberately by people ultra-conscious of their own identity and vigorously determined to defend it. And this in turn pre-supposes a serious party, a serious leadership, a serious means of self-education - a publication which clearly and sharply analyses everything from the full Marxist position.

The publications of a communist organisation must be capable of forging a vital link between the vanguard of the class - i.e. the party (or that embryo of it which exists) and the class. The Bolshevik-Trotskyists consider that the publications of the RSL do not measure up to this imperative need.

At the Extended National Committee on March 6th Ted Grant said without qualification that Militant would be the same even if we were an open party. It has already been argued that whether we are 'in' or 'out' changes decisively the character of such slogans as demands on leaders. Ted Grant's statement, which is also contained in 'The Marxist Paper' indicates that the entryist approach is not a clearly understood, deliberately applied tactic but a concept which permeates our thinking and is defended as a principle for all times and all conditions - which is precisely what it has become for Ted Grant.

Ideas, as we have seen, are not 'things in themselves' - neither are publications. On the two issues discussed in Section 2, the legislation question and the sea strike, most of the points we raised evoked the same reply from the leadership and from almost everyone else: 'alright - so that point should have been included in the article'. Take into account the nature of the omissions and this sort of reply will assume its proper significance - a reflection of how far literary and propagandist conceptions of our role pervade the organisation.

There is no denying that we are a propagandist society, and we all know the remarks of Lenin and Trotsky on how many people constitute a 'sect'. But what is clearly lacking is a proper understanding of the nature of revolutionary propaganda and of the organisational work that must accompany propaganda. It seems necessary to discuss what we as a group mean by this. Are we a diluted version of the SPGB playing schoolmasters with the class and the Labour Party, or do we recognise that serious revolutionary propaganda directly leads to limited struggles and is enriched by them, and yet again in turn enriches these struggles? We are not advocating an immediate mass agitational approach. But the diluted Labour Party loyalist/entryist propaganda, terribly abstract and quite Fabian in its divorcement from the basic class struggle, and accompanied by a rigorous refusal to fight within the Labour Party itself, threatens us with absorption in the Labour Party swamp - as a part of its left face.

Our 'propaganda' begins to have less weight than agitation, and is devoid of its immediacy. (Militant also deals with questions of nationalisation in the most Fabian manner, without mention of the state, without demanding workers' control. This is not justifiable on any grounds. It amounts to a break with the communist conception of nationalisation.)

The paper and its articles clearly seen as ends, more or less perfect in themselves - but they are not ends, they are means, weapons in the struggle. The approach that each article must be according to a recipe, and the excuses on the sea strike etc. ignore the fact that literary inadequacies reflect (and generate) practical inadequacies. Our literary productions should be modelled and designed as weapons in our concrete fight. 'Omissions' are not just oversights of detail - the articles reflect the organisation as such. A fighting combat party would demand appropriate literary weapons. Omissions would not be seen so indulgently.

Paradoxically the propagandist concept of the group, that literary productions are all-important in themselves, leads to indulgence towards literary inadequacies. After all - if it's just a matter of form and keeping to set recipes we can always add another sentence next time. At best we reflect the existing movement. But since the papers are not seen as weapons

aiding a living organisation to enter into the evolving struggles, the inadequacies cause no alarm - and there's always plenty of time ... next month (or after the summer or Christmas break).

It is an open question how much of the Militant omissions on the Labour Party, the state etc., are the result of fear of breaking Labour Party legality. We think, on the evidence of the group documents, that there are genuine illusions. However, it remains a fact that these questions could not be fully, consciously, sharply discussed in relation to current events in a paper, for the sort of Labour Party entryism which Militant attempts (though we could 'get away with' a great deal more than Militant does attempt).

It is clear that we must have open discussion and education on these questions. We must have a paper which presents the full Marxist case without concessions in substance to popular illusions, i.e. no concession to bourgeois ideas which amount to a substantial departure from the spirit of our own full case.

The absence of a serious open paper, from a sharp Bolshevik-Trotskyist point of view, is crippling. We must discuss in sharp language both the situation and the tasks of our own movement. This is not, as the leading comrades say, just the task of the 'theoretical organ'. It is not a matter of a discussion on the necessarily abstract generalised plane of theory, but a concrete full commentary on events as they develop. The full lessons must be drawn. Our crystallised theories and ideas must be continually lit up by events.

It leads to distortion, it is political self-castration, to confine ourselves to ideas which are acceptable to the vast labour movement at which we direct Militant. There exists an independent revolutionary tradition, which is a vital capital of any Trotskyist organisation - yet there is a total lack of this in our publications, necessarily so in an entryist paper; and that's just the point - an entryist paper alone is not enough. In a purely entryist paper we can only expose contemporary betrayals by the bureaucracy, as they happen, and then in muted tones. We must expose the whole historical process, summed up in our movement's ideas. At best we allow hindsight on current events. That is not our role.

