

ALL OURS LETTER TO ALL WRP COLLEAGUES

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THE WRP AND THE ELECTION

C O N T E N T S

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The Workers' Revolutionary Party and the

General Election of October 1974

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(Correspondence)

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL WRP COMRADES

Dear Comrades,

Some four weeks before the General Election of 10th October, the Bulletin submitted a letter to the Central Committee of the WRP stating the views of our tendency on the WRP's decision to stand candidates in the election. We said then, and we feel even more strongly today in the light of experience, that to run WRP candidates in the election on an anti-Labour ticket would be to stab the working class in the back. We also warned that the effect on the party and its cadres of a repetition of the February 1974 WRP election campaign, with its ludicrous stunts designed to pass the WRP off as a rival apparatus to the Labour Party (contests in motor-cades, sound systems, 'trendy' candidates etc.), and as a party already winning mass support (opportunist instant recruitment), could prove disastrous. The concentration of the WRP's slender cadre resources in the ten parliamentary centres for three weeks could do nothing else but liquidate the positions of the WRP elsewhere. Everything was sacrificed for a place in the parliamentary sun, and the overall movement of the class through its traditional organisations on a national scale ignored or even derided.

This ultra-left, sectarian orientation of the WRP is more than a passing malady. Neither can it be termed an infantile disorder, one associated with the growing pains of a still young movement. Those primarily responsible for the degredation of Trotskyism in the recent election campaign have been around the movement a long time. Whatever else Healy might plead in his defence, lack of experience cannot be his excuse.

As far as the abysmal results themselves are concerned, Bulletin will be publishing shortly a critical evaluation of the WRP's election performance, and its significance for the future of the Party. Here let us single out some of the more glaring political deviations from Trotskyism that manifested themselves both in the course of the WRP election campaign and its immediate aftermath. They are of a nature that should concern every serious party comrade.

The WRP election Manifesto merits special treatment as an example of the inner unity of opportunism and sectarianism. While lacking any transitional approach to the stated goal of the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the break-up of the bourgeois state, it combines maximalist sloganising with a rejection of a demand of a partial character - namely the repeal of the Tory racist Immigration Act! Taken together with the WRP's shameful abstention from trade union demonstrations against the fascist National Front, and refusal to support demands for the expulsion of fascists from trade unions, the omission acquires a truly sinister character, one that suggests an opportunist adaptation to chauvinist prejudices in the working class.

This opportunism, masked by leftism, is centred on the editorial offices of Workers Press, where under the benevolent gaze of Healy and Banda, petty-bourgeois radicalism reigns supreme. This is nowhere more in evidence than in the approach to the Labour Party, which during the election campaign, was repeatedly bracketed with the Tories and the Liberals as either 'the three main parties' or 'the old parties'. This is dangerous talk. The Labour Party, as Lenin and Trotsky insisted against the ultra-lefts, is a workers' party with a bourgeois leadership. The task of Marxists is not to

obscure this contradiction by radical sloganising, but to develop it to the point where the mass of the workers, in order to carry forward the struggle for the demands which they place on the Labour leaders, have to break from the Labour Party apparatus and take the road of revolutionary struggle. This is the method of the Transitional Programme, and the purpose of its slogan 'For a Workers' Government', which at no time in the election was raised by the WRP.

Instead we had the following:

'All three main parties ... take the side of the industrialists and are preparing to pauperise the working class, because to fight inflation they would be forced to destroy the entire living standards of workers and young people ... This election is a rotten cover-up because all three parties - Tories, Labour and Liberal - are prepared to gang together in a coalition to attempt to smash the working class'.
(Sylvester Smart, WRP candidate for Lambeth Central, in Keep Left, 28 Sept., 1974)

Smart is not wholly to blame for the wholesale revision of Trotskyism expressed in these few lines. He learnt his ultra-leftism, his hostility to the workers' movement, from the WRP leadership. It is they who must be made to give an accounting for their failure to educate the younger comrades in basic Marxist theory and principles.

If it is true that there is nothing between the 'three main parties', that they are equally ready to join together to 'pauperise the working class' and even 'smash the working class' (presumably smash the organizations of the working class is meant here) then in what sense can we call the Labour Party (for it is the party as a whole and not just its reformist leadership that Smart is referring to) a workers' party? And if a workers' party can indeed set itself the task of smashing the Labour movement in its entirety (for that is what 'smashing the working class' means), then how can Trotskyists call on workers' to vote for such a party, even for the purposes of 'exposure'? What use is such an 'exposure' if the class is smashed and the militants end up in the concentration camps of the Wilson-Thorpe-Heath Junta?

Finally we should point out that Smart's characterisation of the Labour Party as a party geared to smashing the working class smacks of third period Stalinism, which advanced similar ultra-left (and in effect, defeatist) notions about the Labour Party in the period between 1929 and 1933. The term used to denote the reformist leaders in those days was not 'corporatist' however, but 'social fascist'.

Yet this line on the Labour Party is not a consistent one. There were moments when reality burst through, when the struggle of the working class to elect a majority Labour government, and to deal with the secret coalitionists in its own ranks, compelled even the Workers Press radicals to pay lip service to the contradictory class nature of the Labour Party.

Thus after predicting almost daily that Wilson was preparing to take the entire Labour Leadership into a 'national government', the resignation of Lord Chalfont from the Labour Party elicited from Mitchell the comment that 'in leaving Labour, Chalfont has openly declared his hostility to the unions and the working class'. (W.F. 24th Sept.) Remember, the party Chalfont had just left was nevertheless preparing to 'pauperise' and 'smash' the working class jointly with the Tories and Liberals!

Nevertheless, Mitchell had caught an all too rare glimpse of the truth - the drive of the working class for a majority Labour government to fight in their interests was beginning to make it impossible for the petty bourgeois rightists like Layhew and Chalfont to peddle the line of a 'middle of the road' coalition. The time was therefore ripe to raise the demand in the working class, and also address it specifically to both Wilson and especially the lefts: either force the right like Jenkins and Williams to accept the conference decisions of the Labour Party or get out now. *

But precisely at this point, when editorial comment should be an element of revolutionary intervention of Marxist programme and tactics, the Workers Press fell silent. The answer Mitchell advanced to the possibility of support for a coalition from Labour's right wing was 'All Labour ministers and MP's who refuse to carry out policies of nationalisation without compensation under worker's control must be exposed (how?) and driven out - to join Chalfont'.

This is the classic ultra-left ultimatum. The issue raised by Chalfont's departure was 'coalition'. The task of the WRP was to develop the conflict between the plottings of the coalitionists (and their supporters in the Jenkins wing of the Party) and the forward drive of the class, expressed in their struggle for a majority Labour government. The demand of the hour was not, therefore, a fatuous ultimatum to the entire PLP and Cabinet to endorse and carry out the WRP election Manifesto (failing which they must be 'driven out') but to raise those demands that were both in line with the drive of the class and would serve to deepen the crisis in the reformist leadership.

Few workers will turn a hair if they learn that the Labour leadership has failed to pledge itself to WRP policies. But millions will be aroused to anger and action if they learn that Wilson (and the lefts) are protecting those in the leadership who would repeat the 1931 betrayal of MacDonald.

This is the method of the Transitional Programme, the method which Healy is revising at break-neck pace:

* Under the influence of the betrayal by the historic organizations of the proletariat, certain sectarian moods and groupings of various kinds arise or are regenerated at the periphery of the Fourth International. At their base lies a refusal to struggle for partial and transitional demands, i.e., for the elementary interests and needs of the working masses, as they are today ... They remain indifferent to the inner struggle within reformist organizations, as if one could win the masses without intervening in their daily strife'.

(Transitional Programme)

But we repeat, reality does still force itself into the thinking of the WRP leadership. Smart had the Labour Party smashing the working class (on 28th September). By 7th October, Workers Press was commenting 'Right Wing Labourites are preparing to smash the Labour Party ...' Which, if Smart were correct, could lead ultra-lefts to conclude that the 'right wing Labourites' were doing the working class a good turn.

Finally, we should draw attention to another facet of the WRP's increasingly unstable oscillation between opportunist adaptation to the working class, and sectarianism. This we find in its varying estimations of the degree to which the working class has broken from reformism.

To cite some examples. In the Manifesto itself, the claim is made that 'in the struggle to compel the reformist leaders to implement the socialist programme we have outlined (i.e. the WRP's full revolutionary programme) they will be exposed and driven out'. This presupposed that the working class had broken from the grip of reformism, and would reject the Labour leaders for failing to carry through not only basic partial demands, but the revolution itself. This theme was revisited on 25th September, when Mitchell wrote in Workers Press that 'workers are also showing they have no faith in the reformist bureaucracy of Wilson or Len Murray'. No faith? We consider this judgement just a little too sweeping, and one prone to disorient cadres fighting in the trade unions. It contains within the dangers of over-correction when reality refutes it.

Following the election, on 14th October, Mitchell again insisted that the Labour vote 'in no way reflects faith in social democracy'. He then added that 'it was the spontaneous reflex action of the working class to keep out the Tories and against coalition'. Here Mitchell downgrades the consciousness of the working class, for it acted with some degree of class consciousness, not just by 'reflex', 'spontaneously'. Mitchell in fact contradicts himself yet again a few lines further on when he says that 'workers who were daily becoming more conscious of the economic crisis and the threat of catastrophe turned out as a class to vote Labour'.

A different note was struck the next day by Workers Press when it declared bluntly that 'once again, they (the workers) hope to be able to solve things in the old reformist way' by voting Labour. Mitchell then returned on 18th October to claim once again that the 'spontaneous movement' reflected in recent strikes reflects a 'complete mistrust of the reformist and Stalinist bureaucracies'.

Nowhere do we find the issue posed in the terms of the method of the Transitional Programme.

Trotsky's approach to the question of the Labour Party is made very clear in 'Where is Britain Going?'

'If we were to take the Labour Party only in its Macdonald, Henderson and company section (read Wilson-Jenkins section) we should have to declare that they came to consummate the uncompleted work of the total enslavement of the working class to bourgeois society. But in actuality a second process is, despite them, at work in the masses, a process which must finally liquidate the Puritan-Liberal traditions liquidating Macdonald in its development'.

Further on he declares:

Beneath the democratic-pacifist illusions of the working masses lies their awakened class will, a profound dissatisfaction with their situation, a readiness to support their demands by all the means that circumstances demand'.

The task of Trotskyists in the recent election, as at all other times, was to develop the two contradictions outlined by Trotsky - that between the reformist leadership and the workers, and the illusions of the workers and the material demands for which they fight, and which can be achieved fully only by revolutionary struggle. The WRP election intervention not only ignored both these contradictions, but helped to obscure them. This must never happen again. That is why the false course of the party away from the Transitional Programme and the

traditional organizations of the working class must be corrected. This demands a full discussion in the party on all the issues involved, and a party conference that will take decisions to put the WKF back on the road of Trotskyism.

The October General Election must be understood as a step in a process which began when the miners won their first strike against Heath, and the Pontonville Five were released from jail to forstall a General Strike.

During the later stage of Wilson's 1966-1970 government the workers' movement was in a state of crisis. It had fought Barbara Castle's attempted wage freeze, 'In Place of Strife', and although the legislation was dropped the result was a turn away from political support for Labour. A brief attempt was made to overcome the obstacle of the Labour right wing through militant union action. This hesitancy allowed Heath, the erstwhile discipline master for the trade unions to rally, temporarily, financiers, industrialists, landowners and sections of the middle class and win the 1970 election. This was a reversal for the unions, the policy of militancy and industrial action now confronted a ruling class attempt to establish a strong state.

The first year of Heath's government was a difficult period for the working class. We must take note of some lessons.. Despite his intention to build a 'strong state' to use against the unions and the introduction of appropriate anti-working class laws, Heath could not sustain the initial unity of all the important sections of the ruling class. Under Heath the bourgeois state could not throw back the advance and defeat the demands of the British working class; ultimately the bourgeoisie began, behind the scenes to lose confidence in the strategy of an immediate massive showdown with the unions.

When Heath came to office he benefited from the demoralization among trade unionists created by the betrayals of Wilson in the previous four years. The British working class had not faced a class war cabinet like Heath's in any degree since the war. However an awareness of what was involved in the talk of 'tightening belts' and the Industrial Relations Act and Counter Inflationary Laws soon brought a response from the most organised sections of workers, especially in 1972 when Heath faced the strong elements of the miners and dockers. Although Heath was able to defeat struggles by the postmen and hospital workers, his period of office was characterised by the rise of the working class to meet his challenge. In this the key role fell to the miners.

Although the level of struggle undertaken by the working class was uneven, not always being able to smash through Heath's laws, always the need to have a Labour government, so as to be able freely to pursue demands, was thrust to the fore. Those sections, such as power workers, miners and dockers, whose place in industry was vital, brought a strong attempt by Heath to crush their strikes and work to rules. In each case Heath avoided the conclusions of his own way of governing - a general confrontation.

Despite the antipathy to Wilson, common to many worker militants, despite the rise of rank and file movements such as the LCDTU, under

C.P. leadership, between 1971 and 1974 the working class turned to Labour. It needed a government which would accede to its demands, it needed a political expression in parliament - Labour was its only choice. In this turn is contained a growing contradiction - the logic of class struggle forced workers to turn to Labour, with class struggle demands; Labour cannot satisfy most of these demands, it must try to suppress many - yet workers must turn to Labour. During this period the left wing of the Labour Party became vocal and found an audience for its populism, not seen in many decades.