We need an open paper to appeal to the Communist Party and other tendencies, are to unattached militants in struggle. We want to make it clear that we disagree with the affected contempt of the leading comrades for other revolutionary or pseudo-revolutionary groups. It's all very well quoting Trotsky's advice to move closer to the broad movement in the thirties - but a little incongruous with the accompanying perspective of ones and twos and tens for the next main period. We cannot afford to ignore the Communist Party and the smaller groups with whom we are in more direct competition.

The inevitable illusions expressed in Militant for entryist purposes can and do rub off on our own comrades. We need an open paper to counter this influence. This paper would have an invaluable role for our members, such militants as we reach in the Labour Party, close contacts - and would fight on our common revolutionary ground for the RSL conception against the other revolutionary groups. The 'contempt' of the leadership here is generally interpreted as lack of confidence ...

The production of an unequivocally Trotskyist paper is an absolute necessity, not some luxury which comes second to a semi-entryist university paper ... yet we have no such paper - despite the large number of very young people recruited in the Labour Party, for whom this is so vital. Yet side by side with this situation we have an overlapping (Perspectives and Militant) and generally anarchic state of our publications ['Perspectives' was published by Sussex University Labour Club, then Militant's student stronghold]. Nothing reflects the history of the group more than the publications: the semi-independent local groups and circles of the branches, the practical absence of a serious national centre. If it is its history that explains the present situation - then it is the political conceptions of the leading comrades that allow it to continue.

FIGHT SUBJECTIVISM!

As a general principle: failure to live up to your politics in apparently small things inevitably denotes a drifting away in times of sharp crisis equally inevitably means a break with revolutionary politics. This is relatively true for individuals - for organisations it is absolute. It is inevitable whether the break with Marxism occurs by a passing over the barricades to the other side or by becoming a cover for the enemy by centrist inertia. We must abjure the subjective approach of the centre: we have gigantic tasks and the only politics that answer the needs of the working class. We must live up to them.

FINALLY:

Comrades who come to Bolshevism (Trotskyism) in Britain today are faced with the polarisation between the irrational super activists and the contemplative scholastics perched with their telescopes atop a mountain of press cuttings from the Financial Times - and with the mutilating rationalisations that go with both. This is an artificial, a self-defeating division.

Trotskyism is neither Healyism nor Grantism! Both feed off each other and are one-sided inversions, in their development and now; arbitrary overemphasis of different aspects which should be complementary reduces both to the level of political deformities. Natural selection completes this.

It must be said that Healy and God have something in common: they clearly fulfil a vital need for so many people ... Those who have never had contact with the SLL must have a sneaking suspicion that Healy doesn't exist at all but is the

product of the need of a large number of people and groups for a bogey-man. If Healy didn't exist Grant would have had to invent him a long time ago! In all seriousness, we think they had a large part in creating each other.

In the whole world the only consistently revolutionary ideology is Marxism - the Marxism of Bolshevism and the Third International is today to be found in Trotskyism: there exists no other proletarian communism. We must not fail in our duty to defend this from the adulterations of Grant, as well as Healy.

We repeat that the division is artificial:

REJECT ALL ATTEMPTS TO CONFINE DISCUSSION ON THESE QUESTIONS INTO THE WELL-WORN RUT OF THE SLL/RSL DISPUTES!

FIGHT AGAINST ONE-SIDEDNESS AND MECHANICAL INVERSION!

NEITHER HEALYISM NOR GRANTISM - BUT BOLSHEVISM-TROTSKYISM!

PROPOSALS TO CONFERENCE:

We would be guilty of that for which we attack the leadership were we to leave it at that, without concrete proposals. The rectification will come as a result of a long process the beginning of which must be a serious discussion of the issues we have raised. Discussion takes time which might be expended on direct practical energy. But it is not, as the Stalinists maintain "a luxury". The practical work is conditioned by our ideas and these can only be clarified by sharp and serious discussion. That is the function of a Congress. This is not, as the leading comrades would have it, just another national aggregate - it is qualitatively different. It's true that we must "get on with it" - but the congress is the body which is responsible for deciding the direction in which we must travel, and also for checking the navigation regularly. Organisational changes alone will not rectify the position we have outlined. But a start must be made. We want to put the following before the November Conference as immediate concrete proposals.

- CONGRESS
 1. Reinforce the Constitution, which already provides for an annual conference, so as to make the calling of such an annual body compulsory for the officers of the organisation.
 2. A regular pre-Congress period, to open at least three months before Congress. This is necessary if the Conference is to be prepared for by all the membership in a serious and regular way. During this period all material submitted for discussion must be circulated by the machinery for the organisation.

- NATIONAL COMMITTEE
 1. We need a functional National Committee responsible to Conference, rather than the present conception of the National Committee as senators who are loyal to the Secretariat and can therefore be entrusted with the custody of a vote - and no other function as National Committee members.
 2. The Conference must charge the new National Committee with meeting regularly, at least monthly, and also charge it with establishing itself as a functional body - with division of labour in the running of the organisation; committees for special fields of work; serious discussion on political issues; serious regular discussion on the practical questions of our political activity; one day quarterly for the National Committee to be extended to an open national aggregate, as now.
 3. The Secretariat to continue between National Committees as the executive, meeting weekly, and responsible to the National Committee.
 4. CONGRESS MUST DECLARE THAT THE FIRST TASK OF THE LEADERSHIP IS THE ORGANISATION. ON THESE COMRADES RESTS THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENSURING BOLSHEVIK ACTIVITY BY THE WHOLE GROUP IN THE BROAD MOVEMENT. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THEIR OWN BROAD MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES TAKE SECOND PLACE - PARTICULARLY SO FOR THE SECRETARIAT.
 5. "Organisation Reports" which are a mere quantitative listing of activities which 'have happened', more or less accidentally, over the preceding period, are no substitute for a proper integration of our practice and politics by a serious national centre. AN END TO 'NON-POLITICAL' ORGANISATIONAL REPORTS - THE LESSONS MUST BE DRAWN!

- THEORETICAL EDUCATION

"Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary politics" - It is the duty of the leadership to raise up the theoretical level of the membership. Occasional one-sided discussion cannot be regarded as sufficient - neither can a hastily improvised reading list. Theory is not a self-contained water-tight entity. Theoretical lessons can and must be drawn by our practical activity, otherwise we cannot go forward and 'theory' becomes a fossilised showpiece. TO THIS END WE PROPOSE:

1. Prepared political schools, on a regular national and regional basis, to be supervised by the National Committee; to this end a National Education Officer to be elected by the National Committee.
2. A regular political-organisational Internal Bulletin - monthly or bi-monthly; the Congress to pronounce on this and the Secretariat to be charged by the National Committee with its preparation and circulation.

- PAPERS

In view of all that has been said about our publications we want to make the following proposals for the reorganisation of the resources which are spent on publications. At present our papers are not up to the level of a Bolshevik organisation.

1. That Militant be developed as our Labour Party entry paper; that the 'Marxist' jargon be minimised; that it attempts to agitate on current issues, particularly and systematically applying those Transitional slogans which events show as appropriate. That this paper should not be quietistic or slavishly Labour Party legalist - but must organise the fight on concrete issues. Provide a living link between the communists and the Labour Party and trade union workers.
2. That the centre be responsible for Spark, its regular appearance and content; arranging the finances as possible. No more myths! Spark must appear quarterly: Congress must charge the leadership with this task. An end to amateurishness and glorification of our own inadequacies! Sufficient resources exist and what we lack is the will to utilise them. An end to the Centre's lack of concern for the fight on the theoretical front!
3. That the Centre takes responsibility for Perspectives, and Perspectives is developed as an open communist paper, with the task of drawing the full Marxist lesson in a way that is impossible for Militant to do. Perspectives merely reflects the student one-sidedness of one local group and is a waste of valuable resources. A reorganisation would provide the necessary revolutionary link between the members of the organisation as such and its supporters, winning the really advanced workers for Trotskyism. The title would need changing and the production improving. It should be monthly, duplicated at first ... as a tentative suggestion we think it should be called WORKERS' FIGHT. This will raise serious problems of distribution while our main field remains the Labour Party - but we must map out our tasks and fight to fulfil them. The danger now is Labour Party liquidationism. The first job of Workers' Fight must be the education and clarification of our own comrades.

- MINORITY RIGHTS

We attack the lack of democracy in the Communist Party But a provision of their constitution is that the membership have a right to their material being circulated by the organisation to all members within ten days of requesting it. A hang-over from the post-Hungary period, this is an advance on our position; it has also been implemented once or twice. We propose that the constitution be amended on Minority rights.

1. Minorities to have the right under the constitution to have their positions discussed in the organisation.
2. Minorities must be guaranteed the right to fight for their positions.
3. An imprecise constitution leaves a great scope for arbitrariness therefore we must clearly write into the constitution the rights and duties of the members and leadership. CONGRESS MUST APPOINT A CONSTITUTION-REVISION COMMISSION TO THIS END. FOR A DEMOCRATIC CENTRALIST ORGANISATION!