* The first signs of the class struggle in the Labour Party are always to be found in the fight over programme at the annual conference. Here the constituencies can speak, here the trade unions, refracted through the bureaucracy, voice their needs. The last two conferences have adopted programmes which Wilson knows he cannot implement. The seeds of a struggle are already sown inside the Labour Party. The changing relationship between the working class and its leaders was expressed clearly in these conferences. The membership of the Labour Party, which declined in the last period of the 1966-70 Wilson government, stabilised itself. Many speakers in conference debates began to try and make the LP a vehicle through which workers could fight. The highest point in this struggle of the right wing to suppress the demands of the working class, was in the whole rich experience of the Clay Cross affair. It is no accident that despite the attentions of SLL-WRP, IS and others, the tenants and councillors of Clay Cross, could only fight for solidarity and victory through the Labour Party. And it was a mark of the changed balance of forces inside the LP that they could call a constitutionally illegal conference of constituency LP's and the right wing could take no action. Who were the members of the WRP, J. Gale and others addressing themselves to when they attended that conference? They were talking to a movement which grew inside the LP and unions, they were overwhelmingly talking to workers who were going to vote Labour.

During the Heath government the left social democrats, Benn and others, together with the 'militant' tendency, had gained strength from this turn to the Labour Party. So much so that 'militant' can now claim among its supporters several MP's. The turn to the Labour Party during 1971-74 must be examined qualitatively. What this means is that although individual membership of the LP has not increased notably, the link between the living struggles of the workers and the activity of local constituency LP's has been strengthened. In a situation where Labour remains the only mass party of the working class, it is to its programme we look for changes. Here lies an important element in deciding how revolutionaries should intervene in the working class. For the first time in a decade Labour's programme contains measures which are clearly an emasculated attempt to give a class struggle colouration to the old reformist rubbish about 'improving' and 'rationalizing' capitalism. These 'class struggle' ideas: opening company books, nationalisation and workers control, are reflective of the changed consciousness of the working class. Yet class consciousness has not intruded into LP conferences in some abstract fashion. In order for the programme of the LP to have been changed, even in the small way it has, a struggle has taken place, inside the Labour Party itself. Just in the same way that before Gaitskell could change the programme to his ends a faction fight was waged against the Tribunites in the late 1950's, so now it has taken a real, physical movement inside the LP to begin to reverse the hegemony of the right wing. There is a linked process - people such as Jenkins and Williams typical of the right class collaborationists in the Labour Party, are thrown into crisis by the oncoming rejection of the EEC by the working class. Yet it is the threat to them inside the Labour Party by its

changing political colouration which gives this crisis direct expression. They are frightened of expulsion from the Labour Party. How else can be explained the replacement of Eddie Griffiths with Joan Maynard, and the demise of Taverne?

Inside the wards, committees and conferences of the Labour Party small shifts in policy have been reflections of massive movements of the class itself.

Unlike the WRP, The Bulletin has never raised any demands which imply that the Labour Party can be transformed into the organ to seize state power, such as 'Labour to power on a socialist programme'. Workers Press has said repeatedly, and who among Trotskyists doubts it, that the ultimate way to stop the bourgeoisie crushing the unions is to take state power. In fact this was the solution proposed as its election programme. Then why did workers turn to Labour? Precisely because unlike Heath they have not confused the removal of Heath with the making of a revolution, even the beginnings of a revolutionary situation. Every WRP member knows that the period since February has been characterised as a revolutionary period. Not yet! This is why the working class did not break with a 70-year tradition and turn away from Labour to an organization like the WRP.

We may have a new situation - the trade unionists have seen their strength in relation to a parliamentary government, they have brought Heath down. Yet to bring Heath down did not require the seizure of the state and the smashing of the police force and army. Heath never succeeded in any real measure in using the police to crush strikes, he never used the army. This is the fact, despite headlines about Heathrow and coups, or internal WRP frenzy over imminent revolutionary situations. The working class is on the offensive, it will try to use its existing mass organizations to fight through. Correct us, was it not Clay Cross Labour Party, in defiance of Heath, Wilson and the law lords which led the rent strike?

* The working class built the LP to fight through, that remains the case, despite the overwhelming dominance of the bourgeois reformist leadership inside the party. The Labour Party's link with the unions was shown quite clearly in the experience of February 1974. Few, if any, miners had any illusions in Wilson's reformist rubbish, yet they made the establishment of a Labour government the aim of their strike on a political level. The new, revolutionary, leadership of the working class will be forged at the point of conflict between the class and its reformist leaders: around the Labour Party. So long as the LP maintains almost complete hegemony in the working class a small shift in its programme, a few real voices of struggle, like the Clay Cross councillors, raised in its conference, are of crucial importance to the building of the revolutionary leadership, because they reflect the concrete relationship between the demands of the working class and its ability to achieve them, with the ability of the reformist leaders to suppress these demands.

The miners not only forced Heath to resign, they also forced the Labour leaders to accept de facto the consequences of bringing him down. The right wing of the Labour Party were weak from February to October of this year. Foot, Benn and others who had made left speeches on occasions, found themselves at the focus of a move against the bourgeoisie. The I.U.M. placed them in power whether they accepted its terms or not. For the next period the political struggle, the central struggle for the leadership of the working class will flow through the Labour Party. This raises once again the question of the isolation of the WRP, which rejected work in the mass movement in 1964 and now has no means to take part in the crucial struggles ahead. The battles

now taking place in the Labour Party and unions demand in a clear form: all serious attempts to build an alternative revolutionary leadership in Britain now require entry work in the Labour Party. Not liquidation, entry work. Let us allow Lenin to formulate the question:

* 'I have become convinced that the decision to remain in the ranks of the Labour Party is really a correct decision ... We must say frankly, that the Communist Party can affiliate to the Labour Party only on the condition that it can preserve its freedom of criticism and can pursue its own policy ... I declare that there will be no class collaboration in this ... in regard to the British Labour Party, it is only a matter of the advanced majority of the British working class collaborating with the overwhelming majority. The members of the Labour Party are all members of trade unions. The structure of this party is a very peculiar one and is unlike that in any other country. This organisation embraces from six to seven million workers belonging to all the trade unions. The members are not asked what political convictions they adhere to ... What we get here is co-operation between the vanguard of the working class and the rest of the workers - the rearguard. This co-operation is so important for the whole movement that we categorically demand (note Lessrs. Mitchell, Bull and other 'anti-liquidationists' - 'categorically demand') that the British Communists should serve as a link between the Party ... and all the rest of the workers. If the minority is unable to lead the masses, to link up closely with them, then it is not a party and is worthless, no matter whether it calls itself a party (our emphasis) ... Until the opposite is proved we can say that the British Labour Party consists of proletarians and that being in its ranks we can secure co-operation between the vanguard of the working class and the backward workers. If this co-operation is not carried out systematically, then the Communist Party will be worthless and there can be no talk of the dictatorship of the proletariat'.

Speech on the role of the Party,
Comintern, 2nd Congress, 23.7.1920.

It is clear, the Labour Party is the focus of the struggles of the working class on the political arena, the communists, to link with all sections of workers, must act in that focus. This is more true now than at any time in the past decade.

* In February Heath failed, even through the most extreme measures seen in Britain since Churchill and Baldwin, to defeat a single important section of workers. The strategy of Heath was to build up the forces of the state, win the middle class to his side, and then to provoke an all-out battle with the unions. But he had not begun this task when in 1972, the dockers and miners threw him back.

From that moment the fall of his government was possible, even the most right wing bureaucrat like Gormley sensed the new mood of the working class. From that moment the forces of the bourgeoisie began to split among themselves, the fragile alliance cemented by Heath began to fall apart. After the election in February the Conservatives were really leaderless. To this moment, no-one has emerged to rally the ruling class against the unions. The main reason that the minority Labour Government was not brought down in parliamentary manoeuvres was that the ruling class had nothing real to replace them with. To

have brought down Wilson would have meant a reversion to the crisis of January-February on a much larger scale. The Conservatives are not yet ready for such an open provocation against the unions.

What was important in the inter-election period of this year was not so much what Labour did or did not achieve in parliamentary terms, which is all the Workers Press can see, but in the change which even a minority Labour government brought to the overall balance of class forces. Put in simple terms the working class was objectively better able to fight for its demands. Against this the reformist leaders attempted to throw their precarious situation in parliament, and the 'social contract', an attempt to stop strikes from inside the workers' movement. Yet the miners won their demands, and the nurses, after a bitter struggle, won also. A section such as the nurses could never have won under Heath. The mood of allowing the minority government time to organise for a new election could not last long. Wilson knew this.

The stalemate situation in parliament hamstrung both reformists and bourgeoisie, making a new election inevitable. The mood of the workers has been strongly for Labour, but not unconditionally. The populism of the Tribune lefts has now become a key factor in the reformist approach to the working class, the response to left MP's heralds a new period in the struggle for class struggle politics inside the Labour Party. These men attempt to tie the struggle of workers against inflation and unemployment to the tempo of parliamentary debates. At this stage, if they can grant satisfactory reforms, such attempts are not ruled out; the experience of the workers' movement in the last six months has shown once again the importance of parliament. The left reformists of course are not prepared to go too far along the road of struggle against the class rule of the bourgeoisie, but they have been able to grant wage increases and alleviate the effects of the Housing Finance Act by a rent freeze.

It was the context of Heath's deciding to go for a decisive battle with the unions which gave the miners' pay demand the significance of a demand to bring down the government. Not that the bourgeoisie had reached a point where it was objectively unable to grant the increase. In this election, Labour voters didn't expect a Labour victory to end the rule of the bourgeoisie or solve the economic crisis, objectively this is not the next step the working class must take. The advanced sections of workers are becoming, through experience, more and more conscious of their strength. The awareness of the class as a class for itself is the next step.

Against this movement the new Wilson government throws not the forces of the state but allegiance to the 'Social Contract'. This 'mechanism' existed all through the period of the Heath government when the TUC, and Labour Party NEC met regularly. It is simply an attempt by bureaucrats to maintain control over the struggles of the unions. As such it has no political or physical resources outside of the unions and Labour Party themselves. It is an attempt to apply the brakes inside the workers movement, not the tying of the unions to the state. If the union leaders cannot hold their members back the 'Social Contract' is meaningless.

The 'Social Contract' which trade unionists, like the Ford workers and BBC workers have come up against, is not a measure of 'corporatism' in the WKP sense, i.e. a way to tie the unions to the state. We have now a majority Labour government. But this government is not synonymous with the bourgeois state.

The unions cannot be quietly 'incorporated' into the state through the medium of a Labour government. To 'incorporate' them at all, their present reformist leaders must be smashed. So-called 'consultative bodies', even the recent meetings at Downing Street, including government, TUC and CBI, are not a corporate state. It is true that the TUC leaders, and the Labour leaders are class collaborators, but they are there as leaders of an independent party and independent unions. Behind these moves lies a desperate attempt by Wilson to bargain with the strength of the working class, to curry favour with the bourgeoisie on the promise of being able, through the 'social contract' to hold the unions in check. Like Canute he is doomed to failure.

On the one side Wilson now faces the threatened 'strike of capital', an attempt by the bourgeoisie, to force him to attempt to discipline the unions, and to crush the Labour lefts. Wilson is responsive to this pressure. Yet on the other side he will now confront all the demands and problems held back by workers during the period of minority government. Without Phase Three and the Industrial Relations Act a whole wave of demands will come forward. Also, most importantly, without direct legal excuses the union bureaucrats will now have infinitely more difficulty in curtailing strikes and other actions. All the major unions have demands outstanding. Coupled to this, many advanced sections of workers now take an interest in wider problems of the economy. There is a direct interest in the talk of nationalisation of 25 companies: it may save their jobs. What to Benn has been a round of tub thumping demagoguery has been seen by many workers, in the aircraft industry for example, as a promise to take action. Labour's programme in this election, in those aspects relevant to the working class, has entered the consciousness and outlook of large numbers of trade unionists.

Any tendency of Wilson to draw back from pledges now will anger and frustrate workers but will not so easily produce the cynicism and demoralisation of 1966-70. The unions are strong, they know it and there are demands which have to be met to defend living standards. These demands conflict with the interests of the bourgeoisie, and Wilson must balance between the two. Yet the pressure of the unions in the next period will concern him more than the threatened 'strike of capital'. The capitalists, if they undertook all their threats, would not only attack the workers but ruin their own basis. This they may do in desperation, but not in the present situation. They are attempting to blackmail Wilson.

The actions of the Tribunites since the election, belittled in WF, are important. Far from being 'a move to the right', the demand for a discussion of the Queen's Speech by the PLP is good in that it allows a fight for conference decisions to be binding on the Labour government. The Tribune group is greatly strengthened in Parliament, compared to 1964-70, and thus expresses changes at constituency level. It reflects the attempts of the left wing of reformism to move with the workers.

In parliamentary terms the process of throwing the Tories out is now completed. The two elections of 1974 are the product of the ability of the British working class to throw back an attack by the bourgeoisie on its organisations and living standards. The turn by the working class to its traditional parties (a turn contradictory in nature, producing a conflict between the content of reformism and the mass form of these parties) has been evidenced here as in Greece and especially in Portugal. The emergence of a strong left in the Labour Party is also the result of this turn.

The bourgeoisie is in disarray over the events of 1972 to 1974, it has had to abandon an attempt at a confrontation with the unions. It must now find new strategy and new leaders.

With Labour in power the working class will look for the satisfaction of its demands, and will objectively be better able to fight for them. The centre of the class struggle will increasingly centre on events inside the LP and unions themselves. There is no doubt that the right wing, lined up behind the 'Social Contract' is already attempting to hold back the forward movement of the workers. In terms of our class this will mean betrayals. Wilson must now move closer to the ruling class in order to win their confidence. Part of this task is proving he can, and will, prevent upsurges like that in Scotland. The right wing union bureaucrats now have the front line positions, they must isolate militants, talk down claims, introduce state arbitration boards and so on. We are beginning a period of confrontation between the leadership and the masses in the unions.