Rachel Lever - Phil Semp - Sean Matgamna

Appendix 1

TU'S [SIC] MUST SAY: NO! TO LEGISLATION: LEADERS MUST DEFEND RIGHTS

BY KEITH DICKINSON

From MILITANT No. 12, December 1965 / January 1966

The press, radio and television have for some years been preparing a climate of opinion which some form of "restrictive" measures could be taken against the organised working class. The decline of British capitalism relative to the other advanced countries in the post-war period, and the recognition by the most conscious sections of the ruling class of the likelihood of a contraction of world trade in the coming period has given added urgency to the demand to limit the power of organised labour.

A howl has gone up in the press. The Financial Times recently published an article entitled "Incompetent Managers or Lazy Workers?" which complains of overstaffing in British industry. Ford's methods are cited as an object lesson of how to deal with this problem: "...the Company stood firm, dismissed the few notorious trouble-makers and insisted on the right to manage". This, of course, they would like to do in a piecemeal fashion undermining employment in one factory after another in order to "cut labour costs", "improve productivity", and so on. Unfortunately for the capitalists, the post-war boom has immeasurably strengthened the workers' organisations by creating a sellers' market in labour. It is virtually impossible to sack workers in individual factories without provoking repercussions on a national scale. The problem is therefore posed sharply for British capitalism: either break the power of the workers' movement as a whole, or go to the wall in the next period.

LAZY WORKERS?

Papers like the Daily Mirror would like to give the impression that Britain's economic difficulties are caused by "lazy workers" who earn much money for too little work, and that, in future, wages must be brought into line with productivity. What are the facts?

In 1964 the Gross National Product was £32,847 million. Personal consumption only amounted to £21,334 million. By 1970, it is proposed in the so-called "National Plan" that the G.N.P. should be £41,057 million and personal consumption only £25,789 million. The intention is thus to increase the amount of wealth created by the workers and reduce their share of what they produce.

It is a lie to say that wage costs in Britain have outstripped productivity. When the press refers to wages in this context, what is meant is nominal wages, i.e. the amount of pound notes in the wage packet. Every housewife knows what this nominal wage is really worth. But in any case, this is not the reason why Britain has fallen behind her competitors in the world market. Nominal wages have also outstripped productivity in Japan and the U.S.A. In West Germany, both nominal wages and wage costs have risen faster than productivity over the past decade. No, the stories about lazy, overfed British workers will not do as an explanation of the diseased state of British capitalism. The real reason is that British capitalism has failed to invest enough in modernising the important section of the economy. Only 15% of the British G.N.P. is reinvested in useful production as against Japan's 35%, 30% in West Germany France and Italy, and 20% in America. Who is responsible for the huge wastage of capital on prestige building advertising, office-blocks, and armaments? Not the "lazy British workers"!

WHAT THE COMMISSION MEANS

In a capitalist society, the law and all its appendages are organs for the protection of the property of the capitalist class. When the capitalists use the term "national interest", they refer to no interest but their own. The job of the Royal Commission set up to look into trade union affairs is, therefore, to assist the owners of industry in their struggle with the workers over the division of the wealth created by the latter.

The Confederation of British Industry, in its recommendation to the Royal Commission, calls for a "Union Overlord". an official responsible for "counselling and prodding Unions to take action against unofficial strikes and breaches of agreement. The Registrar would have sanctions in the form of financial penalties and as a last resort re-registration".

Thus, the bosses are hoping that they will be able with the backing of the Commission and the T.U. leadership, to resist and even punish the workers who "unrealistically" are demanding a little more of the wealth they themselves have created.

Can they involve the Trade Unions in this? For the present, it would appear that the T.U. bureaucracy is going along with the scheme. There is no doubt however that Brother Woodcock feels apprehensive, since one of the jobs of the Registrar would be "approve Union rules". This is heretofore been the privilege of the rank and file and the T.U. leaders. Interference in this democratic right would not only affect the rank and file but would also create problems for the Union leaders themselves. For the C.B.I. suggests that the Registrar "should be satisfied, particularly on provision for the control of a Union's activities by the general body of its members and for the appointment of officials and shop stewards."

Not only does the C.B.I. want the leadership and rules of Unions to be vetted by an official stooge, but also "that there should be no penalties for inadequately defined offences, such as acting against the interests of the Union or failing to apply a 'restrictive practice'". By such insolent demands, the C.B.I. risks provoking opposition even from the Union bureaucrats, who will see them as an attack on their own privileged position.