The lefts at present are in an ambiguous position, we must not simply identify them with the right wing, they have a different role to play. They will try to appear as champions of the demands of the unions, whilst remaining subservient to the parliamentary apparatus and outlook of reformism. In periods of sharp class struggle they are essential for a betrayal of the working class. In the 1926 strike it was the lefts who played the key role in ending the strike, but because it was they who had appeared in the previous weeks to be its foremost exponents.

In all the questions of leadership raised in the unions and Labour Party in the coming period the revolutionaries must intervene using the Transitional Programme and adjusting their demands according to the precise moments of struggle. Only in this way can we prepare for the coming split inside the mass organizations and develop the cadres to build a party.

For Discussion

THE WORKERS' REVOLUTIONARY PARTY
AND THE
GENERAL ELECTION OF OCTOBER 1974 -
IS IT NOT TIME NOW TO WAKE UP?

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With a supplement consisting of Four Statistical Tables,
showing in detail the results of the October 1974 General
Election.

By 'PHARMAKOS'

November 1974

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1. What the W.R.P. Paid and What it Gained

This article tries to study the policies of the WRP leaders in the recent British General Election and their results. Starting there, it puts them up against the theory and experience of the Trotskyist movement, in order to criticise them constructively and to draw the general lessons which flow from them, with proposals for what needs to be done.

The bare figures for the votes received by the WRP's candidates were reported in Workers Press on 12th October. There is much more information to be had, and the tables at the end here will, we hope, provide what is needed. Their contents may be summed up as follows:

The general results for Great Britain (excluding, for obvious reasons, Northern Ireland) show that some 7% fewer people voted in October than in the preceding February. The number of votes cast for Labour candidates, however, fell only slightly, while those for Conservative and Liberal candidates fell heavily. Labour's relative share of the vote was, therefore, 3% higher in October than in February.

In the constituencies where the WRP stood, in October the ten candidates got 3,434 votes, an average of 343. The nine candidates in February got 4,191 votes, an average of 466. Thus the Party's vote fell by some 18%, despite having put up an additional candidate, and despite having fought six of the seats twice within less than a year. None of those candidates who stood both times got more votes the second time round. In only one of the seats which was fought both times did the WRP candidate in October get more votes than its candidate had got in February. This was in Toxeth, where the Labour vote also went up. In the other five seats that were fought both times, the WRP got fewer votes the second time than the first. None of its candidates got more than 1.5% of the votes cast. Only three of them got more than 1% of the votes cast. On the average, they got 1.4% of the votes cast for their Labour opponents. Vanessa Redgrave got the highest percentage of the Labour vote, with 2.6%.

In the two elections the WRP was concerned with thirteen seats in all. In these seats the Labour vote fell in October a little more than in Great Britain as a whole. In three of them, however, the Labour vote actually went up. In four others the Labour vote fell less than the total of votes cast, so that the Labour percentage went up. In five of them Labour's percentage of the vote went down, but in two of these, Pontefract and Wallsend, both the Labour vote and the WRP vote had been abnormally high in February because of the coal miners' strike, and the October figures reflect the general movement of the class.

While any conclusion drawn from such small figures must be used with caution, there certainly seem reasons to believe that the candidatures of the WRP made no difference to the Labour vote, neither increasing nor decreasing it; they were irrelevant.

Assuming that the elections cost the Party the £14,000 which is the target of its Election Fund, then the votes cost the Party just over £4 each.

Workers Press treated the results sparingly, to say the least. We can understand their difficulty, which we analyse in some details further on. The Party had shown no more than that it was throwing the workers' money away, not only once but twice. They talked, in one statement only, of indirect gains. On October 12th, we read, in 'Our Election Fight', "The number of votes does not in any way

reveal the extent to which the WRP forged its links with the workers inside the Labour Party and the Trade Unions." We might then well ask two questions: what does the WRP vote reflect? And secondly, what does reveal the extent to which the WRP penetrates the mass movement? We have to ask these questions because the article makes no attempt to give an answer.

Perhaps, then, the WRP's influence has been so strengthened as to counter-balance the money and effort that were spent in the election campaigns, and the bad impression which these poor results give? We may feel sure that, had there been any such gains, they would have been shouted from the house-tops. Workers Press would have been right to do so, because clearly this disaster has got to be explained away somehow to the members. To our regret Workers Press has nothing but the one unsupported, general statement to offer. We have many years' experience of the British Labour movement and have attacked the Stalinists and the Centrists of the I.L.P. many times for this kind of dishonesty. We take leave to call it 'window-dressing', and ineffective 'window-dressing' at that. You could call it 'whistling in the dark'. Trotsky might have called it 'a consolatory myth'.

Comrade Bevan indeed got an admirable letter from the eleven stewards. Unhappily one swallow did not make a summer. Comrade Cyril Smith, whose trade is statistics, can confirm that, as far as votes go, the WRP did no better nor worse at Aberavon than elsewhere. Comrade Bevan already has his basis in the working class. His candidature did nothing to improve it, nor to improve the Labour vote, which fell by 2%.

2. But - Is there no other way to build the Party?

Three things have to be said, clearly, about these results. For the WRP, they are bad, they are wasteful, and they give satisfaction only to our enemies. The Party could have made genuine and enduring contacts among workers in the course of the elections, by other means, at far less cost in money and effort. We shall describe these means. Meanwhile, there must be no equivocation: the WRP gained nothing to counter-balance even a little of what they lost and squandered. The leaders of the Party acted like the Chinaman in the old story, who thought that, in order to roast his pig, he had to burn down his house. The difference is that, after the house was burnt, there was no roast pig for the WRP, only a load of bills to pay.

Someone may object: Workers Press on October 14th claimed that 2,000 new members had been made. By then, perhaps, they had got their nerve back a bit, after the first shock of the results to their illusions. Many of these new members, we regret to say, existed only in the imaginations of the canvassers. Of the rest, some will already have disappeared now that the excitement is over. Of course, they will not completely forget the people who talked to them about Trotskyism, but may remember them as a small, isolated and perhaps bizarre group.

The question is, what can the WRP teach the rest? We are allowed to believe that the majority are workers. In that case, they themselves would probably expect that the point of application for their political work would be their work-place and their trade union, and we would not disagree. If this is not so, perhaps the leaders of the WRP will explain to the movement as a whole what they want additional members and money for? Never in the history of the

Trotskyist movement has recruitment and fund-raising been presented as an end in itself. We are not like the reformists or the sectarians. The main point of application for the political work of our members has always been penetration into the mass movement and the application of our principles in the struggle there against the reformist bureaucrats and their allies. Have the WRP leaders something other than this in mind? If so, let them say so, without equivocation.

Revivalist gatherings, electoral adventures, exclusively quantitative targets for recruitment, literature sales and fund-raising, all smack of Billy Graham and Jehovah's Witnesses. They do not at all square with systematic mass work and the training which keeps pace with it. As far as Trotskyism is concerned, these are idealistic methods, devised by people who, whatever they may pretend, really believe that they can force the world to be the way they want it. What they are really doing is taking an easy way, to dodge the fight against the reformists and Stalinists where they are. Such methods can, and do, bring into existence and maintain a certain kind of organisation. It is wrong to say that, at least for a time, nothing can be built that way. The organizations which are built that way, however, are not Trotskyist parties, not revolutionary vanguard parties, however much they may claim to be, or their leaders may want them to be. History knows a good deal about that kind of party. At the very best, the WRP can hope, by these methods, to become an imitation of the German Spartakusbund of 1918. It will have all the political weaknesses of the Spartakusbund, without, of course, the background of experience in the mass Social-Democratic Party from which such leaders as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg could emerge.

This is the first lesson to be drawn from these election results. If the course is to be set towards the mass organizations, and especially if the roots of the policy which led to these results are probed, and those responsible are identified, £14,000 is a cheap price to pay. We do not want history to say of the WRP what Trotsky said of the Communist Party of Great Britain, that the British workers would have been better off if it had never been started.

Comrades who have joined our movement in recent years may be surprised to know that this line of thought is well known to Comrade Healy, who will, we hope recognise the passage which we are going to quote, because he helped to write it. We quote from a resolution which the 'minority' of the Revolutionary Communist Party, of which he was a leading member, put to the Summer 1947 Conference of the RCP, and supported by an article, bearing Comrade Healy's name as author, entitled 'Against the Politics of Stagnation'. Both of these documents are to be found in the Internal Bulletin of the RCP entitled 'July 1947 Conference Number'. Anyone who is able to get hold of this document will notice at once the 'catastrophic' economic forecast of the 'minority'. At the beginning of the post-war boom, the 'minority' put forward a prospect of crisis which is really far more applicable to the situation of the world today than it was in 1947. Their resolution argues that the conditions in which, in 1947 British Capitalism was trying to restore its economy, and in which the Labour Government of 1945 was trying to help it to do so, while, at the same time, trying to meet at least to a small extent the expectations of the workers who had elected them, "could only lead, not to economic and political stability, but to extreme economic and political instability". This abstract formulation proved to be a great source of confusion. For no Trotskyist, even at the height of the boom years, ever said, or forecast, 'economic and political stability', and Comrade Healy and his friends had no right to try to

put these words into anyone's mouth. On the other hand, since 1971, but only since 1971, would it be right to speak of 'extreme economic and political instability', which, as any reader of Workers Press knows, we actually now have got. In 1974 we have got the state of affairs which the 'minority' believed to be either existing or imminent in 1947, and therefore, their ideas can today command more attention than they did then. Their resolution includes the following passage:

"This is the economic background to the 1945 electoral victory of the Labour Party, which reflected the first stage of the radicalisation of the workers and middle class of Britain. The radicalisation had long been prepared by the steady decline of capitalism since World War I. The Labour Government's policy has not, and could not, check this decline and, consequently, could bring no serious improvements to the living standards of the working people. But such a government, embodying as it did the hopes and aspirations of the oppressed masses, did exert a temporary braking action on the developing revolutionary movement. By electing a Labour Government the British working class indicated their recognition of the fact that only large-scale political measures against capitalism could bring peace and security to the working people. The energy previously devoted to the economic struggle was canalised into an enthusiastic support for the Labour Government, in which all hopes for the ending of capitalist misery became centred. There was therefore no check to the class struggle, but rather its diversion into other and more political channels."

"But the conflict between Capital and Labour remains unaltered. Conditions of working class life continue to deteriorate. The Labour Government, in exploiting the loyalty of the working class in its efforts to save British capitalism, at the same time undermines the basis of that loyalty, which is the belief that such a government could bring peace, security and a rising standard of life to the exploited masses."

"The desire of the workers to seek a solution for their grievances in the industrial field receives severe rebuffs from the strongly entrenched Trade Union bureaucracy. The increasing unrest manifests itself in a growth of unofficial strikes, which, in their turn, bring the workers into opposition to the Labour leaders and the State. Loyalty gives way to discontent, and particularly among the lower-paid and most oppressed sections of the working class to downright anger. Dissatisfaction with the policy of the government and the desire to substitute for it a far more revolutionary policy is a feature of working class life today. However, there is not, and could not be, any mass swing away from the Labour Party, because:-

- i. Workers to not lightly turn away from the organisation they have built up by their own sacrifices, and
- ii. There can exist no mass alternative until the Labour Party itself is in a process of disintegration."

"Consequently, the discontent of the workers seeks expression in the Labour Party itself. Objectively and subjectively the present situation cries out for the intervention of

the Fourth International within the mass political organizations of the British working class."

"As the discontent grows, we can expect the pale pinks of the 'Keep Left' school (Please note: the writer could not have meant the Y.S., which did not arise for some years later - he means the 'Tribune' group) to emerge with more radical phrases, but essentially their role will serve the top bureaucracy in practice. Meanwhile, the frustration of millions, bottled up in this treacherous alliance, will need an outlet. Despite the reformist policy of the Stalinists, illusions still exist among the workers as to its role. The C.P.G.B. has strengthened its position substantially within the Trade Union movement, and controls considerable forces within the Labour Party itself. But as yet it constitutes no mass alternative to the Labour Party, and cannot do so until the latter is disintegrating as a result of the centrist groupings within it."

"Unless the Trotskyists are able to intervene from within the left-wing, crystallising the tendencies into a revolutionary opposition, it is inevitable that the Stalinists will secure the adherence of those elements developing to the point of an organizational break with the Labour Party. In these circumstances our tasks would remain as before, i.e. the gaining of cadres - the building of the party. But the existence of a mass Stalinist movement would render the carrying out of this task vastly more difficult. Trotskyist intervention now can defeat the enemies of the working class. Through the application of the transitional programme from within the Labour Party, we can deal powerful blows against the bureaucracy and the apologists from the 'left' ..."

This passage is followed by an interesting argument to the effect that successful opposition to the trade union bureaucracy can be done only by comrades who are members of the Labour Party as well as of their union.

3. Can the W.R.P. correct its course?

The particular document which we chose, from the archives of our movement, to throw light on an opinion about the relationship of the Trotskyists to the mass movement, with which Comrade Healy might even today feel some sympathy, is only one of the mass of such documents which exists, in several places, including the files of the WRP itself. At the time, other writers conveyed the same spirit as has just been seen in the 'minority' resolution, for example, Paul Dixon, from whom many of the formulations were borrowed, though he rejected the obviously incorrect economic forecast of the minority. No-one, we hope, will talk as if nothing has happened in the last twenty-seven years, but what remains correct in our opinion, is the spirit in which the 'minority' document faces the question.

The Party of which Comrade Healy is today General Secretary, which he, more than anyone else, has brought into being and given its political character, operates in its work a totally different approach. It cannot be right, however, just to suppress one's past views. The 'New Line' should not be smuggled in as if it were some new great discovery. In reality it is not new at all, but an old, old system of mistakes. Does not Comrade Healy feel sometimes that

he owes his members some explanation of how he has got from where he was in 1947 to where he is today?

Further, the 'minority' document emboldens us to assert that when the WRP put up those nineteen candidatures, it demonstrated, both in so doing and in the arguments with which it supported what it was doing, what should NOT be done. These poor results are not the fruits of Trotskyism. They cannot and must not be blamed on to Trotskyism. They are due to Trotsky's ideas NOT being applied.

The WRP leaders may, of course, refuse to face the fact that they have here a self-induced defeat. They may refuse to heed these warnings. If they do so refuse, then it will be so much worse for the working class. They must change their policies. They must probe into where they went wrong, and why. Otherwise they will turn, despite their subjective desires and efforts, into yet another obstacle in the workers' road. Can they make the change? This is what we are testing here. This is why we quote from Healy's document.

4. The Problem of the Policies of the Leadership: What are they? What is the Source of their mistakes?

Anyone who hopes to find a coherent account of what the WRP leaders believed themselves to be doing during the election campaign, by reading the Workers Press, will be disappointed. This group manifestly failed to grasp the opportunities presented by the elections to educate in politics the advanced workers, or, for that matter, anyone else. What they had to say was theoretically impoverished and thin, as well as being a confused mish-mash. At the same time, we hope that as many of our readers as possible will read through the issues from September 23rd to October 12th steadily at one sitting, and thereby satisfy themselves that we are not maliciously exaggerating. As far as any order can be traced at all, they were asked to operate three different lines of policy. They did their best, but the muddle in which it all came out was inevitable. First we must try to sort the muddle out. Then we must try to show how it came about.

The muddle between the three different positions which they had to defend resulted from something simpler than that. The WRP is a living contradiction. It is torn between two incompatible and mutually exclusive programmes, from neither of which can its leaders readily break. The situation is one familiar to people of the theatre, the one in which a wife wants to sleep with her lover without at the same time deceiving her husband. The simple argument was used, in the course of the campaign, that standing candidates is what a Party is for, that, having for some reason (not too clearly revealed) got a Party, the only thing for them to do was to stand candidates. Let us not dwell here on the Parliamentary illusions which such a conception could foster in the minds of workers, that the main business of a Party is to take part in elections, when at one and the same time the election manifesto was saying that Parliament can solve nothing.

The Party's propaganda in the elections had to start, on the one hand, from accepting the formally correct proposition that the independence of the Party must be established. Now this was already done when the Party was founded, but it was done in a rather peculiar way. The leaders decided to change the letter-head of the SWL, to make some speeches which impressed a number of the many politically still-unsophisticated workers, and hope that some noticeable difference would follow. They could have chosen other less costly and more productive ways to establish the independence of the Party. We recommend to those who have to prepare lectures on 'Marxist

philosophy' and shall ourselves carefully note, this striking example of mistaking the word for the thing. Un-dialectical thinking fails to grasp that the formal, but meaningless 'independence' achieved by calling the organisation a Party is not at all the same thing as the living development which a Party really is.

Many times in our past, Trotskyist parties have upheld their genuine independence, in illegality, in the relative illegality of 'entry' into a reformist, a Centrist or even a Stalinist Party. Anyone who feels their head swim amid the oratory of a WRP mass gathering, may coolly read what Trotsky wrote about the real independence of the Party, against the sectarians who opposed the 'entry' of our French comrades into the French Socialist Party - all in the name of formal 'independence': (See 'Writings: 1934-1935', p.60). Our programme and our policies, not our organisational form, decide whether we are independent or not. However, sectarians have many times in the past diverted and distorted the development of a party by substituting formal 'independence' for a correct approach to the working class.

Having got themselves a Party, they then had to justify its existence and decide what to do with it. The 'Left Communist' political applications of having declared themselves to be this kind of a Party were not slow in appearing. Those who have had even a small chance to study the history of the Trotskyist movement in Britain, let alone anywhere else in the world, will recognise at once the peculiar political outlook of which announcing this kind of Party in this way is a clear symptom. Only people infected with 'Left Communism' operate this way. We are not surprised, therefore, to recognise characteristically 'Left Communist' phrases is what they came to write and say.

Fortunately for the workers of Britain, this 'Left Communist' trend is still only in the chicken stage, though the symptoms are unmistakable. The obstacles to its development in Britain are so great, both inside the present Trotskyist movement and in the experience and traditions of the Labour movement, that we may confidently hope, if not to kill it off altogether, to put it where it can do no harm. In any case, we promise here to give no quarter, either to 'Left Communism' or to anyone who gives it shelter. It is poison. We know already the characteristic method of Comrade Healy, who manoeuvres between the tendencies in the WRP leadership in order to retain his place as arbiter among them. We warn him not to manoeuvre with the 'Left', to the development of which his own example and protection has made such a sinister contribution. Either he tells the truth about his involvement with them, or we shall tell it for him.

The election manifesto carries the typical 'Left Communist' formulations, which are also found in the Banda-Jeffries 'Reply'. We are asked, for example, to believe that "the dominant tendency within the (reformist) bureaucracy in this period of capitalist disintegration is towards the merging of the unions with the institutions of the capitalist state." The 'dominant' trend, mind you! Not just some odds and ends of right-wingers with no roots in the unions! Chalfont and Mayhew would not know themselves. Then we are told that under the Wilson government since February there was an 'unofficial coalition lasting seven months'. An article on August 31st, headed 'No Way Out' begins: "There is nothing that the capitalist Labour government - or any other government - can do about the disastrous future etc. etc." Wilson is depicted as going into the elections so that he can get a coalition with the Tories after it.

These are all typically 'Left Communist' phrases. Anyone who cares can trace how this kind of thing appeared in the British Communist

movement even in the time of Sylvia Pankhurst and Willie Gallagher. All they have to do is to read Lenin's 'Left-Wing Communism'.

The WRP says that it figured in the elections, in its own peculiar way, to expose the inability of Parliament to solve anything for the workers. Another of the objects which Comrade Healy announced on September 23rd was to present its full programme - nationalisation without compensation. This presentation was not contaminated then, or later in the campaign, by any talk of transitional demands. There was no mention of the Sliding Scale of Wages and Hours, of Opening the Books to the Workers' Inspection, by means of which workers, involved as they were even during the election period in great battles over wages, hours and closures, might be helped to see the need to abolish capitalism and to understand what Trotskyism means by socialist nationalisation under workers' management (and not 'control', as a careful reading of the appropriate section of the Transitional Programme should make clear!) These presentations left workers, so far, with only one conclusion to draw: that the position was pretty hopeless. After all, the WRP could only put up ten candidates. Apart from one notable exception, there is nowhere where it has much basis in the unions. If all that can be said for a future Labour Government is that it will come into immediate conflict with the working class, there is obviously little to choose between Labour and the Tories.

Then, to their amazement, the workers who read on would find that they were called upon, "to return a Labour Government with a massive majority". Having read the earlier arguments, they may well have asked whether the WRP really knew what it was about. Far more consistent would have seemed the line of the Communist Party in the years 1929 to mid-1934. The CP put up the same simple-minded presentation of the Labour Party, but at least they drew the conclusions which flow from it. So they told the workers, where they were not standing CP candidates, to spoil their ballot papers by writing on them such slogans as 'Freedom for India'!

There is, however, to be considered another of the WRP's arguments in favour of intervening as it did in the elections. This is not merely the rather misguided hope of reaching a wider audience than by other means, but to "expose and drive out of the Labour movement all the Labour Ministers and MP's who refuse to carry out the WRP's policy of nationalisation without compensation." (We must not pause here to analyse this statement, though, if we may believe Trotsky, the reformists were not all driven out in Russia until well after the seizure of power.) That is not the aspect of the statement which is of immediate interest here. What is of interest is that the author of the election manifesto suddenly remembered, amid all the 'left' phraseology, that the participation of Trotskyists in elections has got something to do with exposing the Labour leaders, with separating them from their followers, and not with simply preaching our full programme into space. Here, if we may venture to follow Comrade Healy into the realm of Greek mythology (but, let us hope, more fittingly), is his 'Achilles' Heel'. To borrow another popular literary allusion, here we come to the albatross that is round the necks of Comrade Healy and the sectarian trend which he allowed to have its head in the election period. For the other proposition, incompatible with their formal but meaningless 'independence' expressed in these 'Left Communist' attitudes, is that, whether they like it or not, they are descended from Trotskyism, and have not yet managed to cut their ties with Trotskyism, which means 'critical support' for Wilson.

All the ultra-left stuff which we have quoted above had little impact in the campaign. The contradictory proposition about the Party's

being also for a majority Labour Government can only have made things worse. Perhaps it was this difficulty which led the Party to console itself with Mitchell's fairy tale: "Workers are also showing that they have no faith in the reformist bureaucracy of Wilson and Murray."

The sectarians and those to whom they gave orders (already embarrassed by the Transitional Programme). had to call for 'critical support' for Labour. They did not understand why or how, because they had not grasped the tradition of our movement which is derived from Trotsky himself. Understanding only that it had somehow to be done, they got it wrong even when they tried. For they called for support for Labour, not on the basis of testing out and exposing the inability of the Labour leaders to carry out their own programme, let alone to take any genuine steps towards Socialism, such as our transitional programme suggests but - on the basis of the maximum programme of the WRP! As we had occasion in the early thirties to point out so often to the Stalinists, if you approach the workers this way, the only people to whom you expose the Labour fakers are - yourselves. The workers are not going to 'see through' the Labour leaders for not applying a large-scale programme of nationalisation without compensation, when that is precisely the programme which they themselves do not yet understand to be necessary. We may ask, what does Comrade Tony Banda, who has so laboured to provide the movement with Trotsky's writings on Third Period Stalinism, think our attacks on the 'United Front From Below' were all about?

For the tree of sectarianism produces bitter fruits. Not being able to give the readers sound reasons for 'critical support' of Labour, Workers Press on October 9th, offers them a thoroughly bad one. It tells them that it will be alright for them to vote Labour - as they were evidently going to do anyway - "In all other constituencies where the WRP is not standing, vote Labour and force the Labour leaders to carry out Socialist policies."

This is making a bridge to the workers alright! It is a bridge on thoroughly rotten, false and opportunistic foundations. We can hardly believe our eyes! After explaining that the WRP puts up candidates in order to expose the futility of Parliament, how can they expect anyone to take them seriously, when in the next breath they say, not only that the Labour leaders can do something, but that they can carry out Socialist policies! What do those men of stern principles like Comrade Slaughter make of this? Tell everyone please, Comrade Slaughter - what will you say when a worker, perhaps a miner, asks you to explain why you are against the 'British Road to Socialism'? After all, he knows as well as we do that the Communist Party's whole policy rests on the idea of 'pressuring' the Labour leaders. This miner may have read your savage attacks on the 'International Socialists'. He will have got out of them at least enough to wonder whether they are to be taken seriously any more.

Unhappily, this business does not just end there. It calls into question the very principles on which Trotskyism is founded. If the Labour leaders can carry out Socialist policies, whether under pressure or not, why particularly go to all the trouble of standing candidates to establish, in however misguided a fashion, the 'independence' of the Party? Why devote our lives to building a Trotskyist, vanguard party at all? Why talk of taking power by revolutionary means? What are we saying to the comrades in Lisbon? What was Lenin writing about in "What is to be Done?"

On October 9th, the 'Left Communist' line collapsed, turned into its opposite and demonstrated, in practical experience, to those who had

been taken in by it, where it leads. On that day, Workers Press, Ted Grant's 'Militant' and the Morning Star all agreed! In the language of Marxism, such politics are known as 'Centrism'. In the campaign, it was now revealed, the WRP was presenting two faces, one ultimata and the other opportunist. We have shown where the down-sliding into opportunism came from, from the sectarians' inability to understand why they were supposed to be calling for a Labour majority, because this is not compatible with their basic position.

The pathetic aspect of this 'mistake' is that it was totally unnecessary. But it was no slip of the pen, no accident. It was prepared for by the 'Left Communist' attitudes which have developed in the leadership in recent years, and is, like them, a free gift to our enemies.

Workers Press summed up all its confusion over the elections on the front page on October 12th in the supreme and unforgettable contradiction, the highest expression of the master-minds of Clapham High Street. We can hardly imagine that it was intended, for the headline read "Decisive Election", followed by a story, the opening sentence of which stated: "Labour's wafer-thin three-seat majority in Thursday's General Election can solve nothing". There's one for the histories!

At this point we are in a position to clear up the loose talk about 'corporatism'. Those who of late were throwing this new word about in the press and the meetings of the WRP do not appear to have got clear in their minds what they mean by it. There are three things which it can possibly mean. In a moment we shall explain concretely what they are. On the one hand, those who use the word 'corporatism' may be doing so to refer to either one of two possible real-life situations. These situations have appeared and may well appear again, but to use this word 'corporatism' for both of them confuses two quite different things. On the other hand, there is a third possibility which must not be over-looked. This is that the sectarians have, independently, re-discovered one of the nonsensical conclusions generated during the 'Third Period' by the ultra-left thinking of the Communist International, a conclusion which has no basis at all in real life. They may fancy that this third sense in which 'corporatism' can be used is their own, original discovery and advancement of theory, so we shall have to reveal to them its unsuspected, and illegitimate, ancestry.