WILL THEY SUCCEED?

As a reaction to the hulabaloo in the capitalist Press some comrades have been pushed into an alarmist position, predicting immediate all-out attacks on the workers' organisations, the banning of unofficial strikes, and the undermining of the gains made by the workers in the past period. It would be entirely wrong, however, to see the sabre rattling threats of the Daily Mirror as an accurate reflection of the real balance of class forces at this stage.

The capitalist class cannot implement their threats until the workers movement has been undermined by a whole series of serious defeats....

In spite of all the threats of the Tories and the appeals of the Union bureaucracy, in spite of all the paper "agreements" on prices and incomes the workers' organisations remain intact and continue to press forward their demands which the bosses are incapable of resisting.

The hollowness of the employers threats is evident from the deliberations of the Royal Commission itself, Lord Robens had the brazen effrontery to suggest that unofficial strikers should be deprived of the benefits of the social services. This sleek, well paid "Labour" lord was quite prepared to see workers and their families in the so-called "Welfare State" forfeiting sick pay, maternity benefit, and pensions for protecting their living standards by the only means at their disposal! But the more serious representatives of the capitalist class threw the idea out of the window. Sir George Pollock, director of the former British Employers' Confederation, suggested "that instead of looking for penalties for people who broke the law, they might think of giving advantages to people who do not break the law."

This gives the game away. The capitalist class is ready to use the most vicious and inhuman measures to cripple the Labour movement. But it dare not lift a finger at the present time. Even if a law were passed banning unofficial strikes, it would prove a dead-letter in practice, as Pollock clearly understands. For the time being, even the British capitalist class can afford to give concessions to the workers. This they prefer in any case as a method of keeping the workers quiet. However much they squeal when the workers demand more wages, their threats are meaningless.

The final solution will be found once and for all on the basis of a socialist re-organisation of the economy. In the meantime, all attempts to hinder the workers in their struggle to defend their living standards by industrial action must be vigorously opposed by all sections of the Labour movement.

Appendix 2

FIGHT ANTI-TRADE UNION LEGISLATION

Unsigned article from MILITANT No. 13, February 1966

Some readers have been critical of the article on the anti-working class legislation being contemplated by the Labour Government.

However readers and supporters of Militant should have a due sense of proportion. The headlines of the article indicate the main emphasis that should have been given. "T.U.s Must Say: NO! TO LEGISLATION. LEADERS MUST DEFEND RIGHTS."

T.U. LEADERS SILENCE

The article should have been slanted to give emphasis to the reactionary character of the legislation and the need for militants to agitate and struggle against it within the Labour and Trade Union Movement. This activity should have been around the demand that the Union leaders mobilise their members by launching a campaign for the abandonment of such shameful legislation by a government speaking in the name of Labour. It should have emphasised as the main theme of the article the need to fight the suggested legislation within the Labour Movement. It should have dealt with the need to preserve the independence of the Trade Unions from the entanglement of the capitalist state even under a Labour Government. They must fight all anti-working class measures whoever introduces them.

At the same time it should be remembered that we reach primarily the advanced workers at this stage, and therefore the lessons of perspective should also be given.

N.Y. TRANSPORT STRIKE

While the mass organisations of the workers remain intact, legislation can hamper, but also embitter the workers. It is wrong to underestimate this vicious legislation but it is also false to exaggerate the possibilities in front of reaction at this stage.

It is one thing to put it on the statute book it is another thing to carry it out. Any attempt to carry it out will cause a worse situation than the employers are trying to avoid. Instead of small strikes they will have big ones. They will heighten the class consciousness of the workers and aid their radicalisation. The example of the New York transport workers strike is particularly clear, in this regard. The Court Injunction that the strike was illegal and the arrest of the trade union leaders, embittered the workers and made them even more determined.

It did not prevent the victorious outcome including the release of the Union leaders unconditionally. It should be pointed out to the advanced workers and the militants, that the union leaders, who are looking the other way, or at best only expressing nominal opposition to the suggested legislation may themselves be caught in a trap of their own making.

RAISE ISSUE IN UNIONS

If Michael Quill, a non Socialist Trade Union leader under pressure of his members and of circumstances, can wage a struggle and "defy the law", then certainly the British trade union leaders, with the Socialist consciousness of the movement, under pressure of the workers can find themselves in the same situation.

Now is the time to raise the issue sharply and clearly in the trade unions and labour movements, shop steward's committees unconditional opposition to any legislation restricting trade union and workers rights. Move resolutions of protest in the wards, G.M.C.s trade union branches, district and area committees, shop stewards' committees, and throughout the labour movement.