Let us hope that, in the end, those who thought that 'corporatism' sounded like something good to say, will accept the two perfectly good words, Bonapartism and Fascism, for the two real-life situations, will not dispute that its third possible meaning does not correspond to anything that really exists, will consent to declare the word 'corporatism' redundant, and will promise not to fuddle workers' minds with it any more. Particularly deplorable was the attempt by Banda and Jeffries to exploit the authority of Trotsky and to appropriate quotations from him, in order to dress up a bit their pathetic, abstract little chapter, so pretentiously headed "Corporatism and Fascism", and shedding light on neither.

The confusion between the two real-life senses, in which this word 'corporatism' could be used, occurs because, like all sectarians, they see everything as either black or red. They have no feeling for the importance of time, for the order in which events take place and succeed each other, for what has to happen first before something else can happen, in other words, for processes of development. Possibly they are using this odd word 'corporatism' to mean what Trotsky and Trotskyists have always been accustomed to call 'Bonapartism'. This is a good word, which we got first from Marx himself, and it has served us so well that we do not need to replace it by another one.

The 'Bonaparte' who lent his name to it was, first, the great Napoleon, and secondly, his farcical nephew, Napoleon the Third, Emperor of France from 1852 to 1871. The use of the word derived from their names enables anyone to understand what their regimes were like, and what similar regimes in later history have in common with theirs. The term is used to describe, as far as the capitalist world is concerned, a state of political affairs in a country in which the government is carried on, for the benefit of the dominant section of the property-owners, by a state-apparatus, army, police, civil service, ruling by decree, supported perhaps by a shadow of a Parliament and a pretence of consulting the electorate by means of plebiscites, but more or less effectively raising itself above, and separating itself from, the main contending classes, and maintaining itself by balancing between them.

In this situation, the trade union organizations are not entirely independent, in the sense that they are independent in bourgeois democracy, but at the same time they are by no means liquidated, or re-organised so as to be wholly State-controlled. Those interested in the history of British Trotskyism may like to know that our comrades in the I.L.P. in 1934 established this conception as against the Stalinists, for whom, at that time, everything was Fascism, the Tories, the Labour leaders, the Trade Union leaders, the lot! About the same time, Trotsky re-inforced the lessons of his great works on Germany, with a little essay called "On Bonapartism (Marxism is Superior)", which is to be found in "Writings 1934-35" P.105. This helped a great deal and we recommend it to our readers.

However, the state of affairs which our movement has hitherto always been satisfied to call 'Bonapartism' implies that, at least to some extent, the trade unions have been successfully attacked, and that the leaders have had to surrender some, though only some, of their freedom of action. It is a transitional state. The workers may either be further weakened, may find their leaders more and more subordinating them to the "State" as the "highest organ of Society". Alternatively, they may, as a result of successful struggles in which they are able to exploit the limited freedoms remaining to them, tip the balance of forces in their favour, plunge the bourgeoisie and the state apparatus into crisis and recover greater freedom of action.

In any case, the trade unions can only get into this relationship with a Bonapartist state when the bourgeoisie have been able to inflict partial defeats on the workers, it being understood that this happens, as we may be sure, only as a result of the indirect assistance given to the bourgeoisie by the reformist and Stalinist leadership of the unions. It would be inconceivable for the trade union leaders voluntarily to enter such a subordinate, second-class relationship. They cannot be imagined as doing so unless and until the movement has suffered a partial defeat.

If any one thing is certain it is that the British workers, led as they are by politically illiterate, confused and self-seeking people, are very far from having sustained such a partial defeat, with its demoralising effects. Their high fighting spirit suggests that neither the bourgeoisie nor their allies will find such a defeat at all easy to inflict. The question of 'corporatism' in the sense of Bonapartism is, therefore, at the most, a question for the day after tomorrow rather than for today.

There is however, the second real-life possibility, that when these people talk about 'corporatism' they really mean 'Fascism'. Now

Trotsky has made it absolutely clear once and for all what Fascism means. It means that the bourgeoisie has been able to mobilise hands of desperate petty bourgeois and lumpen workers, has taken advantage of the political ineptitude, cowardice and conservatism of the reformists to disarm the workers politically and inflict a whole series of defeats on them, to the point that they can destroy altogether the trade unions, replacing them with 'Labour Front'-type organisations staffed exclusively by fascists. Fascism, even less than Bonapartism, is an immediate prospect.

Let us remark, in passing, that Trotsky was particularly careful to point out that the state of affairs which we scientifically call 'Fascism' can itself last only a comparatively short time. The masses discover that the promises on which the Fascists got power are deceptions. The State apparatus expands to give jobs to the successful careerists. The radical wing is eliminated (June 30th, 1934!) The State apparatus once again finds itself devoid of a mass basis, hated and suspected from both sides, and passes into a new stage of Bonapartism, in which, of course, the relation of forces is none the less seriously disadvantageous to the workers, who no longer have their own organisations.

Where does the talk about military 'coups' fit into this analysis? The real risk is that the people who constantly cry "wolf! wolf!" will disarm the workers and drive the real danger out of their minds. The state apparatus is being strengthened, and the attitude of the senior officers grows increasingly arrogant and independent towards their political 'chiefs'. However, whatever the pussey-cats of Congress House say about preserving civil peace, we may be sure that, in the present mood of the working class, the response to a military 'coup' would be like that of the German workers to the Kapp Putsch in 1920, a General Strike in the preparation of which the spontaneous movement of masses of workers would sometimes run ahead of and sometimes take advantage of the approval of the reformist leadership. In any case, such a move would hardly even get off the ground under a Labour Government, in the present mood: the lower-grade clerks would undermine the 'security' which the officers need, and 'blow' the whole business to the unions and the press.

In a different and less favourable relation of forces, if the Labour and Trade union leaders lead the workers to a series of defeats which begin to demoralise them, then they could find themselves obliged to dump all their pretentious nonsense about being equal partners in a 'social contract', and pass under the yoke which, with measures such as the Industrial Relations Act, would restrict their freedom of negotiation. Until then, they will do everything they can, apart from mobilising the workers in mass struggles with a political objective of overthrowing capitalism, to retain for themselves their monopoly, their sole rights, in being the go-betweens between the workers and the employers, in disciplining, manipulating and betraying the workers in big things, in return for the concessions in small things by which they sustain their authority. This is what makes them important. For this they get their seats in the House of Lords and their jobs.

There remains for us to consider the third possible meaning which the WRP sectarians and their imitators attach to this unfortunate word 'corporatism'. They appear to be using it in the same sense as the Stalinists in the 'Third Period' used the term 'social-fascism'. Having superficially skimmed off from Trotsky's writings that social-fascism was a wrong thing to say, but not grasping the essence of his exposure of the 'theory of social-fascism', in the usual formal way, they think they can get away from the thing by avoiding the word.

The most flagrant instance of this mistake is in the Banda-Jeffries pamphlet against the 'Blick-Jenkins' group', "A Reply". "We have warned, and we warn here again, that the dominant trend within the bureaucracy in this period of capitalist disintegration is towards the merging of the unions with the institutions of the capitalist state." That is what they mean by 'corporatism'. That is also one of the things that the Stalinists in the 'Third Period' meant by 'social fascism'. The same 'Left Communist' starting point, the formal conception of the 'independence' of the Party, leads to the same result - whatever you call it. For Banda and Jeffries to shout that they do not treat the trade union leaders as fascists has nothing to do with the case. We have already shown what nonsense this idea is that the whole reformist bureaucracy could 'do a MacDonald', or 'do a Chalfont' or 'do a Mayhew'. The form is different, Comrades Banda and Jeffries, but the content of your position is that of the Stalinists in the 'Third Period'. No Trotskyist can go on holding the view that these professional reformists, whose whole lives are identified with the Trade Union and Labour apparatus, could possibly place before themselves the conscious aim of subordinating themselves to a Bonapartist or 'corporate' State, even if it would have them! This is formal, un-historical, un-dialectical rubbish, which proceeds from a sheer lack of knowledge about the mass Labour movement. If only we could dissuade people who know nothing about the trade unions and the Labour Party from pontificating about them!

Comrades Banda and Jeffries - at least take warning from a little letter that appeared in the 'Times' for October 28th. This came from that wicked old Stalinist hack, that vicious slanderer of Trotsky, that dishonest, corrupt, flower of the 'Third Period', that sprig of the British aristocracy, Ivor Montagu. He takes your position. He wrote: "Isn't Mr. Wilson the best Tory Prime Minister we have?".

The Communist Party in the 'Third Period' represents classical sectarianism in British working-class experience, and originated the business about the 'independence' of the Party with the peculiar twist which we have seen. We shall be completely wrong if we think that the sectarian tendency of the WRP is the same as the dominant wing of the leadership of the Communist Party. They both combine ultra-leftism with opportunism, and they both try to assume a mantle of extreme orthodoxy while they do it. But there the superficial resemblance ceases. We should be giving way to impressionism if we let it be pushed any further. The problem of the C.I. was far more dangerous to the workers. Stalinist ultra-leftism, with opportunism waiting behind it to take over in the subsequent period, had powerful material roots in the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, strengthened as it was in relation to the working-class by the whole series of post-1918 defeats of the workers.

The sectarian tendency in the leadership of the WRP today, differs from the 'Third Period' Stalinists in two other important respects also, in having another important disadvantage, in addition to a less solid material base. Not only is the ultra-leftism in the WRP leadership exposed to attack in a period when the morale of the workers is high, when they cannot feed on defeats. They also are still anchored to Trotskyism; they have not yet cut the cable. Aspects of the Trotskyist tradition embarrass them, but they cannot easily or quickly get rid of them. First, the tradition that the Labour Party must get critical support. Secondly, that oppositional work must be organised in the trade unions, no matter how this may not square with other activities. Thirdly, that some notice has to be taken of movements of disaffection in the Labour Party against the reformist

leadership. Fourthly, that the Party prefers a Labour victory to a Tory one, and for definite reasons. All this means a determined, principled stand against 'Left Communism', against the bad personal habits which it engenders, the bluster, over-confidence alternating with the self-deprecation, proclivity to back-stairs manoeuvre or to issuing orders as methods of solving difficulties. All these are perfectly well known in the history of the Marxist movement. Beneath them all lies - theoretical superficiality.

Where sectarians are in control, there is no mechanism by which differences can be debated and resolved between comrades. We therefore promise the sharpest exposure of anyone who covers up for sectarians, who tries to manoeuvre with them or obstructs for his factional interests the process of exposing and re-educating them.

What are the social origins of this Centrist combination of sectarianism with a down-sliding towards opportunism? How has it got into the WRP? Basically the degeneration is a buckling under the pressures of British capitalism, expressed in the natural impatience so often experienced in the same way in the past at the slow development of the social crisis and the convoluted development of the working class. These feelings lead to an idealistic appreciation of the workers' movement. The infection was able to flourish in the Party because the Party has not studied, let alone assimilated, the past history of the British Trotskyist movement, authentic materials for which exist in plenty. The sectarian tendency was fostered by the special conditions of the last few years in which relatively quick and easy gains could be made in paper membership and money, in the early stages of this present, new mass radicalisation. Nor must we overlook this leadership's inability to establish any stable international co-operation over the years. The personal psychology of individuals also is relatively much more influential in small organisations than in large ones. Comrade Healy himself finds difficulty in maintaining a stable opposition to 'Left Communism', apparently partly because he got his early training in the Communist Party in the closing years of the 'Third Period'. Further, none of the leading cadre apart from him has ever had any serious experience of the life or work of a normal trade union or of the Labour Party.

The advanced workers will pronounce on this leadership. What will become of it? If it does not correct these tendencies in which 'Left Communism' appears to dominate, but opportunism lies close to the surface, it will become more and more at the mercy of forces which it does not understand and cannot control. Who knows what problems are round the corner? How will it stand up to the isolation which will assuredly hit it in the early stages of great industrial battles, for at those times it is certain that the masses will rally as never before round their traditional organisations?

If the results of the elections do not give rise to a thorough-going investigation, this leadership will lurch from left to right and back again. Each new turn will be passed off as a new discovery, instead of the re-discovery of some old error. Each defeat will be painted up as a victory. Fresh inroads into the tradition of British Trotskyism will take place under the mantle of an abstract "fight for dialectical materialism" - as if these formal thinkers had exclusive rights in Marxist theory! Alongside these external tosses and turns, serious differences will open up inside the leadership and arise in the membership. All sorts of undreamed-of things will come to light. A series of personal and political crises, hitherto unprecedented, will be the by-product.

At the present time, we regard as possible, as well as highly desirable, that there shall be a reconciliation, on the basis of principled agreement, between the elements in the WRP who come to understand the fight against sectarianism and the tendency which supports the general ideas of this document. The WRP leaders, or some of them, may find these criticisms galling, and react subjectively to them. They may demand still greater efforts and sacrifices from comrades who do the Party work, on the basis of the present policies. A fatal course for them! It will only bring on earlier and more severely the inevitable crises. They may, indeed, react against us with measures borrowed from Stalinism. What good do they think that will do them? Did such methods ever succeed against us in the past?

5. How Did the WRP Arrive at its Electoral Policy?

In the October 1974 elections, the workers were serious as never before. Jack Gale, who got his early training in a good school, as an 'entrism' in the Labour Party, understands this. One reason (but not the only one) why the WRP vote dropped in October was that some workers who voted for it in February felt the second time that things were too serious for playing around. This does not at all mean that the WRP had the right policy in October and lost votes just because it was unlucky! It means, on the contrary, that, in this election of all elections, the sectarians wrongly understood the mood of the masses and wrongly approached the working class.

Some of the membership, people we know well, are tough and experienced Bolsheviks. How did they get involved in this adventure? Many of them do not need telling; they know only too well. This is the way some of them think. Many comrades in the Party see no present alternative to it, or to its present leadership. At the same time they have been uneasy for some time at certain aspects of the ultra-left course. Other aspects of it either do not impinge on their work or seem right because they appear to get quick and spectacular results; who dislikes big meetings?

The questions in these comrades' heads are not easily raised in the WRP. It is futile for the hacks of Clapham High Street to bluster about the purity of their regime. There are too many of their ex-members still active in Trotskyist politics, who know better, from rich experience. Do not challenge us to produce a 'Red Book' on the way things are run at the top of the WRP!

However, the WRP, none the less, is still nearer to Trotskyism than any other of the (relatively) large semi-Trotskyist groups. The IS is at present moving to the right, and who can tell where it will move next? The attachment of the IMG to Trotskyist politics is so precarious that the first great wind of the class war will blow it to bits. The comrades of the WRP are right to hope to save the Party for Trotskyism and to retain as many of its leading cadre as they can. We agree that changes are overdue. In order to be completely concrete, and demonstrate by example what sort of changes are wanted, let us probe the way the WRP's electoral policy was adopted.

We do not speak, of course, of the content of the policy. That has already been analysed as a 'Left Communist' or sectarian policy, with opportunistic compensations. We are just considering how it was adopted. Was the proposal to stand ten, or nine, or eleven candidates, or one or none at all, openly debated in the columns of

the paper? That would, after all, have been the practice of the Bolsheviks, of the old Communist Party, as well as of the Trotskyists. Did not the Party encourage the advanced workers on its fringe to think about the electoral problems, and perhaps write to the paper their views? Maybe these comrades did not yet know enough about what was involved to take up a position? Did not the Party then prepare educational documents for them? Did no one tell them about the traditional attitude towards elections of the British Trotskyists? Have our past disputes nothing of benefit or interest for them? Did no one mention the lessons we have drawn in our past attacks on the errors and wobblings of the Stalinists? Were there possibilities of debate and disagreement? Was there an open confrontation of alternative policies?

These questions have to be asked, and answered, to illustrate the kind of organisational changes which must be made, but which cannot be made as long as the political leadership is this Centrist mixture of sectarianism and opportunism and until the political differences in the leadership are properly aired before the Party and do not remain hidden in the upper rooms at Clapham High Street.

6. The Electoral Policy of British Trotskyism: What Trotsky Taught Us

We are fortunate that Pathfinder Press of New York has published Trotsky's shorter writings in the last eleven years of his life. Two articles, written nearly forty years ago, and a report of a discussion nearly as old, will be found to be of great value to us. The first is "Once Again: the I.L.P." The second is "Interview by Collins". Both of these are in "Writings: 1935-36", pages 69 and 76. The third is entitled "On the History of the Left Opposition", and is most easily available in "Writings: 1938-39", p.61. Comrade Healy reproduced it in a duplicated bulletin in the early 1950's called "Forum". While history never exactly repeats itself, any comrade who reads these articles today, or even the extracts and references which we give here, will recognise at once how the political essence of what Trotsky was saying at that time sheds light on our problems today.

"Once Again the I.L.P." is a report, checked by Trotsky, of a conversation which he had with a member of the British Trotskyist organisation, a Canadian comrade called Earle Robertson. Their talk took place in November 1935, a couple of weeks after the General Election of that year. At that time, the main stream of the British Trotskyist movement consisted of a faction organised inside the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.). In earlier times the ILP had been a leading reformist party affiliated to the Labour Party. In 1935 it had been outside and to the left of the Labour Party for three years, but had failed to develop beyond a Centrist position, in which it tried at one and the same time to be a Parliamentary Party and to be a Party preparing the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. By now it has effectively passed off the political scene (there is a bit left in Bristol), but in the early 1930's the possibility still existed that the Trotskyists might win it over for the Fourth International, or, at least, win workers in it to our point of view. For a time, indeed, "entry" into the ILP proved to be fruitful. Inside the ILP our faction, which was called the "Marxist Group in the ILP" started a discussion on electoral policy, in order to smoke out the Centrists.

The best-remembered of the ILP leaders at the time were Jimmy Maxton, M.P. and Fenner Brockway. They favoured putting up candidates against the Labour Party, because, in Glasgow, four of them could hold seats against Labour candidates. They thought they had a right to these seats and to certain other ones, and if the workers' vote was split and a Tory got in, they said it was the Labour Party that split the ILP's vote. This general attitude to the Labour Party had another element of hostility in it also. This came from the influence of the Communist Party. There was a period, in the years 1928 to 1933, the so-called "Third Period", when the Communist Party was preaching an ultra-left, sectarian line. It said that the Labour Party was a third party of capitalism, and backed this up by saying that Labour was preparing to join a coalition with the Tories, was going to join with the employers in setting up a corporate state, was going to use violence against the workers, the logical conclusion from all of which was, whether you thought the Labour Party a workers' party or not, that you should oppose Labour candidates at elections, and that it made little or no difference whether a Labour or a Tory candidate got returned.

For some time, the Trotskyists hammered away to win the ILP to an electoral policy, the essence of which was a principled United Front with the Labour Party. Taking advantage of the fact that the ILP had been in existence for over forty years, had a traditional following in the working class and was well known, they suggested that the ILP would be justified in putting up a few candidates. At the same time, they urged that, in general, its election campaign should consist of giving "critical support" to Labour. By "critical support" they meant that the ILP would hold meetings and publish leaflets, not calling for support for any particular Labour candidate (for that would be illegal), but stressing the promises which the Labour leaders were making, and a programme of transitional demands, which the Labour leaders ought to be fighting for if they were really fighting for Socialism. In other words, the Trotskyists wanted to make a central part of their campaign persuading people to vote Labour for the revolutionary reasons that in power the Labour leaders would be put to the test, that it would be possible to draw workers into the struggle partly on the basis of the demands put forward by the Labour leaders and that, as the struggle developed, the experiences begun in the election would help workers to see the need for a revolutionary struggle for Socialism and for a revolutionary Party. It must be remembered that while they had a general idea about practical demands to bridge between the present level of consciousness of the masses and what could be done to attack capitalism, the Transitional Programme had not yet been written.

This line was put across in the ILP for a time with much success. There was a General Election coming up in Autumn 1935 sometime, and the Trotskyists hoped to get the ILP to work this way. Then, as a result of a change in circumstances, the 'Marxist Group in the ILP' lost its bearings. They changed their electoral policy, and the sectarian C. L. R. James had a lot to do with it. They realised that the Labour leaders would support the Tories if there was a war. They did not like the idea of supporting people whom they knew would be social-patriots. A majority of the 'Marxist Group in the ILP' began to call on the ILP to put up as many candidates as it could, and, in addition, to boycott Labour candidates. They were prepared to make only a very few exceptions in favour of the very rare Labour candidates prepared to say that they would not support 'League of Nations Sanctions' against Italy. Today's readers may well wonder what this was all about, and the details are so long since dead that a book would have to be written to bring them back to life. None the

less, the underlying political question still lives among us, unsolved to this day by the WRP leadership.

Italy started a war against Abyssinia (now called Ethiopia), in East Africa in the summer of 1935. It was a small-scale but naked piece of imperialist aggression. The Labour Party and the Communist Party called for a campaign of 'pressure' on the Tory National Government, to make it get the League of Nations to tell the Italians to stop. There was actually a deal between the British Tories and the Italian Fascists to give the latter a free hand. The League of Nations represented powers which did not want to interfere for a variety of reasons, some because they were afraid of starting a war with Italy. None of the powers, when it came to the point, was prepared to interfere seriously with the supply of war materials to Italy, least of all the Soviet Union, which went on selling oil to Italy throughout its invasion of Ethiopia, while the Communist Party here denounced the Italian 'aggression', and called upon the British Tories to stop it! This early instance of strike-breaking by the Stalinists, and all this placing of confidence in the good possibilities in the Tories alarmed many workers in Britain. They could foresee that, if it ever suited the Tories to let their differences with Italy reach the point of war, they would be able to say it was a 'just' war on the ground that Italy had defied the League of Nations, and the Stalinists would be - as, of course, they were in 1941-1944 - in full cry disarming the workers for the benefit of the 'war effort'.

The policy which the ILP wanted Labour candidates to accept in the 1935 General Election was to oppose the Labour and the Communist Parties' calls for 'League of Nations Sanctions' and for the war against Italy to which they might lead. The ILP's attitude was a muddled one, because many of them were pacifists, who objected as much to British workers stopping war supplies to Italy as they did to British firms sending them!

The Trotskyists were divided. The minority, which in our opinion was correct, wanted to go on supporting critically all Labour candidates except where the ILP was standing. The majority, however, wanted to support only ILP candidates, or those few Labour candidates who would promise to oppose the Labour Party's official policy. In practical terms there was only one of them, only one 'anti-League of Nations' Labour candidate. He was George Lansbury, an out-and-out pacifist, miles away from being a revolutionary.

In those days the Trotskyists discussed their differences openly inside their organisation. The 'Bulletin of the Marxist Group in the ILP' carried statements from both sides, showing, of course, which was the majority point of view. After the election, Comrade Robertson went to ask Trotsky to clear up the matter of principle behind our difference, which we had no intention of sweeping under the carpet. The 'Marxist Group' published the report of the conversation at the time, not deterred by the fact that it condemned the majority.

The relevant part of the report on Trotsky's conversation with Robertson, which is to be found in "Once Again: The ILP" reads as follows:

"Question: Was the ILP correct in refusing critical support to Labour Party candidates who advocated military sanctions (against Italy)?"

"Answer: No. Economic sanctions, if real, lead to military sanctions, to war. The ILP itself has been saying this. It should have given critical support to all Labour candidates, i.e. where the ILP itself was not contesting. In the "New Leader", I read that your London Division (under Trotskyist control - Ed.) agreed to support only anti-sanctionist Labour Party candidates. This also is incorrect. The Labour Party should have been critically supported, not because it was for or against sanctions but because it represented the working masses.

"The basic error made by some ILP'ers (including the majority of the Trotskyists - Ed.) who withdrew critical support was to assume that the war danger necessitated a change in our appreciation of reformism ... The war crisis does not alter the fact that the Labour Party is a workers' party, which the government party is not. Nor does it alter the fact that the Labour Party leadership cannot fulfill their promises, that they will betray the confidence which the masses place in them ... The ILP must say to the workers: "The Labour Party will deceive you and betray you, but you do not believe us. Very well, we will go through your experiences with you, but in no case do we identify ourselves with the Labour Party programme" ...

"Question: Should the ILP seek entry into the Labour Party?"

"Answer: At the moment the question is not posed this way. What the ILP must do, if it is to become a revolutionary party, is to turn its back on the CP and face the mass organisations. It must put 99% of its energies into building of fractions in the trade union movement ... For the time may come when, in order to reach the masses, it must enter the Labour Party, and it must have tracks laid for the occasion. Only the experience that comes from such fractional work can inform the ILP if and when it must enter the Labour Party. But for all its activity an absolutely clear programme is the first condition. A small axe can fell a large tree only if it is sharp enough ..."

In the second interview, also in "Writing 1935-36", Trotsky talked about entry into the Labour Party, which, at that time, in the given conditions, he strongly advocated. This interview took place, in Summer 1936, with a worker-comrade of the Marxist Group in the ILP called Sam Collins, who took his holidays that year to go to Norway and consult the Old Man about our problem of perspective. It was the last contact that the British movement had with Trotsky before the Norwegian police, at the behest of the GPU, interned him and cut off his communications. He does not specifically discuss electoral policy in this interview, but rather deals with the relationship of the revolutionaries with the Labour Party. There is no point in extracting quotations from this report. Like "Once Again the I.L.P.", it was circulated in duplicated form by the comrades of the 'Marxist Group in the ILP'.

The third reference is to a talk between Trotsky and C.L.R. James, the intellectual from Trinidad, who was active in our movement from 1935 on. Trotsky did not check the report, which James wrote, but it is so critical of James that it cannot be doubted. James had been making out that ever since 1924 the Stalinists had consciously desired the defeat of the working class. Trotsky explains that this is too formal, and goes on:

"All that, however, is not very dangerous, although it shows a great lack of proportion to say that our whole propaganda has been meaningless. What is much worse is the sectarian approach to the Labour Party. You say that I put forward without reservations the slogan of

Blum-Cachin (the leaders of the SP and CP in France - Ed.) Then you remember "All power to the Soviet" and you say that the United Front has no Soviet. It is the same sectarian approach."

James: "There has been difficulty in England with advocating a Labour Government with the necessary reservations."

Trotsky: "In France, in all our press, in our archives and propaganda, we regularly made all the necessary reservations. Your failure in England is due to lack of ability; also lack of flexibility, due to the long domination of bourgeois thought in England. I would say to the English workers, "You refuse to accept my point of view. Well, perhaps I did not explain well enough. Perhaps you are stupid. Anyway I have failed. But now, you believe in your party. Why allow Chamberlain to hold the power? Put your party in power and I will help you to put them in ..."

7. How Many Candidates?

The Theoreticians of the WRP will read these quotations, and say, 'But this is just the policy which we are carrying out'. If only that were true! They may even believe it, but the evidence is against them.

Trotsky said we should put up 'as many candidates as possible', because 'we do not know our strength unless we test it'. The Party's support had been tested alright in February, and in February two candidates would have been enough. It does not take the loss of nineteen deposits to find out that you get 343 votes per candidate. Two would have been plenty for that, and today two is the 'largest possible number'. They have talked of some other kind of support which they get from putting up more candidates and claim to have got, without evidence, and we must tell them that they are kidding, at least, themselves. We do not believe anyone who says that they put up five times too many candidates just to carry out Trotsky's suggestion for testing their support. Nothing was ever mentioned about this during the campaign. The reasons given for putting up the nineteen candidates in the two General Elections were quite different. They were, as we have seen, the hoary old sectarian arguments, with which militants get seduced in every generation, unless Bolshevik-Leninism can put a stop to it.

Some of the influential members of the WRP took seriously the Party's words about wanting Labour to win, even though they may have doubted the extent to which its candidatures could be said to help Labour by 'putting a revolutionary edge on the election'. These comrades saw nothing actually done to develop critical support for Labour. The Party's declarations served, accordingly, merely as a fig-leaf to cover its sectarian practice, from which flowed, as we have seen, the grossly opportunistic compensating down-sliding.

True, the 1974 campaigns carried little conviction with workers who are now Labour Party or Trade Union militants. What would carry conviction with them? At least a campaign on the following lines would have been better.

- i. No principles can be laid down a priori whether our Party stands no candidates, one or more. If any particular number of candidates, at a given time, offers the greatest possibility of testing its strength, getting experience, showing its face to the workers and counter-posing its policies to those of the Labour Party, putting up candidates is not ruled out. Running one or more

candidates is not necessarily always the best way to show the Party's face, and in any case the proper way to do it is quite different from putting up so many, with so little previous thought or preparation, that all the Party does is to give its opponents something to laugh at, that it gets one eighth of the proportion of the Labour vote, in the constituencies where it stands, that the CP got in the 1929 General Election, where the CP got 10% of the Labour vote where it stood.

- ii. There will then be enough money and manpower to spare to approach the workers, by means of leaflets, public meetings, motorcades and any other devices which the experts can suggest, to explain the place of our policies in the struggle for the Labour victory over the Tories, the struggle to which we are contributing. We shall, it is to be hoped, put across Trotsky's reasons for giving 'critical support', not the two contradictory lines of the Workers Press.

We feel sure that readers will be interested to know that this will not be the first such independent intervention by British Trotskyists. To carry it through does not call for any super-human acts of imagination. In the Spring of 1934 there was a by-election in North Hammersmith. The political feeling of the workers was running strongly in favour of the Labour Party against the 'National' Tory Government. The Communist Party put up Harry Pollitt and split the Labour vote against the Tories. The Communist League issued a leaflet headed 'Five Communist Reasons for Voting Labour' and denounced the sectarianism of the Communist Party. Comrade Healy will probably agree that the arguments which it put forward for supporting Labour were opportunistic ones, and should not be copied, but the point here is that our support for Labour must not be merely 'critical', but positive. What we cannot do is only to call independently for support for any named individual.

The WRP in 1974 got the worst of all possible worlds. They were careful to choose nineteen contests where their intervention would not split the Labour vote enough to let a Tory in. It would have got some political credit if it had chosen, say two constituencies, made some impact there, and let everyone see that it was supporting Labour elsewhere. Everyone saw the WRP put up far too many candidates, without any one of them having the chance to make the slightest impact, so nobody bothers whether it split the Labour vote or not, or gives it any credit for trying not to do so!

8. Organising the Electoral Work: Some Specific Proposals: What They Mean.

First we had to clear away the debris. Now we can begin to build. The day will come when our party in Britain is strong enough to put forward many candidates. Even then it will have to face the question of its relationship with the mass Labour movement, and find the place in the United Front against the Tories in which it can get the greatest political advantage. Even then, as today, the organisational mistakes of the 1974 campaigns will have to be corrected. Putting up candidates at the last minute anywhere is useless. The time-table for the Party's electoral arrangements cannot be allowed to depend on the decision of the Prime Minister to dissolve Parliament.

The WRP is no more exempt than any other party from the external conditions in which it can do electoral work. Other parties have to select their candidates in advance, and to construct a basis for them.

So must the WRP. Only at the very height of a revolutionary crisis, a crisis in the thinking of the masses as well as in the economic base, could these conditions be ignored with impunity. People who 'parachute' a candidate into a constituency, as if they could seduce or rape the electors, give an impression of contempt for the working-class voters, to put it at its mildest.

The Labour and Trade Union workers tolerate least of all a party which seems to want to have it all ways at once. We respectfully suggest to the leaders of the WRP that the way NOT to impress this decisive layer of the masses is to proceed as they did. What did they do?

- i. They put up a number of manifestly futile candidatures:
- ii. They said that they were for a Labour victory, and the reasons they gave contradicted each other, some saying it was to expose Labour (but in an ineffective way) while others said it was to 'force the Labour leaders to carry out Socialist policies':
- iii. They did in fact nothing to back up their pose of wanting a Labour victory.

If we were Stalinists or 'Left' Labour-ites, how we would look forward to catching some guileless Workers Press seller in public and skimming him alive! Even if he did not understand what his leaders had let him in for - the working-class audience would!

We believe that there is sufficient sympathy for these views in the WRP for us to recommend:

1. A systematic discussion among the Party workers, to cast light on the following questions:-
 - a) What really is the state of the Party's contacts with the rank and file of the Trade Unions and the Labour Party? What members of these organisations has it got? What, if anything, do they do in these organisations for the WRP?
 - b) What is the relationship which the WRP should be trying to establish with the rank and file of these organisations? In other words, what is meant by the 'United Front' and how should it be operated?
 - c) What lessons can be learned from: (i) The past experience of Trotskyists in trade union work and in 'entrism', (ii) The experiences of the Communist Party between 1929 and 1934 with the 'United Front from Below' and 'Rank and File Movements' on the one hand, and its various electoral policies on the other?
2. At the same time, while undertaking the theoretical work necessary to clear up the Party's relationship with the mass movement, the preliminaries for the next General Election can be put in hand. As Comrade Healy said at Stoke Newington, this majority Labour Government will not last long. The necessary steps will be:
 - a) Select early a constituency where Trotskyist policies can be effectively shown to be part of the general forward march of the working class, and select a prospective candidate.
 - b) Prepare systematically: (i) Actually be seen to take part in the struggle against the Tories and the National Front: (ii) Popularise the Party's ideas and its candidate on the basis that its fight is there to strengthen and not to split the working class.

However, at every step in those discussions and this work, there will flow out the central question: in which direction is the Party faced? Let us look at a splendid example. In October 1974 the contest in Hackney and Stoke Newington produced the poorest result of all. Even the miserable Stalinist got two and a half times as many votes as did Comrade Banda. Should not Comrade Banda ask himself the question, how it comes about that such a man as he, who has devoted his whole life to the struggle for Socialism, who should be able to approach immigrant workers where people of Western origins cannot, in a place where the immigrants are savagely exploited in so many ways, makes so little impact? It is not due to lack of talent, not to lack of devotion. It is not the party comrades who need changing. It is the ultra-left policy, and no amount of last-minute concessions to opportunism will cover that up.

The Labour movement and the workers generally, to whom the WRP addresses its appeals for money, has the right to be told what made the Party decide to stand in Hackney. There is not the slightest sign that anyone in the WRP knew anything about the area. Did no-one tell them about the fight that was going on in the local Labour Party? Did they really know nothing about the struggle to chuck out the seventy-year old Weizman? Did they not know how near it had come to success? Could they really find no other way to intervene in the life of the workers of Hackney than what they did?

Comrade Banda's experience sufficiently demonstrated that no small organisation can approach the oppressed people directly with any hope of success. It has to take into account that the trade unions and the Labour Party dominate the scene. No-one has yet suggested, in our time, and let us hope that no-one will suggest, that we try building 'Red Trade Unions', in competition with the existing mass organisations. The consequences of trying to substitute the WRP for the Labour Party have just been spelled out in quite definite terms. As Comrade Healy so rightly warned Behan in 1960: "If you despise the Labour Party, you will come to despise the unions, and if you despise the unions, you will come to despise the working class". And so it turned out with Behan.

The road to the masses must be opened. For this purpose, a base must be prepared in the mass organisations. Those who know little about trade union or Labour Party faction work often talk as if this work were some kind of 'soft option'. Such opinions are nonsense, but, like much else that is nonsense, they are dangerous to the Party and have to be fought. It is true that work in the mass organisations does not lend itself to impulsiveness. It has to be consistent and carefully planned. It demands a higher level of political knowledge, as well as of thought, for in the mass movement you come face to face with the agents of the enemy, their arguments and their cunning manoeuvres. There are no instant answers to the problems you encounter there. The short-run results are of course, less spectacular, and less impressive to simple minds.

Such work cannot be done at all if there are leading people in the Party who either disagree with it or do not understand it. Those who think in terms of instant results will consciously or unconsciously sabotage the work of the fractions. This applies with even greater strength to a fraction in the Labour Party, which has the added problem that it cannot even speak openly in the name of the Party.

One of the lessons which James P. Cannon taught the present writer was that the trade union factions of a Party tend to pull away from it, and that this tendency has to be consciously counter-acted.

(We noticed with interest that this aspect of Cannon's contribution to our movement did not attract the attention of Comrade Banda). Cannon's point was that the trade union comrades are in the front line: they are under the direct pressure of the sharply changing environment, sometimes full of struggle, sometimes quiet. Consequently they need a leadership which can listen as well as talk, can support as well as criticise, can persuade as well as command.

Behind the seemingly minor argument about how to work in a trade union, there may well be rising much greater conflicts, between totally opposed methods of trying to build the Party, the Trotskyist method and the sectarian method. Ultimately these are irreconcilable. Trotskyist work in any relation to the mass movement is impossible as long as we are tied to incorrigible sectarians. For a time we can live in the same organisation, use the same words, wonder why there is continuous friction and bad personal relations about seemingly trivial things. In the short run, but only in the short run, as long as the Party is comparatively small and isolated, the sectarians may seem to have everything going for them. They get the quick results, because the Trotskyists have so little chance to test out and prove the superiority of their ideas overnight. The sectarian can say or do what he pleases. He is restrained least of all by the disciplines of the mass organisations. With one moment's irresponsibility or malice, he can damage months of other comrades' exacting faction work. As in the WRP, in the short-run, he can develop a sectarian tendency while attracting support on the basis of the matchless intellectual treasures of Trotskyism.

Consequently, an electoral organisation which will enable the Party to take advantage of a correct policy demands that the local membership in an area are encouraged to get on with their local work, attend trade union branch and other local meetings, seek contacts in the Labour and Trade Union movement in the organisations rather than at the street corner. The Party must silence vulgar talk about such work being 'routinist', and must bathe in the mass movement anyone who talks like that.

A 'turn' to the trade unions and to correct work in them, which in itself opens up a possibility of a correct electoral policy, as well as of building fractions inside the Labour Party, does not offer any instant solutions to problems. It merely provides the Party with the chance to fight where the fight is most worthwhile. As the 'Internationale' says, there is no 'saviour from on high' to deliver us from the problems of how to fight. Our history has made at least this clear. There have been people in the history of British Trotskyism who turned to the Labour Party in the hope of using it as a road to the working class and who found instead that it got them involved with the aristocracy of labour and the reformist apparatus. Others hoped to avoid falling into this trap by having nothing to do with the Labour Party, and fell into the equal and opposite trap, of trying to involve themselves with workers in struggle without taking into account its influence in the mass organisations. Nothing can enable us to avoid these traps but the accumulation of experience, enlightened by the study of Marxism and the discussion of theoretical and practical questions, leading to the disciplined execution of decisions democratically arrived at. To those who want to work this way, sectarianism and Centrism are the kiss of death, with their looseness in matters of theory, their empty shouting and bureaucratic cock-sureness. Vulgar subjectivism says: 'It's a cinch! We have willed it, and we shall make the workers vote for us'. Marxism says, on the contrary, 'If you are objective about your situation, you will realise that you depend on the masses who vote Labour, and you will

entrench yourself in their ranks and integrate yourself in the struggles to which they address themselves." What a practical lesson these electoral questions have given us in the narrow knife-edge of Bolshevism, with the traps of opportunism on one side and those of sectarianism on the other.

Planning the work of a trade union faction, or, for that matter, of a Labour Party faction is not something separate and distinct from the 'open' work of those who sell papers in the street or in other ways approach the public direct in the name of the Party. Trade union members may often be able to sell the paper openly. Whether they do or not is a tactical question, safeguarding on the one hand against their sliding into a centrist relationship with bad elements in the union, and, on the other hand, against prematurely isolating them before they have got a basis in the union. In any case, there is not commonly any question of either 'open' workers or 'faction' workers approaching the masses with 'our full position'. If our 'full position' could be freely put forward, with good results, there would be no necessity for transitional demands, nor for the United Front! The essence of the matter is that the trade union and Labour Party work is work for which the whole Party is responsible, in which the 'open' workers are just as involved as the 'faction' workers.

In 1960 the whole matter was over-simplified in the Socialist Labour League. Grainger and Behan, the ultra-left 'Left Communist' tendency denied the working-class character of the Labour Party. Comrade Healy, who was at that time nearer to the main stream of Trotskyism and under less pressure from the sectarianism which has subsequently developed, made a bloc with the section of the Party most experienced in Labour Party and Trade Union work. This attracted, on a generally correct Trotskyist basis, the best elements of those who had come in from the Communist Party after 1956. The Labour Party, even so, was analysed only in a partial, un-dialectical way. Consequently, half the case against Behan was missed, in addition to a chance to arm the League in advance against another sectarian infection. Everyone was called upon to agree to a declaration that the Labour Party is a working-class Party, and the great majority did. We left out, however, the other half of that great contradiction which is the Labour Party. Not only is it a workers' Party, but it is controlled by people under the influence of the bourgeoisie, selected and trained, usually at first through the liberal middle class, and then through the mechanism of the politics of bourgeois democracy, to dominate the Labour Party with bourgeois ideas. The Labour leaders are NOT Tories. Talk of their being 'Trojan horses' comes only from people who understand, neither Greek mythology, nor the way that Labour leaders are formed out of the population.

It is not enough to say: the Labour Party is a working-class party. The reformist workers also say that. Trotskyists must add: the Labour Party is a contradiction. It is a party, based on the trade unions, which came into existence only because the organised workers needed it to express their interests in the class struggle, but, even in its origins, it also harboured people who make it their job to confine the struggles of the workers as far as possible to Parliamentary channels. Such people accept the responsibility for running capitalism, argue from the imaginary 'national interest' to get the workers to accept sacrifices, bargain for small concessions to the workers as the price of big concessions to the bourgeoisie; and take their rewards in the House of Lords and the board rooms of nationalised industries. Not the Tory Party, but the Labour Party is the basis of their careers.

Over the last forty years the apparatus of the Labour Party, has, therefore, become more and more a mechanism for keeping the workers out of participation in politics, and for counter-posing the more conservative layers of the trade unions against the more advanced. Now the outbreak of the crisis reflects itself in a dozen places in the Labour Party - Blyth, Brightside, Clay Cross, Hackney, North Hammersmith, and where next?

The reformist leaders well understand what Trotskyism wants to do to them. They want us outside the mass movement, and do their best to keep us there. What stops us from learning the score as well as they do? Nothing but cheap, short-cut, big-mouthed sectarianism! Vulgar, confused tub-thumping!

9. About Some Other Sectarrians

One additional argument about putting forward 'independent' candidates against the Labour Party has to be tackled. This is the one which we sometimes hear from groups other than the WRP. These people parrot the cry: 'Labour is already exposed'. They are usually not merely unaware of our dialectical analysis of the Labour Party, but incapable of understanding it. Since such theoretical questions are above their heads, they assume incorrectly that workers also are not able to understand them. Consequently, such groups feed in their members a contempt for the working-class.

The argument that 'Labour is already exposed' appeared in its full bloom in the General Elections of 1929 and 1931. Those who think they have made some original discovery should refer to 'Labour Monthly' at the time. There this sectarian policy is indeed enriched by the double-talk about how 'the CP was right to support Labour in 1924, but by 1929 Labour was "already exposed"'. Everyone now knows that the 'turn' of the Stalinists to a sectarian electoral policy was really only one aspect of the whole 'Third Period' policy. A significant point for students of the history of British Trotskyism is that the first published writings of Reg Groves, (who was so important in founding the Communist League and leading a tendency between 1931 and 1939 which in its later years capitulated to opportunism in the Labour Party and disappeared) were in strong support of this argument 'Labour is already exposed'.

In the early 1970's, however, as readers will doubtless have noticed, few people have been consistently preaching that they cannot support Labour on any terms. The sectarians have also been detected tailing behind the mood of the masses. In 1970, every little bunch of Mao-ists could slander the Trotskyists as 'reformists'; we were not 'Left' enough for them. The ineffable Robin Blackburn was in one of his 'left' phases. The unstable leadership of 'International Socialism' was playing about with abstentionist ideas. In October 1974, however, the strong mood of the masses exerted its pull.

The sectarian tendency in the WRP cannot advance this argument at present, constrained as it is by its desire to appear as a defender of orthodox Trotskyism. Like everybody else, they know that Trotsky was for 'critical support'. Yet as we have seen, they cannot develop Trotsky's arguments in favour of 'critical support'. The best they can do is to amalgamate sectarian with opportunist arguments. Their arguments give us no confidence that the WRP can stand up in debate to the Mao-ists, the IMG and the IS. It cannot destroy their positions because it has not got a firm position of its own. Nor will it help the WRP to pretend that these other groups do not exist.

The WRP cannot hermetically cut off its supporters from the rest of the life of the Labour movement, try as it may. It cannot dodge the educational process of clearing up these questions, a process for which, at present, its declarations in Workers Press show it to be ill-equipped. The task must, therefore, be tackled here.

It is true that the workers have had experience of Labour Governments, and Labour Governments with power, in the last thirty years. They had not yet had that experience in the 1930's. That is not the point. The point is that there is, as yet, no sign that the decisive layers of the working-class, miners, engineers, transport workers, are rejecting Social-Democracy in favour of the revolutionary alternative. This does not mean to say that they have not got their suspicions of this leadership; far from it. It does mean, however, they do not feel that they have exhausted the possibilities of the reformist leaderships. They do not know much about revolutionary, Trotskyist organisations and their programmes. They tend to identify such organisations and policies with the features of Stalinism, which they find repulsive. Taking the decisive sections of the British working class through the experiences involved so as to win them to Marxism by breaking their faith in reformism is a tremendous historical process of re-education. The method of Bolshevik-Leninism for making this great process possible is basically derived from the First Four Congresses of the Communist International and the continuation of its work by Trotsky. These policies, which we call the 'United Front', do not preclude candidatures against the Labour Party on principle, but they do preclude a sectarian attitude towards the Labour Party and the Trade Unions on which it rests.

Workers Press correctly noted the remarkable solidarity and confidence with which the workers backed Labour in the October 1974 General Election: 'The polarisation of votes for Labour has shown that the economic crisis is widely understood.' These wise words may counter-balance whatever wild impressions have formed in comrades' heads or been picked up on the canvass from disillusioned individuals - but only if the rest of the leadership pay due attention to them and draw the necessary conclusion to turn the face of the Party towards the mass organisations. Otherwise, sooner or later we may be sure, we shall hear this argument, put forward by the WRP as a new contribution to Marxism, to justify still more futile candidatures. The discussion in the ranks, indeed, which we have proposed, should go forward quickly. Already there are signs that the lessons of the elections are to be swept under the carpet and the Party is to plunge on in the old profligate way. The October 12th Workers Press contained the warning: "The scene is now set for the mobilisations of the working-class in mass actions". This abstract formulation could mean a lot of things. What we fear it is intended to mean is that the leaders of the WRP see themselves in the leading role in these coming mobilisations, from which the obvious deduction is that they propose to go on trying to create a small organisation, cut off from the mass organisations, in other words, another Spartakusbund but without the leaders of the Spartakusbund. The false policies of the Spartakusbund enabled the Social-Democratic leaders, Ebert, Noske and Schiedmann (not odd right-wingers, but the controllers of the Social-Democratic apparatus) to call in the right-wing guerrilla bands to attack it. This defeat, in turn, was used to intimidate the organised workers in the mass organisations. Thus the sectarians aided the reformist leaders.

10. Some Conclusions

We have not lightly taken quotations from the important works of Trotsky, and have had many lessons in past discussions as to the damage which can be done by irresponsible and inappropriate quotation. Let us conclude by borrowing Lenin's great warning about mistakes, which we have so often explained to our Stalinist and Centrist opponents and which, we venture to hope, our readers will think appropriate here.

Trotsky quotes it in "The Third International After Lenin", (Pioneer Publishers Edition, p.268), from a speech by Lenin at a Moscow District Conference of the Party on October 29th, 1921:

"It is not the defeat which is so dangerous, as the fear of admitting one's defeat, the fear of drawing from it all the conclusions... We must not be afraid of admitting defeats. We must learn from the experience of the defeats. If we adopt the opinion that by admitting defeats we induce despondency and a weakening of energy for the struggle, similar to a surrender of positions, we would have to say that such revolutionists are absolutely not worth a damn ... Our strength in the past was, as it will remain in the future, that we can take the heaviest defeats into account with perfect coolness, learning from their experience what must be modified in our activity. That is why it is necessary to speak candidly. This is vital and important not alone for the purpose of theoretical correctness, but also from the practical point of view. We cannot learn to solve the problems of today by new methods if yesterday's experience has not made us open our eyes in order to see wherein the old methods were at fault."

(Lenin: Collected Works, Vol XVIII,
Part 1, p.396)
(Original emphasis)

Today we would welcome a thousand times any real possibility of a properly organised discussion, involving the WRP leaders and members alike, and offering any real prospect of a principled reconciliation. It is by no wish of ours that such discussion has not yet begun. The WRP leaders fall back on the specious pretext that they 'cannot discuss the policies of the WRP with non-members'.. Here again, the sectarians take a correct principle, designed to protect the party against leakages of information and alien influences, and formally push it to an irrational extreme, where it becomes an empty abstraction and serves the opposite of its real purpose. The purpose of the principle, when it is correctly applied, is to confine within the party its internal differences, not the policies which have been decided and agreed. Today, the information which the party leadership should have given to the members is being moved in to them from the 'non-members' outside. Today, it is in the seats of power in the party that the 'alien influences' are to be found.

There is a proverb which says that only tortoises stay happy inside their shells. It is useless for the WRP leaders to pull in their heads. The reckoning will not pass them by.

They do not, of course, really believe their formulae. If they did, they would have to stop talking to anyone outside the party at all.

They would, also have to suspend their paper, as well as their attacks on their critics!

Comrades of the WRP! A great intellectual and physical task lies before us. In the world crisis of 1929-1933 the Stalinists were unable to take the opportunities and build the revolutionary leadership, and the Trotskyist organisation was in its infancy. In 1974 the workers and peasant masses are once more mobilised by the new world crisis, and the Trotskyists have the experience of over forty years' struggle to enrich the principles which we have inherited.

Comrades of the WRP! Is it not time to heed the warnings which these election results are shouting at you? Sectarianism has lulled your party into a charmed sleep. Is it not time to wake up?

"Pharwagos"

TABLE 1A

COMPARISON BETWEEN FEBRUARY 1974 AND
OCTOBER 1974 GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS

	February 1974 Elections		October 1974 Elections	
	Votes	%	Votes	%
Total Votes Cast	30,623,831	100.0	28,387,359	100.0
Conservatives	11,870,834	38.8	10,364,305	36.5
Labour	11,648,251	38.0	11,460,453	40.4
Liberal	6,057,008	19.8	5,330,597	18.8
Nationalist	803,338	2.6	1,006,259	3.5
Others	244,400	0.8	225,745	0.8
Swing to Labour				3.0

TABLE 1B

COMPARISON OF VOTES RECEIVED BY PARTIES IN
FEBRUARY AND OCTOBER 1974 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Party	February 1974	October 1974	Change, %
Total Votes Cast	30,623,831	28,387,359	-7%
Conservatives	11,870,834	10,364,305	-12%
Labour	11,648,251	11,460,453	-1%
Liberal	6,057,008	5,330,597	-12%
Nationalists	803,338	1,006,259	+25%
Others (incl. WRP)	244,400	225,745	-8%

TABLE 2

GENERAL ELECTION OCTOBER 1974	Total on Register	Total who voted		Votes for Labour		Votes for W.R.P.		
		No.	% of all who could have voted	No.	% of all who cast their votes	No.	% of all who cast their votes	% of all who voted Labour
Aberavon	64,667	47,251	73	31,656	63	427	0.9	1.3
Coventry N.E.	63,605	44,516	70	26,489	60	352	0.8	1.3
Hackney & Stoke Newington	52,870	27,914	53	16,515	59	159	0.6	1.0
Hillingdon (H. & H.)	55,960	38,885	70	20,291	52	198	0.5	1.0
Lambeth Central	48,722	25,617	59	15,381	60	233	1.3	1.5
Liverpool (Toxteth)	45,883	26,915	59	15,312	57	365	1.5	2.4
Newham N.E.	66,975	38,636	59	22,205	58	572	1.5	2.6
Pontefract & Castleford	60,288	42,890	71	30,208	70	457	1.1	1.5
Swindon	62,900	46,533	74	24,124	52	206	0.4	0.9
Wallsend	90,300	63,979	71	37,180	58	435	0.7	0.9
Totals	612,710	403,136	66	239,361	59	3,434	0.8	1.4

TABLE 3: THE LABOUR VOTE IN THE CONSTITUENCES FOUGHT
BY THE WRP: FEBRUARY AND OCTOBER 1974

Constituency	February 1974 Elections			October 1974 Elections			Change in % Labour Vote
	Total Votes Cast	Total Labour Vote	Labour %	Total Votes Cast	Total Labour Vote	Labour %	
Aberavon	48,522	31,656	65	47,251	29,683	63	-2
Coventry N.E.	47,735	30,496	64	44,516	26,489	60	-4
Dunbarton C.	40,683	16,439	40	39,393	15,837	40	-
Hackney & Stoke Newington	32,676	17,160	53	27,914	16,515	59	+6
Hillingdon	42,037	24,682	59	38,885	20,291	52	-7
Lambeth Central	30,209	15,954	53	25,617	15,381	60	+7
Liverpool (Toxteth)	30,092	14,354	48	26,915	15,312	57	+9
Merthyr Tydfil	31,975	20,485	64	30,111	21,260	71	+7
Newham N.E.	44,517	24,200	54	38,636	22,205	59	+5
Pontefract & Castleford	46,005	34,409	75	42,890	30,208	70	-5
Stetchford	44,677	23,704	53	40,087	23,075	58	+5
Swindon	50,281	24,093	48	46,533	24,124	52	+4
Wallsend	67,483	41,811	62	63,979	37,180	58	-4
Total (13)	556,892	336,410	60	512,727	297,560	58	-2
National Total (Great Britain)	306238311	11648251	38	28387359	11460453	40.4	+3

TABLE 4: PERFORMANCE OF WRP CANDIDATES IN
FEBRUARY AND OCTOBER 1974 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Constituency	WRP Vote February	WRP Vote October
Aberavon	--	427
Coventry East	-	352
Dunbartonshire Central	52	--
Hackney & Stoke Newington	-	159
Hillingdon (Hayes & (Harlington)	-	198
Lambeth Central (same candidate)	337	233
Liverpool (Toxteth)	263	365
Merthyr Tydfil	160	-
Newham N.E. (same candidate)	760	572
Pontefract & Castleford	991	457
Stetchford (Birmingham)	280	-
Swindon (same candidate)	240	206
Wallsend	1108	435
TOTAL	4191	3434
Mean	(9 seats) 466	(10 seats) 343
Change		-757 = -18%